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Gender Analysis

The Situation of Refugees and Migrants in Greece

August 2016



Photo Credit: Aubrey Wade/Oxfam

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Executive Summary

This study focuses on the gender differences in the situation of migrants and refugees in Greece, following their arrival in the country as a consequence of heightened conflict, and social and economic insecurity in the Middle East and other regions. It is intended to inform Oxfam's response in the country, as well as that of other agencies. The objectives of this Gender Analysis were to:

- Understand the different impacts of the current situation in Greece on migrant and refugee women and men of various nationalities.
- Understand how humanitarian actors consider and address gender differences and inequalities within their response.

The research relied on secondary and primary research, the latter through 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) across 5 sites in the Greek mainland, and through a number of Key Informant Interviews (KII) with representatives of the UN and of international and national non governmental organisations (I/NGOs), including Oxfam.

The research found that the response is gradually adjusting to the considerable changes caused on the ground by the closure of borders north of Greece and the EU-Turkey Agreement. Before that UNHCR, I/NGOs and volunteers provided immediate and basic assistance at key points as those on the move transited rapidly through Greece. After the Agreement came into effect, Greece transitioned from a country of transit to a country of reception, thus requiring a larger and more comprehensive response. This had to be prepared in great haste, thus often without appropriate planning, especially in terms of gender and protection considerations. Despite improvements, there are still gaps and challenges in aid provision, which are said to be due to the difficulties of adopting remedial measures, as well as to the limited financial and human resources at the disposal of the Greek Government.

Currently the response is focused predominantly on ensuring that the immediate and practical needs of men and women are being met. The research looked at what this meant when adopting an approach that challenges the view of refugees and migrants as a helpless and indistinguishable mass. Across the sites visited refugees and migrants were anything but helpless. They had overcome huge risks to escape danger and deprivation. They had fled to lead a more productive life in Europe with intentions to reunite with their families – in some cases with husbands already in Germany – and put down roots in a more stable and safe country. They appreciated the solidarity of the Greek people and the work of all humanitarian actors.

All the same, both men and women felt acutely their inability to realise their choice and plans. The slow nature of the legal processes and their obscurity were sources of worry and anger. Limited information and poor communication related to legal processes and eligibility added to the frustration. Women's absence from public spaces resulted in some cases in women not accessing information that was shared predominantly through word of mouth. This was compounded by women's care responsibilities, leaving them often unable to participate meaningfully in information-sharing activities and sessions, resulting in reduced clarity about their options. Other obstacles to the refugees and migrants' ability to act on their choices - related to their asylum options and for

onwards movement - included lack of money, the isolation of some of the sites, and the strong sense that their plight is not understood and their skills not valued.

One consequence of this situation is the limited means through which refugees and migrants, women in particular, organise collectively to inform and influence decisions, or for other purposes. Other disincentives to organizing are the insufficient access of refugees and migrants' to, and influence on, camp authorities, and the lack of clarity about who the duty bearers are and therefore who should be influenced. Furthermore, volunteers in many sites take on activities and responsibilities which the refugees and migrants are capable of organising and managing themselves. This further disengages refugees and migrants from finding solutions to the challenges - which are often gendered in nature - they face.

Most people recognised the efforts of the humanitarian community and the improvements that were gradually made in response to their requests (for example for more culturally appropriate and better functioning toilets). Those being accommodated in buildings appreciated the security that being located in buildings rather than tents offered, and the availability of electricity and hot water. Women found respite and the companionship of other women in the Women and Girls Safe Spaces. At the same time, they felt that many of the services and facilities were not satisfactory. Women and men had different opinions on this, and identified different needs and priorities.

Women felt that poor facilities – accommodation and washing facilities - meant a heavy burden to care for the family, especially when travelling alone with their children. They mentioned the hardship of washing clothes by hand, and cleaning with limited implements and materials, and the burden of caring for children who have become unruly because of the absence of schooling and other boundaries. Supplementing the inadequate food for the family was an especially arduous task, given on one hand the absence of facilities for the individual or community to cook, and on the other hand the lack of money to acquire fresh and chosen groceries. Furthermore, the type and location of accommodation and of washing and toilet facilities (far, or dark, or not separated from those for men) made them fearful for their physical security, modesty and reputation. In sites, the presence of animals and insects were seen to represent health and other risks, especially for children.

The reliance on the choices and decisions of the humanitarian actors leaves women and men disempowered and passive, and often left without appropriate items they need in sufficient quantity. A common sentiment related to the cultural inappropriateness of some of the distributions, as the presence of some actors without sufficient cultural awareness resulted in distributions of clothing not adequate for maintaining modesty, leaving women feeling uncomfortable and with reduced mobility as a result. While women found distribution of clothes and personal items very useful, they thought both could be better tailored to their actual needs and preferences (summer clothes, underwear, good quality shampoos, hair dye, insect repellent, etc.), and replaced more regularly when finished.

Important needs that still remained unmet were for sexual and reproductive healthcare and family planning. This was of particular concern for women who spoke of a lack of women doctors in hospitals and where there were women doctors, an absence of women interpreters in the hospitals. Furthermore, women consistently expressed a need for contraception and had not been made

aware of its availability. Despite refugees and migrants receiving information about available services, the information excluded reference to contraception or abortion. Women felt stigmatised in accessing mental health services, fearing the gossip of their neighbours and community.

Men shared many of the concerns expressed by women and summarised in the sections above, including the urgency of leaving Greece for another European country. They also had somewhat different priorities. They valued being actively engaged (including in recreational activities), and feeling useful (including collecting wood for fires). They would have grasped any opportunity to use their skills to either improve their living conditions or earn an income. All sites had people, women and men, with diverse skills and occupations, including those of teacher, carpenter, hairdresser, pharmacist, tailor and cook. Men felt proud when they could organise themselves in informal groups to resolve disputes although recognised the difficulties of communicating with and influencing camp authorities.

Men remained discouraged by their inability to fully provide for and protect their families, and concerned about the safety of women and girls. Some of these tensions led to conflicts within families and between nationalities. Feelings of depression were common, in part due to past traumas, and in part to the current situation of being forced into a lifestyle of the 'stone age'. They thought that many younger men without families are likely to take the risk of being smuggled into other European countries, both to escape the inhumane conditions and lack of work and other opportunities in Greece, and to achieve the original purpose for which they had left their country, to seek a productive life free from violence and fear.

On the basis of these findings and the approach taken, this report makes a series of recommendations, for the Government of Greece and all humanitarian actors. They address the need to make practical improvements to the services and facilities already provided, while recognising, valuing and responding to refugees and migrants' different choices, opinions and desires. This is also an opportunity to address the culturally specific gender differences of the refugees and migrants, as well as the obligation to promote gender equality and women's rights at all levels of the response.

Ines Smyth
August 2016

Introduction and Approach

The words migrant and refugee are becoming more confused in meaning and increasingly charged with negative connotations¹, especially in Europe.

From the outset, it is therefore important to explain these terms²:

Migrant: Person on the move between countries. They can be on the move for many different reasons including poverty or because they are fleeing natural disasters or war. Refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants are all migrants.

Refugee: People outside their country of origin because of feared persecution, conflict, violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order, and who, as a result, require 'international protection'. Their situation is often so perilous and intolerable, that they cross national borders to seek safety in nearby countries, and thus become internationally recognized as 'refugees' with access to assistance from states, UNHCR, and relevant organizations. Refugees are defined and protected in international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol as well as other legal texts, such as the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, remain the cornerstone of modern refugee protection. The 1951 Convention defines who is a refugee and outlines the basic rights which States should afford to refugees.³

Throughout this report we use the term refugees and migrants.

