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# Migration Network for Asylum seekers and Refugees in Europe and Turkey

## Task 2.1 Networking workshop between Greek and Turkish CSOs

*Recommendations for a reformed international mechanism to tackle issues by Turkey-  
EU coordination*





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## Introduction

In the context of the project ‘Migration Network in Europe and Turkey’ which is implemented by Athens Network of Collaborating Experts, Global Political Trends Center of Istanbul Kültür University, Human Resource Development Foundation, and Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants, a 2-day conference was planned which aimed to analyse the migration flows in Europe, with emphasis given both on the case of Greece and Turkey. More specifically, the conference was separated in three thematic sessions, in each of which analyses of the situation of the migration crisis and discussions of the relevant issues were conducted.

In the first session which were entitled as “Europe, migration flows and the refugees crisis”, an analysis of the coordination of the refugee crisis in Europe; a review of the actions undertaken by the European Union to address this crisis; the EU-Turkey agreement; the review of the European countries attitudes as concerns the refugees crisis on Turkey and Greece, as well as the involvement of FRONTEX and EASO were discussed.

In session number two- “Greece – Turkey, migration flows, refugee crisis and Civil Society”, the following topics were analysed: Identification of the major problems in addressing the refugees crisis in Turkey and Greece, Cooperation between Civil Society in Turkey and Greece: common challenges, common approaches, factors which prevent the smooth cooperation between the two sides (Greece-Turkey) and Administrative, legal, economic and ethical issues

Finally, the conference closed with the last session which was entitled as “The social integration of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and Civil Society” where an analysis of the issue of the social integration of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees in both countries; Implementation of actions for the integration of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and Governmental planning were done and recommendations from both sides were held.

## Recommendations

From the discussions of both Greek and Turkey side, we came to the conclusion that a common approach is needed from both countries concerning the strategy that they follow in order to improve the situation of the migration crisis as well as regarding the way that they treat refugees/ migrants/ asylum seekers. It is essential to strengthen partnership and coordination within the humanitarian community and with governments, both in setting common goals and in establishing national-level coordination structures and information analysis, that ensure an efficient and coordinated response, including coordinated channels for citizen engagement to support the reception and integration of refugees and migrants. Additionally, a flexible approach is needed, common to both sides, which will ensure that refugees and migrants have





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access to appropriate protection and assistance, while legal alternatives to irregular dangerous journeys are made available.

Some general recommendations that arose from the conference were: First of all the necessity to address the root causes of migration by increasing the development cooperation, improving the capacity-building, supporting conflict resolution and promoting respect for human rights in countries of origin and transit. Also, a need to support the creation of additional safe and regular channels for vulnerable people in need of international protection to seek asylum in order to avoid the use of precarious migration routes and to disrupt the business model of smuggling and trafficking networks. Finally, a requirement to ensure access to fair and effective asylum procedures to migrants under the control of EU Member State or Frontex, such as those intercepted and rescued at sea, including the right to raise fear of treatment.

## Human Rights

In 2015, over one million migrants and asylum seekers reached the EU via the Mediterranean. Most of them originate from countries with war and/or intense governmental pressure, such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. More than 3,700 people died or went missing in the same period while making the journey. Since the start of 2016, over 130,000 have made the crossing, while more than 410 have lost their lives in the attempt. A great number of the arrivals take place to Greece via Turkey across the Aegean Sea. Greece is a country which is situated in an economic crisis the last years and this renders it incapable to cope with the influx. Thus, many immigrants travel overland through the Western Balkans to reach other EU countries. As the sea route, the land route also contains its own difficulties: blocked border crossings, summary expulsions and police abuse.

Under those circumstances, a tremendous need to prioritize human rights protection arises. For this to occur, frequent rescue operations should take place in the Mediterranean and safe and legal channels into the EU should be expanded. In more details, UNHCR, IOM and partners should exist permanently in key entry and exit points and should provide help to migrants by informing them for general access to territory and asylum procedures identify people at risk and work with the authorities to reduce tensions and potential human rights violations. Protection monitoring will also be carried out at detention centers and other locations, such as “hot spots”, in order to ensure all aspects of international refugee and human rights law compliance.

