

## Lesbos Bulletin ON EMBARGO: 17 June 2021 0.01 CEST

### Update on the EU response in Lesbos, by the Greek Council for Refugees & Oxfam



Tents right up to the sea in the Mavrovouni camp. March 2021. Photo by Giorgos Moutafis.

## SUMMARY

In early May, the Greek authorities closed the Kara Tepe camp on Lesbos and transferred more than 500 vulnerable asylum seekers to the temporary Mavrovouni camp (“Moria 2.0”). This transfer caused another degradation of the living conditions for the population of asylum seekers in Lesbos. Despite temperatures that reach more than 37°C in the summer months,<sup>1</sup> the camp residents live in tents with no access to shade as the heat of summer looms. Conditions are dire as children in the camp have no access to education and stakeholder express concern over the physical safety and mental health of the residents.

Both national and international pressure to address alleged pushback is mounting, including on cases reported by GCR. The Greek Ombudsperson published an interim report finding that pushbacks appear to be standard practice.<sup>2</sup> The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatovic also addressed pushbacks in a letter calling on Greek Ministers “to put an end to these practices and to ensure that independent and effective investigations are carried out into all allegations of push backs and of ill-treatment by members of security forces in the context of such operations”.<sup>3</sup> The report was rejected by the ministers, who instead point the finger to an “unfavourable environment of intended misleading information emanating in most cases by the smugglers networks and by those supporting them” in their reply.<sup>4</sup> GCR and Oxfam call on the Greek Government to initiate and independent investigation into these pushbacks and avert more senseless tragedies.

## CALL TO ACTION

The Greek Council for Refugees and Oxfam are calling on EU member state's governments, with the support of the Commission, to act urgently to continue to relocate asylum seekers from Greece, in accordance with clearly defined and transparent criteria.

The Greek Council for Refugees and Oxfam call on the European governments and the institutions of the EU to:

- Ensure Greece has the ability to improve living conditions for asylum seekers and refugees across its territory, with a focus on housing in the community, in order to create alternatives to large-scale centres at the border, which offer poor conditions and undignified living.
- In the context of the new Pact on Asylum and Migration, agree to establish national mechanisms to investigate pushback allegations, which are independent, well-financed, with the powers to promote accountability.

In addition, the Greek Council for Refugees and Oxfam are calling on Greece, with the support of the European Commission, to:

With regards to living conditions in Lesbos:

- Abandon the practice of restriction of movement and concentration of the asylum seekers population in inappropriate camps in the border islands. This policy of the last five years has ended in tragic failures like Moria and Mavrovouni ("Moria 2"). The conditions in these camps are not fit for human dwelling.
- Reconsider the recently announced end of cash allowance for asylum seekers living independently.<sup>5</sup> If implemented, this plan will push more refugees back into camps.
- Adopt a national integration plan that includes concrete goals along with the steps and requirement needed to implement them. Amongst others, special consideration should be given to the issue of (actual/potential) homelessness of refugees in Greece and in supporting them to achieve self-dependency, which is always in the interest of all.
- Ensure all school-aged children are attending adequate education programmes, with a strong priority to schools outside camps.

With regards to pushbacks:

- Implement without delay the recommendations of the Greek Ombudsman and investigate all allegations of pushbacks against third country nationals at Greek borders
- To establish a national mechanism in Greece capable of independent investigations of all alleged pushbacks cases, with the legal and financial powers to make determinations of fact. Independent institutions such as the Ombudsman, could have an important role on this, only if provided with additional power of investigation. We also call the Greek judiciary to use its power to investigate practices that violates national and international law

## Updates on the Situation on Lesbos & the Greek Islands

Between 19 April and 9 June there have been only 111 arrivals to Lesbos island.<sup>6</sup> Uncommonly, there were only 8 days where there were arrivals to Lesbos during that period. At the same time, departures from the island, either through organised transfers and/or through independent means, continued at a significant rate, with 1,641 persons being allowed travel to the mainland during the same period.<sup>7</sup> However, in the absence of more detailed data, it remains impossible to assess how many of the people who travelled to the mainland are persons granted international protection and how many are asylum seekers. The distinction is important, because the ones who are no longer undergoing asylum procedures are exposed to an increased risk of homelessness and destitution due to the lack of a comprehensive integration strategy and challenges in securing uninterrupted housing.

