



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



# COUNTRY REPORT GREECE 2018

## Inter-agency Participatory Assessment Report

## Acknowledgements

UNHCR would like to thank everyone who participated in this assessment, and who shared their expert views and recommendations to improve the humanitarian response in Greece.

The Participatory Assessment Report reflects the views of participants consulted with in 158 Focus Groups across Greece.

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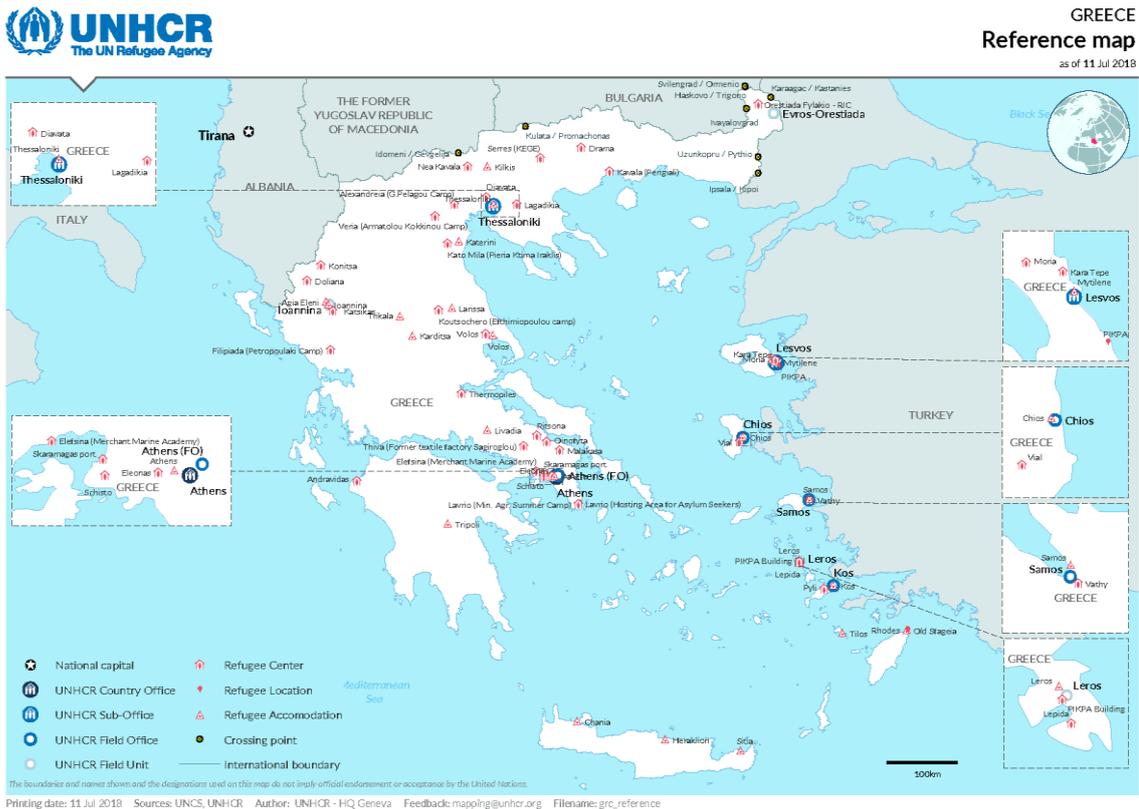
**[COVER PHOTOGRAPH:]**

*Ahmed, a Syrian asylum-seeker, shops for groceries with two of his children at the municipal market in city of Chania, north-west Crete.*

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## Key facts about this year Participatory Assessment

### 1,436 Asylum Seekers and refugees discuss their concerns, challenges in annual Greece participatory assessment

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, today published the results of an annual participatory assessment report on the concerns of asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece about their current situation and future prospects and risks and how to address them.