A more orderly and coordinated process at Europe’s and Turkey’s borders and increased direct resettlement from the countries bordering Syria is needed in order to help people seeking asylum and to enhance better screening of who is entering the borders of each country and thereby benefitting national security. Entering countries should ensure more equitable responsibility sharing for asylum seekers, and implement common EU standards on reception conditions and asylum procedures.





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Also, in order to ensure that refugees and migrants rights are met, a need to record what already exist in respect of EU laws and policies has been highlighted. The already existing EU rights and standards should be established before proposing new legislations. This should be accompanied by an implementation plan aiming at providing practitioners and authorities with an overview of what rights do migrants and asylum seekers have and ways to address current gaps.

At national and regional level, UNHCR directs focused support together with EU in assisting affected countries to build their capacity to deal with the numbers and to redouble efforts to bring national asylum systems up to international standards, including procedural standards, child protection standards, and interpreters. UNHCR's ongoing support in this area will continue with concerned countries.

Access to justice was also identified as a key priority, in particular in cases of fundamental rights violations and non-compliance with EU law. More specifically, first of all, better ensuring day-to-day accountability and control, of both practices and funding falling within the scope of EU policy should be ensured; and second, should be guaranteeing that relevant national authorities and vessels fulfill their obligations in ensuring safe access. Furthermore, European institutions should increase their commitment in enforcing Member States' daily implementation of EU asylum, border and migration legislations. Civil society organizations should be highly consulted and involved in these processes. It is also necessary to establish an independent monitoring or scrutiny mechanism of border controls, surveillance, visa and asylum policies.

Concerning refugees and migrants, they should be systematically informed of their right to seek asylum and the steps necessary to do so, as well as the risks and possible consequences associated with irregular movement through organizing mass information campaigns. Member States in specific, should provide clear practical and legal information to refugees, both orally and in written form, in a language they understand. It is vital to have a sufficient number of well-prepared interpreters and translators to help with registration and dissipate fears and misinformation.

Finally, it is important to empower the capacity of DGMM, Coast guards, Land Forces, National Police, and other relevant institutions; properly training them to understand and operate in line with their national and international obligations concerning the protection of refugees and migrants, in particular the protection of women and children, and to ensure that people with specific needs are identified, counseled, prioritized and referred for services, through the provision of training on international protection and the national asylum framework, human rights of migrants, and the protection of women and children.

## Vulnerable Groups

Another important issue which must be concerned is the protection of vulnerable groups such as women, children and elderlies. Female refugees are especially vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, sexual abuse, trafficking, and exploitation. It has been





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noticed that with long migration, risks increase because of the power relations that refugees and migrants obtain with their smugglers; also the fact that they have to travel without male family members' further increases risk. The risk of gender-based violence increases through the lack of safe shelter and the language barriers that prevent females from seeking protection and assistance.

In order to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, complaints mechanism must be established in all areas where humanitarian activities are undertaken. More specifically, service providers must be properly trained so that they become able to address the specific needs of refugee and migrant women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence prevention, protection, and improved response regarding the clinical management of rape. Significant attention must be given to developing standard operating procedures for the referral of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence; to providing psychological support for women and girls who have become victims of sexual abuse and to developing a regional cross-border tracking system of vulnerable cases.

It is also essential to identify children-at-risk, in particular those traveling without family members and those with disabilities, and strengthen their access to effective child protection services and support, which ensure that their best interests are safeguarded.

Finally, it is important also to improve access to life-saving and health care services for all refugees and migrants, including the direct provision of emergency health services, medical referrals and psychosocial first aid, by providing mobile health services at various points throughout refugees and migrants' journey, focusing on key entry and exit points, upon rescue at sea and in "hot spots". Furthermore, emergency health kits, communication and information activities/campaigns on health issues, transportation to health facilities, and ongoing assessments to identify remaining gaps must be taken into account.