By 9 June, the population of asylum seekers and refugees in the islands has dropped to 9,347, out of which 6,355 were in Lesbos, most of whom (5,541) are still living in the temporary Mavrovouni ("Moria 2") camp<sup>8</sup>. As of 6 June, the vast majority of asylum seekers and refugees in Lesbos are from Afghanistan (65% of the population), the Democratic Republic of Congo (11%), Somalia (8%), Syria (8%), and Iran (2%)<sup>9</sup>. Persons from these countries are often recognised as refugees in need of international protection in Greece.<sup>10</sup>

More than half of the migrant population on Lesbos as of 7 June are women (22%) and minors (32%), which means a population of over 1,800 minors. 70% of the children are under 12 and 7% are unaccompanied, which translates to a population of approximately 130 unaccompanied minors on the island.<sup>11</sup> In theory, this would mean that the current dedicated accommodation places for UAM on the island (total of 203),<sup>12</sup> could suffice to cover minors' needs. However, actors on the island state that there are an unknown number of potential unaccompanied children who reside in Mavrovouni; in most cases residing alongside the adult population. These are young people whose age assessment procedures have been pending for more than 5 months (since January 2021), due to the ongoing lack of qualified staff. In the meantime, these young people are treated as adults<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, by 15 May 2021 (according to the most recent available data) there were still 598 unaccompanied minors living in the streets or in informal and insecure housing conditions throughout Greece, and an additional 110 unaccompanied minors living in Reception and Identification Centres across the country.<sup>14</sup> This again highlights the need to support relocation efforts for children in migration regardless of their current location.

Additionally, 34 unaccompanied children were residing in the Samos 'hotspot' in April, and 40-50 young persons were reportedly still waiting for age assessment procedures to be conducted. While they wait, they too are residing with the camp's adult population.<sup>15</sup>

The presence of more than 200 unaccompanied minors directly contradicts the Vice-President of the European Commission, Margaritis Schinas, who stated that there are no unaccompanied children currently in the Greek islands.<sup>16</sup>

Greek authorities are still using administrative detention, both at national and at local levels. According to information provided by the Legal Aid Working Group of Lesbos<sup>17</sup>, 15 migrants including two women, are detained in the Police Station of Mytilene without any criminal charge against them, as of 1 June.

The ongoing decrease of the number of asylum seekers and refugees that are still trapped in Lesbos, as a by-product of the EU's policy of externalization, could reasonably lead to improvement of the living conditions in the island. Sadly, this does not seem to be the reality.

## Not So “Temporary” Mavrovouni: Deteriorating Conditions

Children make up a large percentage and are still excluded from formal education. It is indicative and highly concerning that out of more than 1,000 school-aged children in the Mavrovouni (“Moria 2”) in December 2020, none were enrolled in school.<sup>18</sup> The situation in Mavrovouni mirrors that of the rest of the island ‘hotspots’, were by January 2021, only 8.5% of school-aged children had managed to enrol to school, out of which only 0.3% (seven children) had actually been able to attend. Children housed in the camps struggle to access education because of lack of transportation from the camp as well as ongoing movement restrictions related to the COVID pandemic.<sup>19</sup> In a welcome development that, on 2 June, the Deputy Minister of Migration & Asylum, Ms. Sofia Voultepsi, announced a new collaboration with UNICEF, aimed at ensuring access “to real and not superficial education, in an environment of equality and equal opportunities”.<sup>20</sup> GCR and Oxfam welcome this announcement, yet stress the need for children to have access to formal/public education.

Despite the camp operating below capacity and that work is ongoing, there remain real concerns about conditions, particularly amidst an increase in the number of positive COVID-19 cases identified on the island. During May, close to 550 positive COVID-19 cases were reported in Lesbos, 341 of which amongst the general population of the island, and the remainder (227) amongst the residents of Mavrovouni camp.<sup>21</sup> Though the process for vaccinating the camp's population was belatedly announced to start on 3 June,<sup>22</sup> this spike in infections highlights the ongoing concerns around whether or not the living conditions in the camp can safeguard the health of residents and employees alike. It also remains to be seen whether the vaccination plan will include all vulnerable groups present throughout Greece, including asylum seekers who may have not been able to apply for asylum and thus remain undocumented.