The Inter-Agency Participatory Assessment 2018 (PA), conducted with 41 partners from authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other United Nations (UN) agencies between January and July this year across the country, is aimed at ensuring the participation of asylum-seekers and refugees in the design and review of humanitarian programmes in Greece.

The main focus is on the risks and challenges as they shift from receiving free accommodation and cash assistance to becoming self-sufficient and integrating with the Greek society. This year's PA also focuses on communication with communities (CwC) and other important protection issues, while the survey aims at identifying strengths within the communities that could contribute to improving the humanitarian response.

The survey covers 1,436 asylum-seekers and refugees from a wide cross section of society, including people with specific needs, the elderly, LGBTI and unaccompanied or separated children. The focus group discussions were held on islands, the mainland, urban areas and state-run accommodation sites and Reception and Identification Centres (RIC). People from 26 countries took part.

Participants discussed a number of key issues, and they identified priorities and made specific and concrete recommendations. In general, with the increasing focus on self-reliance, inclusion and integration, participants sought support through access to the labour market,

Greek language classes, more provision of information, and inclusion in programmes (including education) and activities across Greece. Language was seen as vital.

The other major concerns discussed also included unclear, delayed and lengthy asylum procedures that cause debilitating frustration and anxiety; limited services and unclear procedures; xenophobia and racism; insecurity and inadequate law enforcement, including inaction over inter-communal fights; SGBV, particularly in some of the RICs where segregation is insufficient. Participants also noted too few interpreters; lack of community-based protection structures; measures to encourage co-existence with the host community; information and interpretation provision; access to formal education for all; complaint and reporting mechanisms; and insufficient access to national services such as health and medical care.

The key issues, priorities and recommendations can be found in the report.

## Executive summary

This report includes recommendations, main challenges and protection risks identified by asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece through a Participatory Assessment (PA) that took place between January and July 2018. The 2018 PA is part of UNHCR's regular efforts to ensure the participation of asylum-seekers and refugees in the design and review of humanitarian programmes.

The **focus** of the 2018 PA was on participants' shift from receiving assistance in the form of cash and accommodation to self-reliance, on accessing services, and on inclusion, integration/social cohesion particularly in the urban context. The PA also focused on communication with communities (CwC) and other protection issues that participants consider important. The PA also aimed to identify the strengths within the communities that could contribute to improving the humanitarian response.

The selection of asylum-seekers and refugees to participate in the PA was in line with UNHCR's Age Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach to ensure the representation of people from different age, gender, and other groups. In total **1,436 asylum-seekers and refugees participated** in the PA through 158 Focus Group Discussions (FGD). This included 787 men and 649 women, 25 of whom elderly. There were 37 people with specific needs (PwSN). In addition, 128 children (118 boys/10 girls) took part in the study of whom 112 were unaccompanied or separated children (UASC). In addition, **41 actors participated** from the authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other United Nations (UN) agencies.

The FGDs were in 11 locations: 88 on the islands and 70 on the mainland; 55 in Reception and Identification Centres, 31 in accommodation sites and 72 in urban locations. They were conducted in Farsi, Arabic, French, English, Kurmanji, Sorani, Greek, Urdu and Dari with people from 26 different countries, including Greece. There were seven FGD with PwSN, 22 with children, 10 with UASC, three with youth, one with LGBTI and five with elderly persons. Additionally, persons with specific needs (PwSN) were integrated into some focus groups as well as host community members. Fifty-eight focus groups were carried out with women, 56 with men and 44 were mixed. Families were consulted in 13 focus groups, community representatives in one focus group while, finally, host community members (including, inter alia, hospital representatives, civil servants, and education professionals) were invited to participate in seven focus group discussions.