## Integration

Integration is a multi-dimensional process where individuals (migrants), the state (host country) and the society all play a significant role. Integration, especially for refugees must be measured by using objective indicators which would compare immigrant's position to the majority of the host society's population. Such indicators should include: job, housing, education, health and political representation, as they constitute major factors for the beginning of the integration process.

The reception conditions for asylum-seekers set the starting point for the integration of refugees. The experience of detention, poor reception conditions, unmet health needs and forced economic and educational inactivity create new traumas for refugees that lead to their long-term social exclusion. In order to prevent this negative consequence, host states should promote societal integration by providing beneficiaries of international protection early and equal access to the labor market, decent housing as well as basic language and vocational training.





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More specifically, policies both in EU and in Turkey should give priority to ensuring access to those countries and implementing legal paths of entry and stay. This should not only include people searching international protection, but also for reasons of employment, education, family reunification, etc. Migration policy should become more effective and flexible by covering various thematic streams, such as access for employment at various skill levels; more flexible visa policies and lifting visa requirements to specific groups of refugees, as well as ensuring safer access to international protection in light of EU asylum law obligations. The Implementation Plan mentioned above could also give focus to better and more flexible implementation of existing provisions.

Equal rights and secure legal status for refugees and their families should be seen as preconditions for their integration. Subsequently, policies for refugees must actively cooperate with refugees and their organizations in order to address their most specific needs: missing documentation from their country of origin, family reunification, recognition of their formal and informal qualifications, and enrolment in the education system. It is host societies' obligation to provide the requirements and procedures for family reunification and long-term residence. Refugees and asylum seekers also require greater legal and financial support to access these rights. Naturalization and integration should be facilitated and recognized as especially important for countries of asylum to provide them with full protection, security and a positive sense of belonging.

Moreover, civically active refugees should also be empowered as representatives for a more positive image in the media and as partners to address structural discrimination against other refugees and immigrants. This in combination with some preventing programs for xenophobia in the hosts' societies will facilitate the integration process. Thus, a targeted programmatic response to host community needs will be accompanied by advocacy campaigns with the aim to prevent and counter emerging discriminatory attitudes and xenophobia.

Overall, a host society must welcome beneficiaries of international protection by building and showing solidarity. Projects should prioritize cooperation with NGOs practitioners and networks of volunteers in order to build skills, social networks and solidarity. Mainstream specialized service-providers and ministries must make specific commitments to support refugees. Effective employment services, long-term language learning options and housing support are critical in this transition phase. Public schools are also powerful tools for social inclusion. A specific agency at national level is needed to facilitate cooperation, mainstreaming and the transition to long-term mainstream services.

## Civil Society

According to the World Bank, "the term civil society refer to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a





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wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations”.

A great number of volunteer engagements on issues related with the migration crisis have been observed both in Greece and Turkey. Countless individuals have demonstrated their desire to make their expertise and energy available to support institutional and civil society-led responses. Volunteers also have played a critical role to the migration crisis by providing protection and assistance to refugees and migrants.

More specifically, UNHCR, IOM, NGOs, volunteer organizations and the local population are present on the coasts of the Greek islands to receive the refugees and migrants and provide basic assistance and services, such as medical services, water, food, clothes, blankets, sleeping bags and hygienic kits at assembly points and reception sites. They also support the Hellenic Coast Guard and the local authorities in cases of shipwreck, including psychosocial support, facilitation of family reunification and communication between family members who were separated during the rescue operation, and medical referrals. When separation of family members does occur, it should be UNHCR’s, NGO’s and relevant authority’s task to ensure families reunification and they should raise awareness of the need to avoid family separation upon disembarkation. Sometimes, they also provide transport for arrivals from the coast to the assembly points and to first reception sites.

It would be essential also if UNHCR, IOM and NGOs tried expand and coordinate the provision of information, through a variety of tools (including individual and group information sessions, leaflets, posters, audio and video messaging). Refugees and migrants should be informed of available services, processes, registration, family reunification, asylum in Greece, Turkey and EU, relocation and assistance.