A consequence of the confusion and negative connotations is that refugees and migrants appear - and are commonly portrayed - as an undifferentiated and helpless mass.

A different approach is needed to the perception of refugees and migrants as an undifferentiated mass on one hand, and to their status of helpless and 'vulnerable' victims on the other.

This is the approach adopted in this study: it takes its departure from the understanding that those who are on the move are extremely diverse. They have arrived from a wide range of countries and have diverse social, cultural and religious beliefs and practices. These differences exist both between refugees and migrants from different countries and those from the same country (depending, for example, on issues such as their place of origin within the country and whether they are from urban or rural areas). They move for many and different reasons: economic need, the necessity to escape conflict, instability or social tensions, and the threat of natural risks and disasters. Who, when and how people move depends also on individual characteristics: nationality, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, economic status, health and disability all play a role in the causes and consequences of population movement.⁴

Gender differences are among those often ignored. Despite the abundance of research and formal commitments⁵ by international institutions and national governments, women refugees encounter considerable problems in meeting the definition and proving the status of refugees. In addition,

¹ The results of the recent UK Referendum on membership of the EU has revealed profound unease and prejudice around issues of migration and asylum among large numbers of voters, and have opened the door to yet unknown consequences which will inevitably affect, among many other things, UK and European policies on migration and asylum.

² UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html>

³ <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/3/56e95c676/refugees-migrants-frequently-asked-questions-faqs.html>

⁴ Bridge, *Gender, Age and Migration: An Extended Briefing*, 2016.

⁵ Violence against women and domestic violence; Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000.

despite the availability of tools and guidelines, humanitarian practical and policy responses often fail to include women's voice, to facilitate women's equal access to and benefit from interventions, or prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In some instances, they actively reinforce power imbalances by relying on a 'male breadwinner' assumption, or on consultations limited to male heads of households, and self-appointed community leaders and decision makers who are commonly men, thus ignoring the priorities and needs of women.

All refugees, like many economic migrants, are vulnerable to extreme risks and deprivations. But they are not helpless: they make choices (crucially on whether to stay or leave their country).⁶ and have opinions, all of which must be understood so that they lead to the satisfaction of immediate and long term needs and rights, rather than jeopardizing both. In recent years the flow of migrants and refugees has shifted dramatically, for example in 2014 75% of all detected migrants' crossings into the EU were in the central Mediterranean, and this plunged to 15% in 2015. This demonstrates that displaced persons (as well as smugglers) respond to changing policies, and to other conditions in origin, transit, and destination countries.

This ability and right of refugees and migrants to make choices is not always reflected in humanitarian responses, where often little is known about the skills and capacities, aspirations, plans and hopes⁷ of women and men refugees and migrants, and exemplified in part by the absence of sufficient cash programming at scale. This contributes to the idea of refugees and migrants as 'vulnerable' and helpless victims, women above all. A symptom of this attitude is the extent to which sexual and other forms of violence against women (and children) attract more attention than any other aspects of gender differences in crises. This is not to negate the unacceptable and devastating nature of SGBV in all forms, but to suggest a reason for the frequent lack of comparable concerns for and action on other gendered impacts of crises. Furthermore, this overriding emphasis on SGBV within the coordination system, without a corresponding emphasis on women's political participation and voice or women's economic empowerment could in part contribute to an environment which fails to adequately prevent SGBV.

Purpose

This study focuses on the gender differences in the situation of refugees and migrants in Greece, following their arrival in the country as a consequence of heightened conflict, and social and economic insecurity in the Middle East and other regions. It is intended to inform Oxfam's response in the country, as well as that of other agencies.

Oxfam has been present in Greece since September 2015 as part of a regional response, which includes the Western Balkan countries of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRoM) and Serbia as well as Italy. Oxfam's interventions in Greece focus on Food, NFIs, WASH, gender and protection, as well as advocacy. Oxfam aspires to provide assistance and protection accessible to all according to their needs and regardless of gender and other aspects of their identity and based on a rights approach.

⁶ D Ihring, *Human mobility as a resource in conflict: the case of Syria*, RSC WP116, 2016.

<https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/human-mobility-as-a-resource-in-conflict-the-case-of-syria>

⁷ One exception is a study of the differences in opinions and hopes between Syrian refugees, host communities and providers: D Chatty, *The Syrian Humanitarian Disaster: Disparities in Perceptions, Aspirations and Behaviour in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey*, RSC Research in Brief 3, 2015. <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/the-syrian-humanitarian-disaster-disparities-in-perceptions-aspirations-and-behaviour-in-lebanon-jordan-and-turkey>

Oxfam also takes the opportunity to redress imbalances of power between women and men through specific targeted initiatives where this will enhance the impact of the humanitarian action. This is in recognition that displacement can lead to changes in gender norms and the disruption of social and cultural practices, which opens opportunities for the promotion of gender equality. In Oxfam, humanitarian programming is conducted in accordance with the *Minimum Standards for Gender in Emergencies* that, among others, include gender analysis throughout the project cycle.

The objectives of this Gender Analysis were to:

- Understand the different impacts of the current situation in Greece on migrant and refugee women and men of various nationalities, by exploring;
 - their needs
 - their resources, and capacities
 - their coping mechanisms
- Understand how humanitarian actors - governments as well as national and international organizations - consider and address gender differences and inequalities in their response.

Methodology

Information necessary to find answers to the questions set in this Gender Analysis were sought via:

Secondary Research

This was used to collect information from existing reports and assessments, including programme documents. Secondary research was also used to understand, from a gender perspective, the policy environment contributing to the nature of the crisis, to the impact on refugees and migrants, and, as far as possible, to its gendered features. In addition, available information was used to have a clear picture of, for each site:

- Basic demographics at the site (sex and age disaggregated), size, nationalities etc.
- Facilities (accommodation etc.), camp management systems.
- Services available, including information on registration, relocation, etc. (accessible to women, men and children), and their sources (government, I/NGOs etc.).

Primary Research

The research used two methods to directly collect the necessary qualitative information: Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informants Interviews (KII), the latter also with Oxfam staff. The continuous movement of groups of refugees and migrants from camp to camp or out of the area required a very flexible approach to the research, including to the number of FGDs and KII, and the number and type of questions asked. This was also made necessary by the evolution of Oxfam's programme, structural changes within the Oxfam teams, as well as logistic considerations.

The intention had been to hold 3 FGDs in each site: one for women only (WFGD), one for men only (MFGD), one mixed (MIXFGD); each with about 8 to 10 people. In two sites MIXFGDs were cancelled because refugees and migrants expressed the feeling that *'many come to talk to us and ask what we need, but then nothing happens'*. A total of 12 FGDs (see Table 1) were conducted, in 5 different sites. A brief description of the sites is in Appendix 1.

The original plan had been to carry out FGDs also in the island of Lesvos, but this was not done. As Oxfam was planning to phase out of its activities, interactions with the community would have raised false expectations.

Table 1 – List of FGDs

Locality	No of WFGD	No of MFGD	No of MIXFGD	Total
Epirus:				
Doliana, population 175	1	1		2
Katsikas, population 544	1	1		2
Konitsa, population, 169	1	1	1	3
Tsepelovo, population 132	1	1	1	3
Attica:				
Ritsona, population 750	1	1		2
Total				12

The numbers of FGDs and of people were considered a ‘convenience’, non-representative sample, as neither a random or stratified sample are necessary or realistic for FGDs in these circumstances. FGDs were carried out by nationality, and efforts were made to cover all the major nationalities represented in the sites (Syrians, Afghans, Kurds) where Oxfam works, according to the size of their presence. Nationality or ethnic groups, such as Yazidis, Iranians and Iraqis, whose numbers were very small or were concentrated in sites not covered by the Oxfam programme, were not included.