### Key issues across Greece identified by participants:

- Lack of information and awareness on national services, asylum procedures, and available complaint and reporting mechanisms
- Lack of Greek language classes
- Access to formal education for all
- Insufficient interpretation
- Lack of female staff in various agencies including the Police, amongst interpreters and medical staff
- Delayed asylum procedures
- Limited access to national services including healthcare, legal aid, psychological and social services
- Lack of access to quality food and proper WASH facilities
- Absence of outreach programmes
- Inadequate law enforcement, creating a culture of impunity particularly in RICs and sites
- Absence of community-based protection mechanisms
- Social cohesion programmes appeared limited in outreach

## Summary of recommendations and priorities identified by participants:

- improve information provision
- strengthened interpretation services
- increase advocacy to improve access to public services (education, medical, psychological)
- promote the enrolment of all children in the public school system
- increase support for employment and documentation (for self-reliance, integration)
- develop and promote co-existence and raise-awareness programmes with the host community; provide training on refugee protection principles to key host community actors' personnel (e.g. school teachers)
- improve law enforcement
- increase social cohesion and community recreational projects
- implement more community-based and self-reliance initiatives to help refugees feel empowered and included
- establish and strengthen outreach programmes and a centralized response (e.g., through community centres)
- strengthen community-based protection mechanisms
- train actors on community-based protection and UNHCR's urban strategy

In general, with an increasing focus towards self-reliance, inclusion, and integration, many participants asked for support through access to the labour market, Greek language classes and inclusion in programmes and activities across Greece. Some of the participants offered to support these directly, for example with peer-to-peer interpretation, information provision, and first aid or with cleaning services.

## Brief overview of key issues

**Unclear and lengthy asylum procedures:** The majority of participants were frustrated with what they consider a lack of sufficient information on asylum procedures and the legal framework. A particular source of anxiety is the lack of clarity on procedures or feedback on the status of their asylum claim, particularly on the islands. This has severe implications on psycho-social wellbeing, irrespective of age and gender.

**Limited (public) services and unclear procedures:** For many participants the educational and recreational activities are limited. This, combined with a hindered access to medical and psychosocial services in many locations can lead to idleness, in turn causing protection and security incidents, anxiety and may lead to physical harm, including domestic violence.

Some participants stated that racism and xenophobia hindered their access to public services. They also believe that public services (e.g. local hospitals) cannot respond to their needs because of limited staffing, bureaucratic procedures or language barriers.

On the mainland, participants noted the high number of unregistered people in sites with limited access to services. Others recommended that cash assistance increases, as they state that current amounts cannot cover their daily needs (medication, transportation or medical services). Many were unclear as to the referral pathways to access services. Finally, some PWSN felt they are not prioritized in distribution or access to services.

**Lack of law enforcement/safety and security:** Participants reported a lack of law enforcement, a lack of clarity as to the rules and regulations of sites, and consequently a perceived culture of impunity. This was primarily for sites and RICs. In a number of locations, participants noted the police force is reluctant to intervene when violence erupts. In various locations (sites, RICs), tension was reported amongst refugee communities, as well as between refugees and host communities. This, coupled with reported alcohol and drug use in some sites and RICs, and the lack of police intervention – particularly after working hours – contributes to a feeling of insecurity amongst refugees and especially women, and mistrust towards law enforcement authorities. Many refugees and asylum-seekers are not aware of emergency numbers and relevant procedures. In contrast those living in urban accommodation facilities, irrespective of age, reported feeling safe.

**SGBV:** Basic standards for SGBV prevention are not respected, especially in RICs (e.g. Moria, Vathy) where there are mixed latrines, showers and accommodation, overcrowding (e.g. in some RICs on the islands), lack of lockable containers and poor lightning. Participants noted a lack of awareness on response procedures and service providers. There is also a lack of interpreters and female staff when reporting incidents. In some locations, particularly in RICs and sites, women reported feeling exposed to SGBV risks citing past incidents.