Access to services, including medical support, remains a challenge. Even though residents can have access to a doctor, follow up care and ongoing treatment remain virtually impossible. This extends to services provided by NGOs, who are frequently not granted the space to manage cases, due to ongoing works in Mavrovouni.<sup>23</sup>

Access to water and sanitation facilities is difficult, particularly for residents with special needs. For instance, GCR handles a case of a highly vulnerable single woman, living with a disability that restricts her movements. She reported falling and injuring herself on more than one occasion while trying to access the camp's toilets, which are not accessible to persons with disabilities.

“I am dismayed by the argument that it is more cost effective to send and host asylum seekers in countries of the global south. I find this morally reprehensible – we must not put price tags on human lives. Refugees are not commodities that can be traded by wealthier nations. To do so is dehumanizing, exploitative and dangerous.”

-Gillian Triggs, UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.  
Source: [UNHCR](#)

In Mavrovouni, questions of safety for women remain critical. After the Kara Tepe camp closed in May (see next page) hundreds of its residents were moved to Mavrovouni. To make space for the new residents, single women in the Mavrovouni camp have been once again moved back in tents. This has had an immediate impact on their sense of security. Before the closure of Kara Tepe, many were residing in a rubbhall. As the space was divided in small rooms which could be locked from the inside, women felt safer. By contrast, living once more in tents has increased their insecurity, since as they frequently report to GCR's social workers, everyone can potentially have access to their accommodation.

Despite an enhanced police presence, residents of specific sections of the camp are at risk, due to the lack of patrol in the back part of the camp. This is a section designated for the accommodation of families, who frequently report being robbed. Residents of the camp also continue to report incidents of gender and sexual based violence.

Single men also report a sense of neglect, as service providers are unable to cover the full extent of needs and thus prioritise based on residents' vulnerabilities, often leaving them unsupported.

Overall, the basic needs of camp residents are consistently not covered. Throughout the year, showers had limited warm water. This is evidently problematic for families with small kids or infants. The already poor situation in the camp will likely worsen after the decision of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum to cut the cash allowance for asylum seekers that chose to be housed independently (e.g. do not live in the camps.) The Ministry announced that from 1 July all asylum seekers should accept the lodging provided to them by the Ministry or lose the cash benefit.<sup>24</sup> According to social service workers, this may lead to a forced return of asylum seekers back to the camps. The threat of cash cuts may lead to an abrupt end of co-habitations that have been beneficial for many asylum seekers, may impacting on their agency, and derail their efforts to achieve self-reliance.

This push to return to camps also promotes segregation of asylum seekers and contradicts the potential for a smooth integration process, for those that will ultimately be granted international protection.

The Ministry's decision also seems to fall outside the scope of national and EU law. The provision of Article 57 of L.4636/2020 that implements Article 20 of the Reception Directive 2013/33/EU demands an individualised and justified decision if a restriction or interruption of the reception conditions is imposed. A blanket end of cash allowance without an assessment and evaluation of the personal residence needs of the asylum seekers seems to be unlawful and unreasonable.

## **Isolation and Separation of Asylum Seekers and Host Communities**

On 7 May, the Greek authorities evicted the former camp of Kara Tepe – which was run under the auspices of UNHCR – of its last residents and the camp closed. The Kara Tepe camp offered dignified conditions and a quality alternative to Moria for more than five years, hosting people with disabilities, severe medical conditions, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Out of the approximately 700 vulnerable residents of the former Kara Tepe camp, the large majority, 538 persons, most of whom are families, have already been moved to Mavrovouni. They live in conditions that remain well below acceptable EU standards. Following the evacuation, the Minister for Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarakis, delivered the Kara Tepe camp to the local authorities. In his speech, during the ceremonial hand-over, the Minister praised the fact that Kara Tepe was returned to the local municipality, as a further step towards the aim of 'decongesting' the islands, and that soon, Lesbos would be left with only one reception facility.<sup>25</sup> This comes on the

heels of the closure of community-based PIKPA camp earlier in 2020 and the planned closure of the apartment-based accommodation scheme ESTIA on the islands, by November 2021. No reference was made to the quality of reception conditions in Mavrovouni camp.