NGOs must also support refugee and migrant children who are temporarily staying in the country to have access to quality early learning opportunities and non-formal education.

UNHCR, IOM and NGOs will further pursue their cooperation with local associations and volunteer networks whose members are at the forefront of the humanitarian response by providing them with targeted training and material support.

In order to achieve all the above, an enabling environment for well-coordinated volunteer engagement should be provided. Thus, a programmatic initiative needs to be developed which will highlight good practices in terms of volunteer management and volunteer engagement, including through technological solutions and online volunteering, will provide capacity building for local actors and authorities to strengthen the enabling environment and mechanisms for a well-coordinated volunteer response and will inspire more people to support institutional actors and the humanitarian community through volunteer action.





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## Conclusion

The return of all new irregular migrants and asylum seekers from Greece to Turkey is an essential component in breaking the pattern of refugees and migrants paying smugglers and risking their lives. New arrangements on returns should build on this progress, with all parties working together to facilitate fast and effective returns. Fast-track operational arrangements between Greece and Turkey can be put in place, more suited to the large scale return of migrants. The hotspots in the islands in Greece will need to be adapted – with the current focus on registration and screening before swift transfer to the mainland replaced by the objective of implementing returns to Turkey. For instance, the infrastructure in the hotspots would need to be reconfigured to accommodate the readmission and asylum offices and to deal adequately with vulnerable groups. Another important element would be a substantial increase in reception capacity in the islands. This could include separate facilities for irregular migrants and those undergoing the longer procedure of an asylum request, and would require sufficient detention capacity to be put in place for individuals who present a risk of absconding. The capacity of the Greek Asylum Service should be increased to enable expedited readmission to Turkey as well as rapid acceptance of asylum applications. Appeal Committees should also be able to rule on a high number of appeals within a short period of time. In this regard, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) should also be called upon to support the Greek authorities in quickly and effectively processing applications and returns, if necessary through an additional and targeted call for assistance from the Member States. Finally, arrangements would need to be made for large-scale transport from the islands to Turkey.

A process to link the numbers readmitted from the Greek islands to Turkey and those leaving Turkey to be resettled in the EU is required. A week-by-week approach, in which the EU looks back at the total number of Syrians effectively readmitted by Turkey over the past 7 days and immediately launches the procedure for the same number to be resettled to the EU, could be envisaged.

Projects for refugees in areas including education, human resources and environmental infrastructure are also being developed.

Close to the border/in Edirne region and in other places where migrants and refugees are being de-trained, 42 CSOs would work to prevent or counter infringements of the migrants and refugees' rights by state authorities. Independent lawyers associations would offer their help to detained migrants and ref-ugees and independent doctors would visit detainees to offer appropriate medical care.

Civil society groups would constantly remind state authorities of the limits to their powers prescribed by law, inform the public about migrants and refugees' rights, and survey policing and detention practices. 43 public vigilance would also cover developments at the national level





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– such as the adoption of new legislation – as well as the local level, and ensures that local and national media stay informed and re-report on developments concerning migrants and refugees.

As on the Turkish side, detainees would be offered independent legal counselling and medical checks. While some civil society organizations would thus mainly work to check state authority, others would collaborate with the Greek authorities and the UNHCR, for example by helping to improve detention conditions and by offering specialized services to migrant and refugee groups with particular needs (e.g. families with small children). Glaring holes in the support infrastructure would be addressed by additional organizations (such as the Greek Red Cross) becoming active in the border regions.

As successful cooperation, instead of competition, is essential for addressing the refugee crisis, organizations should build a shared vision of refugee protection and a common understanding of each other's mandates, roles and responsibilities. Member States should support CSOs in working together, conducting research, coordinating activities and sharing experiences, knowledge and resources. Their internationalization, cross-border cooperation and exchange of information could be supported through specific funds or a formal network.