**Lack of community-based protection structures:** One of the most prevalent risks identified is the lack of meaningful community-based protection structures and approaches. While focusing primarily on ‘assistance programmes’ such as cash and accommodation, community based protection support programmes are limited in outreach and sustainability, often small-scale, non-systematic or non-existent. Throughout the PA participants were unable to identify community strengths. Moreover, community representation and leadership structures are not always inclusive, often excluding minority groups, women, children/youth and older people. Participants asked for more engagement in community fora and more meaningful participation in community-based protection activities. Overall, participants requested to be consulted and to be given feedback.

**Co-existence:** Participants noted a lack of programmes to encourage co-existence with the host community. This is across the country, but more prevalent in sites and RICs. Participants reported limited interaction with locals, and amongst refugee communities in several locations. They attributed this to the lack of a common language. The existing co-existence projects are either limited in outreach or small scale. In some locations like RICs and sites, minority groups reported discrimination in food distribution and limited access to relief items.

**Self-reliance and integration:** Most participants reported difficulties in accessing the labour market. They attributed this to a lack of information, high unemployment rates, lack of required documentation (e.g. residency permits, passport), language barriers, the remoteness of some sites from cities, and lack of job advice and placement support. Most participants believe that job opportunities are a requirement for integration, which was echoed by some from the host community.

Participants found the programmes on self-reliance and employment limited and unstructured. There was a general feeling of dependency and lack of self-reliance. Some participants expressed a desire to be engaged in gainful employment, noting that they have skills they would like to use through vocational training and employment, especially on the mainland. Only a few participants reported no interest in being employed in Greece, wishing to move instead on to other EU countries. The remote location of some sites and RICs from cities were noted as notable obstacles to self-reliance, integration and co-existence.

Most participants, particularly on the mainland and some islands expressed the wish to locally integrate, learn Greek and become self-reliant. In some locations, they referred to the good relations with host community members, while in others (e.g. on some islands), they reported limited interaction. Generally, it was mostly those in urban accommodation that reported links to Greek society. The lack of Greek language classes, which most perceive to be required for integration, was a commonly referenced issue.

While most participants have social security numbers (AMKA), they have difficulty obtaining other documents such as AFM and unemployment cards from OAED. Finally, while some members of the host community described their relations with refugees as positive, especially in cities, others referred to harassment and poor relations.

**Information provision and interpretation:** Participants in most FGDs noted difficulties accessing information. This included a lack of interpreters for certain languages (e.g. Somali, Farsi, Kurmanji, Panjabi, Bangla, Urdu, Sorani, Amharic, Tigrinya, etc.), lack of consistent and simplified information on services and procedures (in the form of leaflets, FGD, information desk, information sessions). This applies to sites, RICs and urban locations and to information provision upon arrival.

Participants repeatedly noted that integration, employment and relevant services and procedures are not communicated in the right language or format and are unclear. There is a lack of clarity also of roles and responsibilities of service providers. Communication materials are often too difficult to understand or not translated in all relevant languages. Almost no participants were aware of UNHCR's HELP website.

**Complaint mechanisms:** Complaint mechanisms are reportedly not enforced or encouraged in many locations. Participants voiced confusion about procedures and asked how they can complain or what feedback mechanisms are in place.

## Brief overview of recommendations and priorities (by participants)

### Increased focus on community based and co-existence programs

Participants recommended increased community engagement and co-existence activities so that communities feel more included and empowered. They also recommend strengthening community representation structures as well as community meetings and feedback/complaint mechanisms. Women, elderly and youth as well as PwSN of different nationalities should be systematically included and encouraged to attend community meetings and other community-based protection mechanisms. This way challenges and concerns can be communicated transparently and joint solutions can be explored. These will create a sense of community feeling and belonging, improved information provision and thus may lead to fewer protection risks and incidents.

Several participants asked for more efficient coordination among actors at the site and urban locations to prevent double reporting, improve feedback-sharing and simplify case management for high risk cases. Refugees need to be in the centre of conflict management and problem-solving mechanisms.