Each FGD was led by one facilitator with an interpreter (an Arab and a Farsi interpreter were available for the duration of the field research) and lasted at least 2 hours, but usually more.

KII were conducted with selected stakeholders, chosen among UN, I/NGOs representatives and other informants. The interviews served several purposes:

- To gather understanding of the opinions (and awareness) of different actors, especially on gender matters.
- To collect additional information on the policy context and on the refugees and migrants’ conditions, including to fill possible gaps in the information collected through FGDs.
- If appropriate, to influence various stakeholders of the necessity of adopting a gender equality approach in their work.

The interviews lasted about 1 hour. A separate set of questions was used for Oxfam and broadly guided the discussions.

Clarifications and Limitations

Considerable flexibility was necessary in all aspects of the research, to adapt the methodology and the tools to the situation of the refugees and migrants in different sites, to a fast changing overall context (within Oxfam and beyond), to the need to cover different geographical locations in a short time, and to the availability of humanitarian actors.

As a consequence, the purpose of the gender analysis had to some extent be modified. For example, its emphasis became more on the first of the two objectives, i.e. to acquire better knowledge of the different impacts that the current situation in Greece has on refugee and migrants women and men of various nationalities, and less on the second objective, that of understanding how humanitarian actors consider and address gender differences.

It is worth flagging the limitations of FGDs in general. It is fair to assume that in a group setting participants are less likely to discuss sensitive topics or expose particular vulnerabilities publically. This is compounded by the presence of facilitators with who the participants have not previously interacted and which might undermine trust and therefore, participants' openness. FGDs in this instance were conducted by an all-female team of facilitators.

It is important to stress that this gender analysis was not intended to be an assessment of the humanitarian response in Greece, nor to cover all sectors and locations. It focused on the one hand on the issues most commonly raised by migrants and refugees, and on the other on sectors of particular interest to Oxfam's work (WASH and NFI, Food, Gender and Protection).

All efforts were made to overcome these challenges and limitations, and produce a report that may lead to improvements in the lives of the women and men living as refugees and migrants in Greece.

Context

The following summary from various sources⁸ as well as our research, covers general and gender aspects of recent population movements in Europe, with a focus on Greece.

In 2015, the number of international migrants globally was 244 million. Women made up just under half of such migrants and 52% of those in Europe and Northern America. Forced displacement increased in 2015, with 65.3 million individuals being forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of conflict, violence, or human rights violations. This is 5.8 million more than the previous year (59.5 million).⁹

Over one million refugees, migrants and people seeking asylum arrived in Europe in 2015¹⁰ and 299,582 arrived in Europe in 2016¹¹, the majority coming from refugee-producing countries, especially Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Almost as many people arrived in the first two months of 2016 as in the first seven months of 2015. Following this increase, different admissions policies were put in place by various European countries. In March 2016, the EU-Turkey Agreement came into effect stating that all new irregular¹² migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands would be returned to Turkey. In exchange for every returned Syrian, one Syrian from Turkey would be resettled in the EU. The combination of such events resulted in a huge number of people (nearly 60,000 in July 2016), living in Emergency Reception Centres in mainland Greece and in Reception and Identification Centres in the Greek islands.

While the European Commission¹³ stresses the decrease in numbers of arrivals in Greece and other positive consequences (due to increased cooperation and improved communication) of the EU-Turkey Agreement, a recent Regional Report for Europe from the UNHCR concludes that in view of the average daily arrivals into Greece, up to 92,000 people may be in the country by the end of the year. The calculations are based on assumptions about readmissions to Turkey, family reunification under the Common European Asylum System (Dublin III), relocation, assisted voluntary returns, asylum claims and potential irregular movements¹⁴.

Prospects for an improvement in these forecasts are considered limited, given the poor record of attempts across Europe to coordinate political solutions to the refugee and migrant situation in Greece: "There is now deliberate discrimination (nationality screening), deliberate denial of access to protection for arbitrary administrative reasons (daily quotas on admissions and acceptance of asylum applications), and deliberate failure to comply with binding international judicial decisions or authoritative advice not to return asylum seekers to countries that are known to be

⁸ Bridge, *Gender, Age and Migration; Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons*, 2016
Rapporteur: Ms Tineke Strik, The Netherlands, Socialist Group, October 2015.

⁹ UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement 2015*, 2016.

¹⁰ <https://www.iom.int/news/irregular-migrant-refugee-arrivals-europe-top-one-million-2015-iom>.

¹¹ <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>.

¹² Third country nationals or stateless persons who enter Greece without fulfilling the legal requirements (including those that do not prove their nationality and identity with a document of public authority).

¹³ European Commission, Brussels, 15.6.2016 COM, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The European Council and the Council: Second Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement*, 2016.

¹⁴ UNHCR, *Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan For Europe*, 2016.

unable to provide effective protection".¹⁵ However, at the end of July 2016, numbers of refugees and migrants appeared considerably lower, demonstrating the difficulties of having a clear picture of either trends or the actual situation.

At the same time the activities of people smugglers are intensifying in Europe. A recent document¹⁶ relates that of the one million migrants who entered the European Union in 2015 nine out of ten paid "facilitation services" to networks of criminals paying between 3,000- 6,000 euros each. A further challenge in having an accurate picture of numbers is the knowledge that trafficking is taking place with little known about the full extent and scale.

In recent months there have been shifts in the gender and age characteristics of these movements. While in June 2015, 73% of those entering Europe were adult men, in recent months, around 60% of those crossing the Greek border to Macedonia, were either women or children.¹⁷ Of those entering Greece by June 2016 the demographics are given as follows: children and women 38% and 22% respectively, and men 40% (49% Syrians, 25% Afghans, 15% Iraqis and 10% other nationalities)¹⁸. Women and girls tend to travel in groups formed of extended family, kinship or friends' groups of different sizes. According to one source, one in ten refugee women traveling through Europe is pregnant¹⁹. It is hard to check on the accuracy of this information, both in the country as a whole and in the sites covered by the research, due to continuous mobility.

The increase in the number of women travelling alone or with children to Europe under extremely dangerous conditions and with uncertain outcomes is a response to the continued conflict in the countries of origin. It is also a consequence of trends in the asylum practices of European countries. According to the Women's Refugee Commission,²⁰ problems in family reunification procedures in Europe result in many people risking the dangerous journeys, rather than using complex and lengthy processes directly from Syria or elsewhere. For example, both Germany and Sweden, despite being among countries most willing to accept refugees, have recently restricted asylum laws. Since in 2015 the majority of asylum-seekers were men, changes to family reunification policies may disproportionately affect women and children who in attempting to join male family members find their choices limited to very costly and dangerous journeys. There has been ample evidence that from the start of this recent migration crisis, women – and to a lesser extent men and boys - on the move have been at risk and experienced severe and widespread forms of sexual violence and harassment as they travel, including in Greece.²¹ The UNCHR Regional Report²² mentioned that by June 2016 more than 300 survivors of SGBV had benefitted from legal assistance and 500 received psychosocial support.

¹⁵ Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons Rapporteur: Ms Tineke Strik, The Netherlands, Socialist Group, October 2015.

¹⁶ INTERVIEW-Europol chief says people smugglers at record levels as criminal gangs move in.

¹⁷ Bridge, *Gender, Age and Migration: An Extended Briefing*, 2016.

¹⁸ UNHCR, *Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan For Europe*, 2016.

¹⁹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/europe-pregnant-refugees_us_575eba7ce4b0ced23ca88e5e

²⁰ WRC, *Falling Through the Cracks: Refugee Women and Girls in Germany and Sweden*, 2016.