Without undermining the importance of alleviating the pressure on Lesbos and the rest of the islands, the closure of Kara Tepe and PIKPA – itself another quality alternative for vulnerable asylum seekers, including victims of torture – is disconcerting. It signifies a lack of concern for improving living conditions for asylum seekers on the island. Even if the planned Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Center (MPRIC) would offer dignified living conditions to asylum seekers on the island, as the Greek Ministry and the European Commission claim,<sup>26</sup> the site will still not be operational before March 2022. The new MPRIC's agreed location, in a secluded area, coupled with its nature as a "closed-controlled" center,<sup>27</sup> gives grave cause for concern. These decisions indicate an increasing focus on the intentional isolation of asylum seekers and refugees, in line with the disproportionate movement restrictions imposed on Greece's camps since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This isolation can be harmful both to the integration prospects of those that will be recognized as refugees, as well as to the asylum seeker's rights during the examination of their claim. This reality is also not in line with the reassurances provided by the Minister of Citizen Protection, Mr. Michalis Chrysochoidis. After the Moria camp burnt down in September 2020, when he stated that all of the camp's residents be transferred off of Lesbos by this past Easter.<sup>28</sup>

## Pushback Allegations

The issue of alleged pushbacks has received much attention in the public sphere in recent months. In an interim report, the Greek Ombudsperson recorded 15 individual complaints of pushbacks that have been investigated by the institution in the last three years. In at least two of the incidents, the victims included pregnant women.<sup>29</sup> Amongst others concerns, the Ombudsperson's report notes the "constantly repeated patterns" in the hundreds or thousands of pushback allegations that saw the public limelight since 2017, as well the failure of the Greek authorities to "address those concerns, through a comprehensive investigation", particularly in cases where "official documents" record that the victims had first contacted the Greek authorities, before being pushed back to Turkey.<sup>30</sup> Importantly, in the report, the Ombudsperson stresses that the Greek law has not provided the independent authority (i.e. Ombudsperson) with "the necessary statutory tools and means" to effectively investigate the incidents or form a judgement about the Greek government's actions.<sup>31</sup>

The Greek Ombudsperson's interim report clearly indicates that – unless it is provided with the power to effectively investigate the factual basis of individual complaints – it is not able to provide case-by-case monitoring of pushbacks. However, based on clear patterns in pushback allegations, the Ombudsperson made concrete recommendations to the Greek police, proposing to investigate allegations and publicise within a reasonable timeframe the findings, and to develop specific and detailed operational plans to effectively address the possible involvement of private groups in illegal pushbacks.

On 3 May, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic, increased the pressure on the Greek government even further, by sending three ministers a letter referring to "numerous credible allegations of pushbacks".<sup>32</sup> In her letter, the Commissioner urges the Greek authorities to put an end to

"After they arrested us, while we were waiting, they were telling us that 'you are coming here to take advantage of the good situation in Europe and in Greece'. But we didn't flee from our country for a better life. We fled in order not to be [unjustly] imprisoned; in order to not be wronged and tortured. I didn't want to pass my youth in prison because I was unfairly convicted.

*-K. young political refugee*

pushback operations at both the land and sea borders with Turkey, and to ensure that independent and effective investigations are carried out into all allegations of pushbacks and of ill-treatment by members of security forces in the context of such operations. The Greek ministers' response, which lacks specific data to counter the allegations, instead points the finger at an "unfavourable environment of intended misleading information emanating in most cases by the smugglers networks and by those supporting them".<sup>33</sup>

Given the wealth of sources including EU and UN intergovernmental agencies and monitoring bodies on reported pushbacks at Greece's land and sea borders,<sup>34</sup> GCR and Oxfam express their deepest concern over the Greek Government's ongoing attempt at stigmatising and criminalising those who speak up about what may amount to a systematic violation of the principle of *non-refoulement* by the Greek authorities.<sup>35</sup> Even if it is possible that pushbacks are being instrumentalised in the context of international dynamics, this still does not absolve the Greek Government from the obligation to ensure that all pushback allegations are effectively investigated by an independent body, with the authority to bring potential perpetrators to justice. While the Ombudsperson's report provides a crucial and welcome resource, it also indicates that, without additional powers to make factual determination on pushbacks, the entire investigation architecture will continue to rely on the police investigating its own conduct. This is an unacceptable practice.