### Skills within communities

Some participants called for more efforts on behalf of humanitarian organizations to help build on skills present in their communities and to directly involve asylum-seekers and refugees in the response. Generally, many expressed the wish to feel engaged. As a recommendation, refugee outreach workers could be integrated in the staffing of humanitarian organizations so as to capitalize on skills present within refugee communities. Some participants referred to a strong sense of community bonds expressed by helping each other (information sharing, assistance with interpretation in hospitals and other public services, assistance from those living for more years in Greece with job-seeking etc). Others reported having many employment skills and thus wish to have access to jobs in Greece.

### Information provision, complaint mechanisms and interpretation

Overall, a lack of information on arrival to integration-related issues was reiterated by most participants. Thus, strengthening and harmonizing group and individual information provision in languages spoken by the refugee population (inclusive of minority groups) should be a priority throughout Greece. Generally, younger people prefer to receive information through social media whereas adults and older people preferred focus groups and information sessions. Most asylum-seekers and refugees are connected to the internet through mobile phones. However, there are connectivity challenges in some of the RICs on the islands.

Information sessions should be strengthened in the following areas: asylum and reception procedures, access to services (at site and regarding national services), information about documentation/procedures, Greek law (rules and regulations), diversity/gender equality, rules and regulations at sites, community based protection (CBP), non-discrimination, prevention from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), children rights, dangers of smuggling/trafficking, women's rights/sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), legal services, rights/obligations, access to education as well as integration and access to employment.

Training sessions must be organized for humanitarian staff, including interpreters. These should include the code of conduct, PSEA, humanitarian principles, LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex), intercultural competence etc. Moreover, men and boys are to be engaged systematically and actively in SGBV prevention awareness campaigns. Those who have been at sites/RIC for longer and are familiar with the context could act as peer information focal points.

Emergency numbers should be shared in all locations and in relevant languages. Moreover, simplified and easy-to-understand information kits should be available for new arrivals in sites/RICs in all relevant languages (including services at sites, national services, and procedures) and communicated in awareness-raising sessions or through social media platforms. Better harmonization of information tools was recommended as well.

Generally, participants asked for better interpretation services in relevant languages especially regarding national services. The Tarjimly App providing realtime translation services for refugees could be further promoted as well as the mini lexicon mobile application.

Complaint and feedback mechanisms need strengthening throughout the country, in field locations and through a national hotline.

## **Education (formal/non-formal and recreational activities)**

Participants, especially in the accommodation scheme, reiterated the need for all asylum-seekers and refugees to access formal education. Moreover, information provision regarding enrolment in schools is imperative (but there is no access to public schools for children living in some sites/camps/RICs). Training and sensitization on refugee protection principles to school teachers/parents associations was highlighted as a priority.

Urgent steps should be taken to ensure access to quality and inclusive formal education for refugee children to foster integration. Programmes similar to the qualifications passport need strengthening so that diplomas obtained in countries of origin can be certified. Also, there is a need for better support regarding secondary and tertiary education, including for PwSN.

Participants also recommended more Greek language classes and child care services during language programmes so that women with small children can attend. Better access to national care arrangements need to be explored.

Participants throughout Greece (including UAC, children, women, men, PwSN) asked for more sport and recreational activities inside and outside sites. Some women asked for separate sport/recreational activities.

## **Security**

Advocacy regarding law enforcement and security in sites was a priority. Awareness sessions on the national legal framework (violence, theft) are also needed to increase awareness of potential consequences. FGD participants recommend to deploy more police in sites/RICs, including female police.

## **Self-Reliance/Access to Employment**

Enhanced focus is recommended on employment, livelihoods and self-reliance services in all locations. Refugees suggest specialized partners for job counselling and employment support. The professional experience of asylum-seekers and refugees could be analyzed for better job matching. Many people want to work, including women. Vocational training and job placement programmes are much needed to promote self-reliance. Awareness is needed also on how one can issue an AFM (tax) or OAED (employment service) card. Apprenticeship schemes could be explored with host communities.