²¹ See for example the Rapid Protection/SGBV Assessment report by International Medical Corps & Diotima/Center for Research on Women's Issues, June 2016. See also UNHCR, UNFPA and WRC, *Initial Assessment Report: Protection Risks for Women and Girls in the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis*, 2016.

²² UNHCR, *Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan For Europe*, 2016.

Globally it is not easy for women to seek asylum on gender grounds, as the latter is not explicitly mentioned in the 1951 Refugee Convention. According to UNHCR guidance: “Even though gender is not specifically referenced in the refugee definition, it is widely accepted that it can influence, or dictate, the type of persecution or harm suffered and the reasons for this treatment. The refugee definition, properly interpreted, therefore covers gender-related claims”.²³ However, this guidance is insufficient to guarantee women adequate protection under international law.

Other international documents and agreements may include mention of women and female migrants, but with little in-depth gender analysis or practical recommendations beyond the much practiced reference to ‘especially women’²⁴ with emphasis on their being most ‘vulnerable’, rather than having equal rights. This is the case for both the Political Statement and the Action Plan from the 2015 Valletta Summit on Migration.

For what Europe is concerned, despite the large number of women amongst the overall refugee population (in early 2016, women and children accounted for 55% of those reaching Greece), women account for only a third of those applying for asylum in the EU (though this may have been changing in recent months).²⁵ This is attributed to the fact that though legal reforms in asylum laws of the last decade have seemed gender neutral, in practice differences in the circumstances of men and women who arrive to seek asylum may mean that the implications of these policies are deeply gendered. The very recent trends in refugee movements in Europe and related political developments require even more careful scrutiny from a gender perspective.

Legal Status and Options in Greece

Systematic information on the current conditions in which the refugee populations are living in Greece, both in the mainland and the islands, is not readily available, in part because of the large number of sites, and in part because of the changeable nature of the situation. In July 2016 UNHCR reports that there are 56,853 ‘persons of concern’, of which 42,065 are in the mainland.²⁶ There are an unknown number of refugees and migrants who have chosen to stay in urban settlements (apartments, squats) and who receive no official support. These statistics are now put into question by the fact that, as the pre-registration processes reaches completion, numbers appear much smaller, approximately 20,000 less than the previous calculations.

Refugees and migrants that entered Greece between September 2015 and 19 March 2015 when the EU-Turkey Agreement came into effect have four options in terms of legalising their status in the country: seeking asylum in Greece, voluntary repatriation, the EU Relocation scheme and Family Reunification²⁷.

²³ UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 1: Gender-Related Persecution*, 2002. Paragraph 6.

²⁴ See for example the JOINT AFRICA-EU DECLARATION ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT TRIPOLI, 22-23 NOVEMBER 2006

²⁵ J Freedman, *Women’s Right to Asylum: Protecting the Rights of Female Asylum Seekers in Europe?* 2008. See also <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2016-0073+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

²⁶ <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>

²⁷ See WRC, *EU-Turkey Agreement Failing Refugee Women and Girls*, 2016, pg. 21

According to a recent report from ECRE²⁸, family reunification is the primary way for people to move from Greece to other European countries under the Dublin III Regulation. This is considered also the lengthiest option, given requirements such as DNA tests in receiving states, and it is also flawed because of the exclusion of adult siblings and adult children from the provision.

As already mentioned, on 20 March 2015, the EU-Turkey Agreement came into effect, despite the fact that the legality of “first country of asylum” and “safe third country” concepts in relation to Turkey have become highly controversial among policymakers and practitioners²⁹. All the same, the Agreement triggered a new process in Greece for receiving and registering people arriving irregularly from Turkey.

The majority of those who arrived on the islands prior to 20 March are hosted in 48 sites throughout the mainland, managed either by the Army, Air Force, local authorities or staff from the Alternate Ministry of Migration Policy. There are also unspecified numbers of private and often informal accommodation sites, as already mentioned.

Due to large numbers of people in different formal and informal sites, they were “pre-registered”, i.e. issued a document indicating the beginning of the asylum process. This took place in a number of centres across the country, to which migrants were transported. Between early June and late July, a total of 27,592 people were pre-registered, of which 57% men and 43% women. Given the limited capacity of the Greek Asylum Service it could take a very long time for people already on the mainland to lodge their formal asylum application, with priority given to persons eligible for relocation³⁰ or family reunification (both of which also require application for asylum in Greece as a first step). Information provided to them at this stage concerning the nature and timing of the next phase in the process appear both inconsistent and limited although the Greek Asylum Service has begun to make publicly available the dates for the pre-registered population to lodge their formal application for asylum.

Those who have arrived on the Aegean islands after the 20th of March - on the other hand - have been kept in the hotspot facilities (Reception and Identification Centres - RIC) until they are registered and processed. A total of 13,171 refugees and migrants were present on the islands as of 13 September³¹. The treatment of refugees in the islands is regulated by the “Common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection” law of 3 April 2016. It provides a legal framework for the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement, including the transposition of the EU Asylum Procedures Directive Recast (APD) that includes the “inadmissible applications” article, and the First Country of Asylum (FCA) and Safe Third Country (STC) concepts mentioned earlier. The first article enables Greece to reject the application for international protection without examining the substance or, in other words, whether an asylum claim will be even considered. Once the

²⁸ <http://www.js.static.reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/With-Greece.pdf>

²⁹ <http://www.js.static.reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/With-Greece.pdf>

³⁰ The EU relocation scheme applies to applicants of nationalities with an EU-wide average recognition rate of 75% or higher. On the basis of statistics of the last quarter in 2015, this would apply to applicants with the following nationalities: Bahrain (100%), Swaziland (100%), Trinidad and Tobago (100%), Syria (98%), Yemen (88%), Iraq (88%), Eritrea (87%) and the Central African Republic (85%).

³¹ <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

admissibility stage is passed, a claim will be examined based on substance. Cases of inadmissibility so far are extremely rare and all those who have arrived since the 20 March have applied for asylum³².

The Humanitarian Response

The Government of Greece holds responsibility for the leadership and coordination of the response, with 197 partners present in the islands and mainland of Greece. The response has established Working Groups by sector, i.e. Protection (Child Protection, SGBV), WASH, Shelter and NFIs, Health/Nutrition, Education, Site Management Support and Cash. UNHCR and I/NGOs co-chair the working groups to assist the authorities. The 197 partners are I/NGOs of different size and field of specialisation, including many volunteers' organizations.

Documents and discussions with humanitarian actors underline the fact that much has changed in the response since the EU-Turkey Agreement. Before that UNHCR, I/NGOs and volunteers tried to provide immediate and basic assistance such as food and medical help at key points as those on the move transited through Greece (as well as through the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia). At the time the Agreement came into effect several international organizations stopped operating in so called 'hotspots' in the Aegean islands as well as in the Idomeni camp in the North, as they saw the treatment of refugees and migrants to have 'no regard for the humanitarian or protection needs of asylum seekers and migrants'.³³

After the closure of the borders north of Greece and subsequently the Agreement, the needs of the people then in Greece changed and expanded dramatically, as they became sedentary, requiring shelter, water and sanitation, health and education services, Non-Food Items (NFI) of different kinds, food and nutrition, as well as protection.