Most worryingly, testimonies collected by six civil society organizations under the PRAB initiative (Protecting Rights at Borders), indicate an indiscriminate use of such illegal practices is prevalent throughout the former "Balkan route" (from Greece to Hungary), Italy and Austria. In the first four months of 2021 alone, more than 2,100 pushback testimonies were collected. In 13% of the cases (276), the alleged victims were children, of which 93 were unaccompanied. Of all children, 87 were girls and 189 boys. Women accounted for 177 of the persons who reportedly having been pushed back at European borders between January and April 2021.<sup>36</sup>

National courts across several European countries have already issued decisions challenging the legality of the practices of the national authorities.<sup>37</sup> More recently, in Greece, the Legal Centre Lesvos (LCL) filed a new complaint before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) representing 11 Syrian nationals who were part of an incident in which of a group of 180-200 people were pushed back by the Hellenic Coast Guard in the Aegean Region.<sup>38</sup> The case is pending before the ECtHR.

Testimonies and complaints of pushbacks on Greece's borders are constant. The Ministry of Migration cannot simply deny the complaints without taking initiatives to examine the alleged pushbacks. Nor can the European Commission continue to claim these are mere "allegations". An investigation must be conducted by an independent institution and the findings should be followed up by decisive action to end all illegal practices.

K. is a young political refugee speaking about her experience being pushed backed from Greece. She is supported by GCR's Legal Unit

My name is K. and I have been persecuted for political reasons because I have written publications on the political situation in my country. I have trials that have continued for 5-6 years. I was forced to flee my country, because if I had stayed [there], I would have been in jail for 8 years.

The reason why I selected Europe is because I thought I could ask for political asylum without being afraid of being sent back. We were forced to choose Greece because [Greece] is a nearby country, but I love this country and its history, and the climate; and because we are close in culture, I want to stay here.

When we entered Greece, we were arrested by the Greek authorities. We were led to an old building. They left us waiting there for 22 hours, without anything. We were hungry and it was really cold. While we were waiting, I understood that they will send us back. It's not the first time. They are doing it [in a] very organized [manner].

Even though we told them that we want to seek asylum, they [finally] put us all in a vehicle and led us next to the [Evros] river. We were waiting for 3-4 hours next to the river. There were approximately 150 more people [there]. From my understanding and from the way they were talking they were from Arabic countries; Tunisia, Syria, 60 people were from Afghanistan and two people were from Turkey. There was violence, there was hitting.

I was impressed by the fact that the Afghans were [accustomed] to trying to enter the country and then being illegally returned back to Turkey. There were people that had tried to enter 7-8 times. They were not bringing a lot of money with them anymore. I was asking for how long this will continue, and they were saying to me that 'we will either succeed or we will die in Evros river. I cannot even imagine how people can afford [to handle] this situation; trying to enter again and being sent back again.

They [finally] put us in a vessel and they forcibly returned us to Turkey. They didn't care where the Turkish police was. They just left us on the other side. Every time that I remember, the fear, the nightmare of beatings and of violence, is coming to me again, and again. The fear that I will die; that I will drown into the river; that I will be sent back. I cannot forget. The only feeling that is coming to me again is fear.

I'm sharing this experience with you [because I want this] to stop. I don't know the way. Maybe states can't do something, but maybe the people can. Maybe the people are sensitized, in order for this to stop. Because we are forced to take that risk in order not to be in jail, to not be more tortured. We take the risk to flee from that [kind of] war, and then the police and the public authorities [in Greece] put us again in danger; they are pushing us back. And this continues under the responsibility of public authorities.

My aim is for this to stop.

No more danger against women and children and us.

Stop pushing us back.

