

## CONTEXT ANALYSIS – ELEFSINA, GREECE

### **Political, economic and social background of the country\local area and general current challenges**

Greece has been in the midst of the recent financial-economic crisis and in 2010 the first Memorandum of Understanding was agreed with the Troika. Since then the country is under international supervision (by the Troika) urging for the implementation of an extensive programme of structural adjustments dominated by the ‘dogma’ of austerity. These adjustments do not solely concern the formation of the budget or how debt repayment will be achieved, but they also affect other policies and sectors. As it has been well documented, the country has suffered immensely from the adverse consequences of the enforced austerity. These consequences were of course economic, but also political (such as successive changes of governments and the rise and relative fall of the neo-fascist party of Golden Dawn), as well as moral / psychological. They have affected most social strata since they targeted the welfare state, workers relations and both the public and private sectors. On the other hand, since 2008 the country witnessed an array of social mobilizations and insurgencies (yet not only related to the economic crisis) and the emergence of grassroots solidarity initiatives and actions. Since 2015, refugees fleeing Syria and other war-torn territories started arriving in increased number to Greece and this signified another major event in the midst of the economic crisis. Although fears about possible rejuvenation of far-right attitudes were voiced, on the contrary, refugees were faced solidarity and support (of course not in every case).

### **Migration and refugee situation and measures taken by the government, NGOs and other organizations**

#### ***Basic facts on migration, asylum seekers and refugees***

Unfortunately, and because data are not easily available for local areas, we are not able to provide details about the local context of Elefsina at the moment. As for Greece, at the moment there are almost 60,000 refugees residing in Greece while migrant residents form the 8,4% of the total population (2011 census) and in the Municipality of Elefsina the 10,79%.

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### ***Policies and actions on the national and local level***

At the EU level of particular importance for Greece are the agreements and policies included in European Agenda on Migration (especially the Dublin agreement) as well as the EU-Turkey common statement which significantly impacts the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Greece and particularly in the Aegean islands

Policies regarding refugees and migrants are developed by central government. Regarding refugees the main ones are: Law 3907/2011, Law 4375/2016 and Law 4485/2017, while regarding migrants the main ones are: Law 4251/2014 (Migration code and social inclusion) and Law 4332/2015 (Greek nationality Act). In this context, the resettlement of refugees from the islands to the mainland is decided by the Greek Ministry of migration.

At the local level, regarding refugees, municipalities may be responsible for administering the refugee camps (if they exist in their areas and if they are under their jurisdiction) and for administering the resettlement schemes from camps to apartments (if they have such a scheme). Therefore, municipalities present significant variations among each other in the case of refugees settlement and integration. Access to education for refugees also differs depending on their place of residence.

Always at the local level, the respective service providers (for education, health, welfare) cater for migrants with papers and non-migrants. The situation is different for those without papers since they are limited in their use of public services (only emergency health centres and hospitals but with access to school) and they are much more vulnerable to being arrested and deported.

### ***Main actors / stakeholders dealing with migration***

At the national level the main actors dealing with migration are the Ministry of Migration and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Work and Residence permits are renewed at the Decentralised Administration office of the area of residence or at the relevant department of Internal Affairs (or electronically). There used to be free Greek class for migrants although we are not sure of the situation at the moment. There is no particular funding for migrants' community associations and no special housing provision for newcomers.

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At the local level, the main actors dealing with migration are the municipality, the police and some NGOs and community organisations supporting migrants.

At the national level the key actors are the Ministry of Migration, Asylum Department, EASO, Frontex, the Greek army, UNCHR, Greek Council for Refugees and several International NGOs (such as Mediciens sans Frontiers, IRC, IOM, Red Cross/Crescent, Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee council, Solidarity Now and others) and few national NGOs (such as Praxis).

At the local level, depending on the municipality, the above-mentioned actors are also present (from a minimum to great extent), but other organizations – particularly local NGOs and associations – are also present. This includes, among others, organizations administering the accommodation, those providing educational and cultural facilities, organizations providing medical and psychological support.

The situation concerning unaccompanied minors is also different.

### **Attitudes and behaviours towards migrants and refugees**

There are significant differences concerning the attitudes towards migrants and refugees as well as among them.

Since 2008, Greece has witnessed the rise of the neo-fascist Golden Dawn party as well as a rise of racist and xenophobic political discourses associated with specific migrant groups and neighbourhoods of the city of Athens and of Attica in general. As a result, there was a significant rise of xenophobic and racist attitudes towards specific migrant groups – something that was also imprinted on policies of the time. The prevailing stereotypes associated specific migrant groups with criminality (although data didn't confirm that), with health hazards, with the 'deterioration of specific neighbourhood' (stigmatized as ghettos by the media) and with conflict cultural values (although this hasn't been the dominant stereotype). This situation was ameliorated after the murder of P. Fyssas and the prosecution of Golden Dawn and were facilitated by the militancy of the antifascist/racist party and by the change of government. Everyday relations in urban neighbourhoods differ, ranging from conviviality and social coexistence (in most cases) to harassment, violent attacks (even murder at extreme cases) and "banal racism". In the last months

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racist attacks started re-emerging in Attica (particularly at its Western part) and a number of them took place at Aspropyrgos (the municipality adjacent to Elefsina).

Attitudes towards refugees were significantly different since they were welcomed with solidarity and support – especially at the beginning. There are many initiatives (local grassroots and institutional) that provide support to refugees, some more inclusive than others, and numerous people are involved in them and not just as volunteers (as, for example, in squats supporting refugees). More recently, there has been a slight change in attitudes towards refugees but this has been mostly evident in the islands where fears and demands for refugees' relocation were more frequently voiced. Albeit this is not a general trend – not even in the islands.

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