Of the sectors on which the gender analysis focused (as being of interest to Oxfam), the response has clearly given considerable emphasis to protection, with 47% of its financial resources earmarked for this purpose. However, in the early stages of the response when refugees and migrants arrived daily in great numbers, considerations for safety and dignity were not prioritised in designing and locating facilities as sites were established with no overall planning criteria. Since the EU-Turkey Agreement the pace has slowed down considerably, but problems of coordination between actors still undermine attempts at planning with protection considerations in mind. UNHCR and others are engaged in traditional protection activities, providing accommodation outside sites to those eligible to the EU Relocation Scheme and for a proportion of those deemed vulnerable individuals; case management; medical and legal assistance for SGBV survivors, and the distribution of information on legal processes and rights. The Regional Plan of June 2016 recognises that essential protection services need to be strengthened, including appropriate facilities for children, prevention and response to SGBV including referral pathways information, and access to legal information and solutions.

³² European Commission, Brussels, 15.6.2016 COM, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The European Council and the Council: Second Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement*, 2016.

³³ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/aid-groups-withdraw-greece-refugee-hotspots-160322202842234.html>.

Less attention has been given to broader gender matters. This was clear in the interviews carried out with different actors, where activities that recognised women's specific needs, for example in room allocation, are understood as 'protection' from different risks and especially SGBV. Other rationales (comfort, privacy, dignity, rights) are rarely considered. One demonstration of this is the fact that with the exception of Oxfam, MDM and IRC, no other agencies have resourced gender staff, and in the pre-March period in Lesvos only Oxfam had deployed personnel with gender expertise, despite the recognition of the different needs of men and women. Attention to specific gender issues is now increasingly shown, for example, by the research conducted by IMC and Diotima, and by WRC specifically on the impact of the EU-Turkey Agreement on women and girls.

Other sectors of interest to Oxfam are WASH and NFIs. According to the UNHCR Regional Report for June 2016³⁴ despite considerable progress, the reach and quality of WASH facilities varies by sites both in the islands and in the mainland, and improvements are needed in the facilities and in the provision of water for drinking, cooking, personal hygiene and laundry, so that public and personal hygiene, privacy, safety and dignity of women and men can be guaranteed. WASH practitioners met during this research felt that much has been learned from the technical problems evident from the earlier response in the islands. However, they also remarked that the dispersed and relatively small sites, and the inability to work from an agreed and early plan, all make fast (and cost effective) solutions difficult. For example, most toilets previously installed had to be replaced with the more culturally appropriate squat toilets. As time passes, whilst organizations are beginning to think of the possible need for winterization measures, with little certainty of whether and how many refugees and migrants will remain in Greece in the coming months and which sites will remain open and which will close, little practical steps or decisions have been made in this direction.

The Ministry of Defence, municipalities, volunteer groups and I/NGOs have been providing hot meals and drinks, dry food and complementary food. The problems of quality, quantity, nutritional value and suitability to taste and traditions associated with current food supplies are known to all, but practitioners interviewed felt that the Government of Greece was quick to respond and improvements have been made. In July 2016 the UNHCR Food Task Force was asked by the Alternate Ministry of Migration and Policy to review food assistance, taking into account quantity, quality, frequency, diversity, nutrition and preferences, as well as cost effectiveness. The assessment³⁵ contains recommendations for immediate, mid-term and longer term change, including a revision of menus and distribution practices (immediately); the provision of safe cooking spaces to avoid fires and prevent theft of food and utensils (in the medium term); and transition to cash grants and, in the next stage, the adoption of communal kitchens where appropriate.

³⁴ UNHCR, *Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan For Europe*, 2016.

³⁵ Food WG Assessment Recommendations DRAFT, July 2016

Findings

Reports from various sources from 2015³⁶ stress that with considerable variations by site, facilities and services are worryingly inadequate, with overcrowded sites, unappealing food of low nutritious value, uncoordinated distributions at times provided with little respect for dignity. The absence of learning and recreational activities are leading to boredom, frustration, and aggravate the emotional state of individuals already exposed to traumatic experiences in their country of origin or *en route*. The consequent tensions within families, and between nationalities and religious and ethnic groups – including the death of a young Afghan man in a camp in the mainland³⁷ – receive inadequate response from the security forces, in part due to lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities of the police and army, insufficient presence of staff and lack of training or sensitization on the cultural differences and needs of refugee and migrant women and men.

On the specific situation of women, the stark conclusion of a 2015 assessment³⁸ was that: *“There is a dearth not only of prevention and response services to SGBV but of all services that specifically respond to the needs of women and girls, such as separate distribution lines for food, separate WASH facilities, separate accommodation for specific groups, including single women and female-headed households, and for families. Furthermore, challenges were observed in the availability of dedicated and trained government and humanitarian staff able to promptly identify persons at risk and those in need of special attention and prioritization. Police personnel who are in charge of security and organizing the flow of refugees and migrants into transit centres are not equipped to identify, prioritize and respond to protection risks”*. Though conditions since then have certainly improved, for women they can still be extreme in terms of lack of voice, comfort, dignity and safety.

This gender analysis confirmed these overall findings, and above all collected additional and more detailed evidence, that takes into consideration that much has changed since the previous assessments carried out in 2015. As mentioned in the Introduction, the research took an approach that highlights the ability and right of migrants and refugees to make choices, and the differences (in experiences, perceptions and needs) among women and men as well as other social groups. For this reason, the findings of the research are organised around two connected themes: ***Refugees’ ability to make choices; and Different experiences: gender and beyond.***

Refugees and Migrants’ Ability to Make Choices

*We came to live a normal life. To have a school and a future for our children.
We have run away from a war zone to a safe zone but we are put here in a place which is not safe. Death in Syria is instant, by a sniper, but here it's a slow death from stress (Man in Ritsona).*

Many of the refugees interviewed expressed gratitude to the Greek people, the Government and those providing services, including volunteers. However, refugees and migrants of all nationalities

³⁶ Oxfam, *Multi-sector rapid needs assessment of Refugees/Migrants in Kos Island and Greece*, November 2015; UNHCR, *Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan For Europe*, 2016.

³⁷ Greek Forum of Refugees, *We came for Safety and Survival: Stronger Security Needed in Sites*, Press Release, 15th July 2016.

³⁸ <http://www.unhcr.org/569f8f419.html>.

covered by the research and of both sexes, had one overriding desire: to reach a place of safety, where children can go to school, and they can work and build a new life, in other words to realize the very choice they had made in fleeing their country despite the huge cost and risk. In the Konitsa site women stressed that: “Every person here has a dream and is running from a very bad situation”, “Nobody would take a risk to go in to the sea if there was no big dream”. They contrasted their choice with the current situation: “when we left we had hope of a normal life, working, being productive, not just eating and drinking in a camp”.

They had made a difficult decision in leaving their home, community and family, and yet were still unable to fully realise their choice of living in dignity and safety in a country where they can build a future for themselves. Thus their overriding aspiration was to leave Greece. Women’s desire to be reunited with members of their family – most commonly with their husbands - was often voiced, as clear from the words of a woman in Katsikas: “The most important thing is to leave this place as soon as possible. We want to leave Greece. I want to see my husband, I’ve not seen him in two years”. And another: “We want a safe place, with a future for our kids and our husbands bringing money home. I want stability. We want to be reunited with our husbands and children. It’s not living without having our full family together”. Many of the women met during this research were responsible for caring for and raising their children without the support network which their community had provided in their country of origin, and without the financial and emotional support of their husbands, many of whom had made the journey to Europe before the EU-Turkey Agreement came into effect.

Though knowledge and understanding of legal options varies among individuals, both male and female refugees perceive one of the major obstacles to achieving the overriding desire and choice to leave Greece to be that information given is often inconsistent and not communicated in a timely and clear manner. A resident of the Tsepelovo facility stated that: “We know our options: Oxfam came and told us our options. The people who gave bracelets³⁹made our heart drop that we will have to wait a few more months”.