*-December 2020*

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For instance, LesvosPost, "The weather is getting worse in the middle of the week in Lesbos - Detailed regional weather forecast" ("Χαλάει ο καιρός μεσοβδόμαδα στην Λέσβο- Αναλυτική περιοχική πρόγνωση του καιρού"), 6 July 2020, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/2R56272>; CNN Greece, "Weather: Heatstroke with temperatures over 40 degrees today" ("Καιρός: Καύσωνας με θερμοκρασίες πάνω από 40 βαθμούς σήμερα"), 30 July 2020, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/3wJ71Qh>; Karagiannidis & Lagoubardos, "High temperatures until Tuesday 1 September 2020: At 40 degrees the maximum on Monday 31 August 2020" ("Υψηλές θερμοκρασίες έως και την Τρίτη 1 Σεπτεμβρίου 2020. Στους 40 βαθμούς η μέγιστη τη Δευτέρα 31 Αυγούστου 2020"), 30 August 2020, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/2SI1zHU>.
- <sup>2</sup> Greek Ombudsman, *Alleged pushbacks to Turkey of foreign nationals who had arrived in Greece seeking international protection: interim report (updated up to 31 December 2020)*, 28 April 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/344xO6E>.
- <sup>3</sup> The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Letter to Minister for Citizens' Protection of Greece, Minister of Migration and Asylum of Greece, and Minister of Shipping and Island Policy of Greece (Ref: CommHR/DM/sf 019-2021, 3 May 2021), available at: <https://bit.ly/3uAJ59I>
- <sup>4</sup> Reply of the Greek Minister of Citizen Protection, the Minister of Migration & Asylum, and the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, Ref (conf): 130, 11 May 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3fTMXxe>, p.2.
- <sup>5</sup> Ministry of Migration and Asylum, "The financial aid to applicants for international protection who are not housed in structures of responsibility of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum or bodies cooperating with the MoMA is abolished from 1/7/21" ("Καταργείται από 1/7/21 το οικονομικό βοήθημα σε αιτούντες διεθνή προστασία που δε στεγάζονται σε δομές ευθύνης του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου ή συνεργαζόμενους με το ΥΜΑ φορείς"), 15 April 2021, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/3vSLaPG>.
- <sup>6</sup> See relevant daily updates issued by the National Coordination Center for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum (NCCBCIA), available on the website of the General Secretariat for Information and Communication under "National Situational Picture Regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea" at: <https://bit.ly/3cwnmCB>.
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> National Coordination Center for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum (NCCBCIA), *National Situational Picture Regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea (9/06/2021)*, available at: <https://bit.ly/3wbdy2>.
- <sup>9</sup> UNHCR, Lesbos Weekly Snapshot (31 May - 6 June 2021), published on 7 June 2021.
- <sup>10</sup> For instance, throughout 2020, the rate of positive decisions issued by the Greek Asylum Service for these nationalities was 93.97% for nationals of Somalia, 76.85% for Syrian nationals, 65.31% for nationals of Afghanistan, 45.78% for nationals of Iran and 30.33% for nationals of the DRC. Source: [Eurostat](https://eurstat).
- <sup>11</sup> UNHCR, Lesbos Weekly Snapshot *op.cit.*
- <sup>12</sup> According to the latest data published by the National Centre of Social Solidarity (EKKA) at the time of writing, in Lesbos, there are 8 shelters for unaccompanied minors (UAM) with a total of 183 dedicated accommodation places, and 5 Semi-Independent Living (SIL) apartments for UAM, with a total capacity of 20 places. EKKA, *Situation Update: Unaccompanied Children (UAC) in Greece*, 15 May 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3wcByPw>.
- <sup>13</sup> As per article 1(11) of Joint Ministerial Decision 9889/2020 of August 2020, "For as long as a minority in in doubt, the third-country national or stateless persons is considered a minor". JMD 9889/2020 of the Ministers of Health and of Migration & Asylum Amending and replacing Decision 1982/15-02-2016 (B' 335) και amending Decision 92490/04- 10-2013 (B' 2745), Gov. Gazette 3390/B/13-8-2020, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/2QDwpkq>.
- <sup>14</sup> EKKA, 15 May 2021, *op.cit.*
- <sup>15</sup> Refugee Rights Europe & Still I Rise, *Unaccompanied children at the gates of Europe: voices from Samos*, April 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3fAYmD9>, p.5.
- <sup>16</sup> LIBE Hearing, 19 April 2021. [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/committee-on-civil-liberties-justice-and-home-affairs\\_20210419-1345-COMMITTEE-LIBE\\_vd](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/committee-on-civil-liberties-justice-and-home-affairs_20210419-1345-COMMITTEE-LIBE_vd)
- <sup>17</sup> LAsWG, meeting of 1 June 2021
- <sup>18</sup> Greek Ombudsman, Educational integration of children living in facilities and RICs of the Ministry of Migration & Asylum, 11 March 2021, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/3ounlWc>, p.9.
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>20</sup> Ministry of Migration & Asylum, "Memorandum of Understanding of Ministry of Migration and Asylum - UNICEF: Together in the battle for a safe bridge of knowledge" ("Μνημόνιο Συνεργασίας Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου – UNICEF: Μαζί στη μάχη για μια ασφαλή γέφυρα γνώσης"), 2 June 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3yVpZ1c>.
- <sup>21</sup> Sto nisi, "Three new Covid cases in Lesbos" ("Τρία νέα κρούσματα στη Λέσβο"), 2 June 2021, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/3gc8voD>.
- <sup>22</sup> Amna, "Vaccinations in the RICs of Kara Tepe in Lesbos, Vial in Chios and Vathy in Samos to start tomorrow" ("Ξεκινούν αύριο οι εμβολιασμοί στα ΚΥΤ του Καρά Τεπέ Λέσβου, στη ΒΙΑΛ Χίου και στο Βαθύ Σάμου"), 2 June

2021, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/3uOGk4r>.