## **Prevention activities and access to services**

Generally, there should be increased focus on prevention rather than response activities. Referral pathways and available reporting and community-based mechanisms should be better communicated to residents in all sites, including to PwSN. Subsequently, there should be better access to public services (e.g. health and psychologists) and fewer parallel systems. PwSN without a support system should be prioritized for referrals and interventions.

It is also recommended to continue advocating for the separation of single women and men (both regarding WASH and shelter), the installation of locks and adequate lighting to prevent risk for SGBV.

Equal access to services should be ensured at sites/RIC level for all communities. One of the main recommendations from those consulted were aimed at speeding up the asylum process and improving feedback on asylum claims at the individual level. Refugees should be better linked to the social services of municipalities, including community centres.

Participants suggested that medical actors train community volunteers for immediate first aid support, hygiene and health awareness.

## **Brief overview of additional recommendations and priorities (proposed by humanitarian agencies)**

### **Advocacy**

The array of protection risks identified, particularly in the RICs on the islands, reinforces UNHCR's call on the government and the EU to step up measures to protect asylum-seekers and refugees. There is a need to improve access to public services and national social support mechanisms including for PwSN, to improve law enforcement, increase security presence and patrolling (including with female police officers), to register 'unregistered' people at sites, to increase timely access to health services by KEELPNO (including psychological interventions and with more female doctors present) as well as access to enhanced interpretation services. Law enforcement and police reporting need to be strengthened. Cases without interventions need to be reported in order to inform advocacy.

### **Enhanced and systematic Protection Monitoring**

There are different protection monitoring tools in place by different actors which at times are not interlinked. There is a need to develop comprehensive protection monitoring databases (e.g. Kobo tools) to systematically record participatory assessments and protection monitoring data for evidence-based advocacy and follow up.

### **Staff training**

There is a need to train staff (UN, NGO, authorities) on community-based protection and UNHCR's urban strategy in all locations.

### **Community Centres (urban)**

There is a need to shift from home visits to a more centralized response (e.g. through community centres) in urban locations. Also, inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees in the existing community centres otherwise restricted for only some is imperative for social integration.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AFM</b>	<b>Tax Registration Number</b>
<b>AGD</b>	<b>Age Gender Diversity</b>
<b>AMKA</b>	<b>Social Security Number</b>
<b>CBI</b>	<b>Cash Based Intervention</b>
<b>CBP</b>	<b>Community Based Protection</b>
<b>CwC</b>	<b>Communication with Communities</b>
<b>EASO</b>	<b>European Asylum Support Service</b>
<b>FGD</b>	<b>Focus Group Discussion</b>
<b>HCG</b>	<b>Hellenic Coast Guard</b>
<b>LGBTI</b>	<b>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex</b>
<b>NFI</b>	<b>Non Food Item</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-Governmental Organization</b>
<b>OAED</b>	<b>Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization</b>
<b>PA</b>	<b>Participatory Assessment</b>
<b>PoC</b>	<b>Person of Concern</b>
<b>PSEA</b>	<b>Prevention from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse</b>
<b>PSS</b>	<b>Psychosocial Support</b>
<b>PwSN</b>	<b>Persons with Specific Needs</b>
<b>RAO</b>	<b>Regional Asylum Service</b>
<b>RIC</b>	<b>Reception and Identification Center</b>
<b>RIS</b>	<b>Reception and Identification Service</b>
<b>SGBV</b>	<b>Sexual and Gender Based Violence</b>
<b>SSI</b>	<b>Social Security Income</b>
<b>UAC</b>	<b>Unaccompanied Child</b>
<b>UN</b>	<b>United Nations</b>
<b>UNHCR</b>	<b>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</b>
<b>WASH</b>	<b>Water Sanitation and Hygiene</b>

# PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR GREECE

January 2018 - June 2018



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