According to a BBC Report⁴⁰: “these refugees had one overriding communication requirement: timely and reliable information on how to get to their next destination safely, quickly and without being detained”. The right to information is a basic element of EU asylum law, it requires authorities to provide refugees with information on the procedure in a language which they understand and in due time. The irregular and contradictory nature of the information refugees currently receive, language barriers (especially for non-Arabic speakers), and the fact that information comes from many different sources (UN agencies, the Greek Asylum Service, I/NGOs, volunteers and independent legal practitioners) have added perhaps more than anything else to the frustration of the refugees and migrants, and undermined their capacity to exercise their choices and rights.

This research found that in most sites posters with relevant information in various languages are displayed. But most refugees interviewed felt that the means of communication, the nature of the information and the possibility to give feedback on services to be inadequate, especially given the lack of interpreters who can cover a heterogeneous population who speak several languages. ⁴¹This makes it even less likely that groups with specific needs (for example for family planning) will be

³⁹ All those registered have received a bracelet indicating that they have gone through pre-registration.

⁴⁰ BBC, *Voices of Refugees* July 2016. Pg 4.

⁴¹ Languages used are Arabic and Farsi/Dari, but also Urdu and Kurdish, and Kurmanji spoken by Yazidis refugees.

aware of and capable of accessing services and vital information. This was also a problem for representation, as a man in Konitsa stated: “People who speak English have the power and communicate on behalf of the other men”.

Difficulty in communicating was mentioned as the toughest problem especially by non-Arabic speakers. Afghan men in Doliana stressed that: “When we go to the shop, we can’t communicate. It’s frustrating, we feel stuck”. Women of all nationalities felt language to be an obstacle in receiving information and accessing services. This was a particularly acute problem in accessing healthcare. In hospitals women are often entirely reliant on an interpreter to verbally describe their physical ailments since in many cases they are uncomfortable in showing their bodies for an examination.

The isolation of some sites, though considered to grant safety, also influences the feeling amongst refugees and migrants of being unable to control their destiny. “We are so far away that we need to be prioritised for care. You know our situation; you know what we suffered through. They brought us here but our personal needs are completely non-existent, we wish for you to look at our case with a very serious eye to find solutions for us” (male refugee in Tsepelovo). The sites which are far from public services and most importantly, far from a Greek Asylum Service office, create a feeling amongst refugees and migrants of being forgotten and not having an avenue through which to press for progress with their asylum applications. The refugees and migrants in sites such as Doliana or Tsepelevo are entirely dependent on visits from I/NGOs and authorities to stay connected and informed. Unfortunately, in some cases, these visits are conducted without adequate interpretation support and infrequently.

Frustration is compounded by a justified sense that others outside the community cannot truly understand their experiences and plight. A Syrian man in Tsepelovo exclaimed during the FGD: “no matter how we explain this, you cannot understand it”. Some feel that they are in Greece as a consequence of cynical political manoeuvres: “We were told we might be here for 3 years. We are like a game here, it’s like a toy that is passed from one political party to another. Each one has their own agenda at our expense” (Syrian man in Ritsona). These refugees and migrants, often highly qualified, skilled and educated, are acutely aware of the context they have been forced into and feel frustrated in being unable to influence or change it.

When considering the obstacles refugees and migrants encounter in realising what has been their choice to leave their country of origin and reach a place of safety and better opportunities, women’s experiences are compounded by other limitations. One is language, as already mentioned. Afghan women in Doliana were emphatic: “We all have the same problem. We don’t speak English or Greek, so we cannot communicate with anyone unless we have an interpreter”. “We need language classes so that we can communicate with the people. Right now we can’t communicate with the local people. We just use signs or body language. Communication is a big problem, and we are still waiting to have language classes to communicate”. At the same time, despite the existence of stereotypes relating to Arab or Afghan culture, women had a strong desire to be more in control of their life, as one woman in Doliana said: “We really need language classes, either in Greek or in English that could give us more hope for the future. We want to be able to work and communicate with people so that we can support ourselves. I want to be able to use my skills as a seamstress to make clothes to earn some money”.

It is worth mentioning in this context that in the course of the FGDs conducted for this research, women were surrounded by children or babies often demanding attention and creating a noisy if homely environment, and affecting their ability to concentrate. This rarely happened with men, with whom the FGDs could be conducted in a much quieter atmosphere in which they could pay attention and fully benefit from, and contribute to, the discussions.

As part of the research, the majority of women were observed carrying out traditional household chores, with a particular emphasis on caring for children, cleaning clothes by hand and attempting to adapt the food to suit their children and families. These tasks are by nature time-consuming and therefore, in some cases, stopped women from participating in, contributing to and benefiting from the FGDs.

It is not unreasonable to conclude that language barriers and gender specific tasks that impair women's participation in events and exchanges (such as those associated with our research) strongly affect women's ability to receive and make use of the already limited and confused information necessary to make choices.

Lack of money is another obstacle to refugees and migrants' daily ability to make choices and act upon them. Most will have exhausted their money and assets during the period of conflict, and then to pay for the means of escape. As a man in Ritsona stated: "We are all in debt to collect money to leave Syria. We thought we would get somewhere better to work. Now our pockets are empty".

For all, the lack of money means no access to medicines and to better, different or more nutritious food; no treats for the children (this was felt very acutely by men); no transport into town; no cigarettes, batteries or other necessities. Some actors in the response (MercyCorps among them) have carried out cash distributions, on a one-off basis. In Tsepelovo men and women were unanimous: "don't give us food just give us money and we will cook it ourselves". In Doliana: "We don't have money to buy food. Any money we have gotten is from MercyCorps and that has all already been spent". They all appreciated the MercyCorps distribution as it came towards the end of Ramadan and could be used to buy appropriate food and other necessities. A woman in Konitsa expressed the wish that others shared: "We hope the money that we received only once, will continue".

Different Experiences: Gender and Beyond

"Accommodation, food, washing, everything is bad for women here. You're cooking, you're cleaning the house, cleaning the camp. Everything you want, the family put it in the bucket and I will go to the end of the world to wash it and come back" (Woman in Katsikas).

As mentioned in the Introduction, refugees and migrants in Greece, as elsewhere, are diverse in their experiences, their needs and aspirations. While the emphasis of this research was on differences between men and women, it took into account as far as possible the ways in which such differences manifested themselves among different major nationalities.

As already clarified for this report as a whole, the summary below is not intended to be an assessment of the humanitarian response in Greece, comprehensive or otherwise. It focused on the one hand on the issues most commonly raised by refugees and migrants, and on the other on sectors of particular interest to Oxfam's work.

i. Refugees and migrants organizing

In both Doliana and Tsepelovo individual men, and to a much lesser extent some individual women, take the role of representing their specific national groups (Syrians, Syrian Kurds and Afghans), usually because of their capacity to communicate in English. It was clear that they at times performed useful roles, but were not necessarily seen to represent the entire community, and that tensions existed as a consequence.

In Ritsona, men mentioned an informal group of male self-appointed Elders. They value the role they played in supporting and advising younger men, organizing some physical ameliorations to the site (benches, tables etc.), and coordinating their demands to the authorities. Women, on the other hand, had either not heard of their existence, or doubted their usefulness: “Women can speak even without elders, but nobody seems to have authority”. In Katsikas, a Construction Group of men was actively cooperating with an NGO, Lighthouse Relief, in building and maintaining some spaces. There was no equivalent group of women, which would help to elevate their status in the community or provide some respite from the mundane and repetitive daily tasks in the site.