<sup>23</sup> As per information received by GCR's team on the ground at the end of May 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Migration & Asylum, 15 April 2021, *op.cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA), "The Kara Tepe facility has been returned to the Mytelene municipality", ("Στον δήμο Μυτιλήνης επέστρεψε ο χώρος της δημοτικής δομής του Καρά Τεπέ"), 7 May 2021, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/3blJOyZ>

<sup>26</sup> Amongst others, European Commission, "Migration: Commission and Greece agree joint plan for a new reception centre in Lesbos", 3 December 2020, available at: <https://bit.ly/2S1FunA>; the Guardian, "EU announces funding for five new refugee camps on Greek islands", 29 March 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3iaqLbt>.

<sup>27</sup> As recently re-affirmed by the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis. Kathimerini, "Kyr. Mitsotakis: The '6-point policy' on the refugee-migration issue" ("Κυρ. Μητσοτάκης: Η «πολιτική των έξι σημείων» για προσφυγικό – μεταναστευτικό"), 12 May 2021, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/34yGJgU>.

<sup>28</sup> Amongst others, Kathimerini, "Michalis Chrysochoidis on Thema: I will stay in Moria until we bring order, like in Exarcheia" ("Μιχάλης Χρυσοχοϊδης στο ΘΕΜΑ: Θα κάτσω στη Μόρια μέχρι να βάλουμε τάξη, όπως στα Εξάρχεια"), 21 September 2020, available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/3viRX4E> and the Guardian, "Greece vows to empty Lesbos of all refugees by Easter after fire", 15 September 2020, available at: <https://bit.ly/3oBFNkR>. While the statement uses the term "refugees", the reference includes all of the 12,000 former residents of Moria 'hotspot'.

<sup>29</sup> Greek Ombudsman, *Alleged pushbacks to Turkey of foreign nationals who had arrived in Greece seeking international protection: interim report (updated up to 31 December 2020)*, 28 April 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/344xO6F>, pp.10-11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p.23.

<sup>31</sup> The Greek Ombudsman, *Alleged pushbacks to Turkey of Foreign Nationals who had arrived in Greece seeking international protection*, p.20

<sup>32</sup> The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Letter to Minister for Citizens' Protection of Greece, Minister of Migration and Asylum of Greece, and Minister of Shipping and Island Policy of Greece (Ref: CommHR/DM/sf 019-2021, 3 May 2021), available at: <https://bit.ly/3uAJ59l>

<sup>33</sup> Reply of the Greek Minister of Citizen Protection, the Minister of Migration & Asylum, and the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, Ref (conf): 130, 11 May 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3fTMXxe>, p.2.

<sup>34</sup> For a brief yet indicative list of relevant publications, see the "Joint Statement on push backs practises in Greece", 1 February 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3i3lXZ>.

<sup>35</sup> Also see Campaign for Access to Asylum, "Illegal pushbacks, Lives at risk, NGOs under prosecution: Investigations on pushbacks at the EU level, targeting of those highlighting them in Greece", 16 March 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3p5xVsq>.

<sup>36</sup> PRAB, Pushing back Responsibility: Rights Violations as a "Welcome Treatment" at Europe's borders, April 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3fBdosr>, p.8

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p.10-12

<sup>38</sup> Legal Centre Lesbos, "Another complaint at the European Court for Human Rights against the Greek State aims at redress over mass refoulement by the Greek Authorities in the Aegean ("Άλλη μία προσφυγή στο Ευρωπαϊκό Δικαστήριο Ανθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων εναντίον του Ελληνικού Κράτους επιδιώκει αποκατάσταση για μαζική επαναπροώθηση από τις Ελληνικές Αρχές στο Αιγαίο"), 26 April 2021, available in Greek at <https://bit.ly/3fXAmsH>.

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