The scarcity of refugee’s own organizational structures may be attributed to a number of reasons. From the perspective of both the refugees and the aid community (as many of those interviewed stated), it is only since the EU-Turkey Agreement that it has become clear that Greece is no longer a transit location and thus systems of representation need to be in place. Lack of information about the length of time that asylum related processes will take, and refugees’ strong desire to leave the sites and Greece as soon as possible, are all powerful disincentives to organise. “No point in learning Greek as we are leaving. The children are convinced that if they study here, it won’t be useful”. Remuneration to refugees is not permitted even for volunteer work in the sites, and this represents a further discouragement.

An additional explanation lies with the presence of several organizations from which volunteers perform most camp maintenance and distribution tasks (though not in the more remote locations). Therefore, rather than refugees and migrants actively participating in improving their living conditions, the work is being conceptualised and carried out by well-meaning volunteers. Furthermore, during the research refugees and migrants often commented on the kindness of the volunteers but noted that they tend to establish close relationships with select families and give them preferential treatment in the distribution of aid, from clothes, food, medicine, to company and opportunities to socialise. Most practitioners from the UN and other organizations interviewed agree that volunteers provide a valuable contribution to meeting people’s needs. However, their lack of coordination with other actors and distinct ways of working may be affecting negatively cohesion within the migrant and refugee community and thus their willingness and capacity to organize. The high turnover of volunteers may also be causing additional distress for refugees and migrants who are making and subsequently breaking ties and attachments.

Women have even fewer opportunities than men to organize collectively to improve conditions or for other purposes. Their responsibilities for child care, washing clothes and dishes and complementing the inadequate diet of their families, create obstacles to participation due to the time-consuming nature of these activities. In addition, fear of gossip and the lack of activities that may justify their presence in communal areas, limit their presence in public spaces, especially for

younger women and those travelling alone with children. As a woman in the Doliana camp said: “My mother and I basically stay inside most of the day except to go to the bathroom. Sometimes we go to the town to just walk around, but that is it”. Other providers have reported similar obstacles to women’s participation.

Both men and women felt that existing in/formal committees are useful in managing small problems or disputes internal to families, but have little authority in their dealings with camp management or beyond. In Katsikas a committee of Syrians and one of Syrian Kurds were mentioned, which intervene: “If there is a problem between people, between families, about cleaning toilets, about the food. This committee is very useful”. However, the conclusion was that: “But it doesn't have authority to do anything with Greek authorities.” The absence, in general, of community organising is compounded by a lack of engagement by the authorities themselves and a general lack of awareness amongst refugees and migrants of who the duty bearers are in the response and therefore with who they should be raising issues.

ii. Food

The appreciation of refugees and migrants when receiving food they enjoyed was evident, not only because it satisfied basic needs, but as a sign of being truly cared for and respected. This is clear for the case of Konitsa, where men and women refugees were enthusiastic about the improvements in food (“the food now is really, really good”) that followed a change in catering arrangements, but much more so about the personal efforts of the chef and his assistant: “Please keep the chef. The chef is getting us milk with his own money. Sometimes he allows us to cook and adds things we like”; “we love him”.

Food was only second to the desire to leave Greece in terms of urgency and depth of concern among refugee women and men. As frequently reported by those interviewed and by humanitarian actors, the provision of food, mostly in the hands of the Greek Government (Ministry of Defence or Ministry of Migratory Policy), has been both nutritionally inadequate and unsuitable to the needs and tastes of the refugee population. Many practitioners also considered it unsustainable because of cost⁴².

Overall refugees’ opinions differ about the quantity of the food, but are unanimous about its quality and taste. The statement of a woman in Doliana reflects this: “We have cards and we go to the canteen to get food. We wait in line. Everyone gets according to the family needs. There is too much food and we throw it away. The children eat only the bread, juice, and water. Other than that, they don’t eat because they don’t like the food”. Similarly, in Ritsona: ‘Military food is bland and has no flavour. It’s frozen for months, it’s heated and brought to us. The food is not edible and it comes in plastic containers which isn’t good for you”. Many people interviewed appreciated the challenges that exist in providing meals to diverse groups located in many and distant locations. However, they were concerned at the food not being suitable for small children and older people, as well as for diabetics or others with special dietary needs.

⁴² This repeated several times by representatives of UNHCR and other organizations at the meeting of the Food WG attended in the course of the research.

Having to rely on less palatable food and not being able to cook for themselves in the majority of sites is for women, in particular, a painful reminder that their own skills and capacities are not seen or valued, as a woman staying in Konitsa said: “amongst us we have a hairdresser, we have a seamstress, a pharmacist, and good cooks but right now we are denied this talent because we are not cooking”. Cooking would also help bring a sense of normality, which is currently lacking.

The refugees adopted different strategies to supplement their diet. In several sites, volunteers distributed basic ingredients like oil and onions, and this was welcomed. However, according to those interviewed, this was ad-hoc and not reliable. As one woman FGD participant in Ritsona mentioned: “They do distributions of additional items and tonight I swear I have garlic and oil in my house. What can I make with that?” Such distributions were also at times perceived as prioritizing individuals and families whom the volunteers befriend, thus contributing to tensions and even overt conflict among the refugees and migrants.

Others were able to supplement their diet and that of their families with the addition of fresh items such as vegetables, provided they had the necessary cash and access to markets and shops. For some, both were a problem. Ritsona is an open camp in a forest about 60km from Athens, and one of the male refugees, when asked whether they could buy food said: “Our money barely gets us to the market. 20km there and 20km back to buy half a kilo of tomatoes?” Women expressed feeling comfortable only when going to the market in large groups. According to information collected for this research, distance is becoming less of a problem as vendors are beginning to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the presence of the refugee population to set up mobile stalls in the vicinities of sites. While this is useful, it is creating new risks when refugees are allowed to buy on credit (or obtain loans from vendors or other refugees and migrants), or when vendors offer snacks and treats for children that parents find hard to resist.

Even when the problems of cash and distance, and perceived or real dangers are overcome, access to more nutritious and fresher food still presents obstacles, such as keeping perishable goods. In Tsepelovo people were in agreement on the following: “We buy vegetables and we need a fridge. We buy vegetables and have nowhere to keep them”. This is further complicated by the poor state of many buildings and their limited capacity to support multiple electrical appliances.

From a gender perspective, women still have the nominal responsibility to feed families or to supplement the available food, as recognized by several interviewees from UNHCR. In Ritsona it was a group of women, supported by men, who are said to have ‘gone on strike’ and held a demonstration to ask for improvements in the food distributed. Anecdotal evidence points to the possibility that some female-headed households - where women have sole responsibility for feeding their children - may be resorting to survival sex when unable to feed their children with what was being provided or to supplement existing distributions⁴³.

It is mostly women who cook on makeshift wood fires either within or near tents (although this is not allowed for safety reasons). In Dolianna, Afghan men declared that they didn’t know how to cook or could prepare only basic things: “Cooking is a woman’s job”. Women also physically access markets though usually visiting them in groups. Men are also taking on this duty, as well as that of

⁴³ KII in Lesvos, 2016.

collecting wood for the fires, especially when this requires having to venture further away than the immediate camp vicinities. This relieved boredom, but it also left them disoriented, as a man in Katsikas explained “we have to go very far away to get wood. We cut it and we bring it all way back to camp. We went back to the dark ages, we are separated and secluded from the world. No radio, no TV, no internet. All my life is just spent cooking on a metal drum and sleeping”. It is not surprising that a UNHCR representative thought that it is important, in the context of gender equality inspired interventions, to work with men and support the functionality and cohesion of the family through appropriate provisions and systems for nutrition.

iii. Safety and Security

The extent to which women and men feel safe and secure in the sites varies, as the nature and severity of threats and risks are different according to locality, services and facilities, and gender. Whilst the fear of insects and snakes seems to impact on women and men to the same extent, the risk of violence and SGBV in particular, is felt differently. Anecdotal evidence suggests that men are prone to being drawn into conflicts and fights between nationalities, which we were told often resemble the inter-ethnic tensions that played out in their home countries.

Women, on the other hand, are experiencing various forms of SGBV, including domestic violence, trafficking, forced prostitution and survival sex.⁴⁴ Despite the difficulty of obtaining quantitative data related to SGBV - due to sensitivities around obtaining information related to trauma without the appropriate resources and services to respond, and the danger of stigmatization - it is widely recognised amongst I/NGO staff as prevalent in Greece. It is partly due to this difficulty in obtaining quantitative data that the IASC 2015 guidelines now require that “all humanitarian personnel ought to assume GBV is occurring and threatening affected populations; treat it as a serious and life-threatening problem; and take actions based on sector recommendations in these guidelines regardless of the presence or absence of concrete evidence.”⁴⁵

Tented sites present threats associated with animals and insects, strongly felt by many of the men and women refugees who are of urban origin. In Ritsona, they showed photos of large snakes and wild boars, and spoke of spiders and insects, and of their fears for the children. Both talked about being unwilling to go to the toilet at night for fear of animals. In Katsikas, women – particularly those who are alone – suffer from stomach aches as a consequence of their reluctance to leave their tents at night to go to the toilet: “I don't have a husband and so I can't go at night time to the toilets. We stay until morning to go. It's far away – and so I wait until crack of dawn”.

Buildings offer a higher degree of protection from certain threats, and in Tsepelovo women thought that: “This is very safe, the young men are here – which is good. Outside, we are afraid”. In Konitsa, where people are also housed in a building, refugees linked their sense of feeling safe to the fact that Greek people treated them well, for which they were grateful.

But women's safety remains a concern in most places, not only in tented sites. Afghan men in Doliána, in particular, were worried for the women when the latter used washroom and toilets. “We

⁴⁴ KII in Lesbos, 2016. Protection/SGBV assessment conducted by IMC, 2016.

⁴⁵ Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action*, 2015.

don't feel safe, if a woman needs to go she must be accompanied by a man". Moments of relaxation were also sources of worry: "It's very dark and we don't feel safe, especially at the front door where the ladies sit outside at night because it's so hot. There are animals like scorpions and snakes. They are dangerous; we need to get rid of them. I have found 3 or 4 scorpions under my bed."

Afghan women in Doliana thought the same, and one stated: "I feel unsafe because my room does not have a door so people can come and go as they want. I am worried about humans as well as wild dogs coming into my room at night because there is no door". The lack of any doors or locks in the tents also poses a risk for children, who can easily leave the tents in the night. Some women we spoke to expressed concern about this issue and a few explained that it left them unable to sleep at night.

Many men and women raised the fact that boredom affects everyone as there is so little to do, and that this can lead to tensions within families: "Problems are between families. People here are under stress." Men frequently referred to having increased levels of stress and frustration, in part due to their inability to be "productive". Frustrations have spilled over in individual or collective acts of violence and undermine personal resilience. Women also referred to the increased stress and frustration of men and the fact that the families had been living in very close proximity for a long period of time, without distractions or other activities and that this closeness - with men inside all day - was not how they had previously organised their lives and were finding it difficult to reconcile themselves with this new reality.

There are also indications that the behavior of young women is closely scrutinized by all, and suspicions that their reputation is at risk – not an uncommon occurrence in such crowded conditions - may lead to male relatives using coercion and violence against them to safeguard it. The presence of Women and Girls Safe Spaces created by Lighthouse Relief with Oxfam's support are giving women an environment where they can relax, meet and share information, thus perform a role that goes well beyond that of increasing safety.

Tensions between nationalities are widespread, in part due to historical enmity compounded by perceived or existing discrimination of certain nationalities - for example, that Syrians have access to the EU Relocation Scheme, whilst Afghans are not eligible. In Doliana, Syrian and Afghan refugees are housed together in a building where washing and other sanitary facilities are only on the floor occupied by Syrians. Afghan women felt very insecure: "We feel like someone is watching us when we are in the bathroom. The Syrian men are really tall, so we are worried that they are watching me when I go for a shower, I ask my husband to stand by the door when I go. Because I got into a situation with the Syrians a few weeks ago, I am really afraid of the Syrians." "Today we went for a shower and the Arab speakers were swearing at us."

It appears that hostilities between men - and to lesser extent women - of different nationalities, are manifested through or caused by issues related to women's exposure to threats to their modesty and safety, as well as by widespread stress and sorrow, by perceived preferential treatment given to a group or other, and by the inevitable difficulties of living so close to people with whom there may be historical enmities dating well before this exodus.

Such conflicts and insecurities are slow to subside because refugees and migrants on all sides think that little is done by the police and other authorities to intervene, thus creating a culture of impunity. Afghan women in Doliana complained that: “We go and tell the police, in person. We don’t receive any support at all from the police”. A Syrian Kurdish male in Katsikas made a similar point: “there are Afghans, Kurds, Palestinians, Arabs here and there is no authority which makes rules and regulations. If you have no one between these different ethnicities, problems arise. We need an authority to rule between us”. There is insufficient security presence in the sites and where it exists, it is often confined to the entrance rather than patrolling the site. Of particular concern is the lack of gender balance amongst the security staff with seemingly very few, if any, women working in the sites to offer protection. This has repercussions on whether women feel comfortable in reporting abuse or seeking assistance.

iv. WASH and NFIs

Refugees in all locations recognised the efforts made by the humanitarian actors to ensure that they have access to clean water for drinking and washing, and to adequate sanitation. A woman in Katsikas truly appreciated the improvements brought to sanitation: ‘When they (the toilets) were far away from me, I wasn't going but these bathrooms are better than the other ones. You feel more comfortable’. A man in Konitsa agreed that: “We have seen improvements, we have hotter water in the showers”. They also valued basic facilities that buildings offered, for example electricity. A man in Konitsa commented: “There is electricity, very good lighting on all floors”.

However, many were clearly frustrated by the array of different problems they experienced associated with water, sanitation and cleaning facilities, whether practical or related to safety and dignity.

Gender differences appeared most stark around the presence, type and quality of water and sanitation services, for a variety of reasons. The Afghan women (and men) in Doliana who have to use sanitary facilities in an area dominated by Syrian refugees feel uncomfortable and think it is dangerous, and not only because of men’s behaviour: “The Arab women bother us too. We are just culturally not the same and we would really prefer to be separate from the Syrians”.

More practical difficulties were also evident: “We would really like lights outside our downstairs area. We would love to have a sink and running water downstairs so that we don’t have to go all the way upstairs through the hall, where it is dark at night. Then we also wouldn’t have to carry all the laundry upstairs and then again back downstairs”.

In Katsikas women thought that cleaning their tents and the camp areas near them was their responsibility, despite the presence of a cleaning team recruited by camp management. They valued the dishwashing equipment that had been distributed, but needed other cleaning tools and material. In other sites, for example in Tsepelovo, during FGDs we were asked whether Oxfam would provide more cleaning materials: “Oxfam brought equipment and products for cleaning but it’s all finished”.

Issues of privacy and modesty were evidently important, and more so for women than men. An Afghan woman in Doliana stated: “If they separate the men and women’s showers, it would make me feel safer”. And another: “Since the men’s and women’s toilets are in the same area (i.e. not separated) we cannot put our used sanitary pads in the trash bins”.

Washing clothes is, with some rare exception, a woman's task among the different nationalities covered by this research, and it requires considerable physical effort and time. As a woman in Katsikas repeated: "I have five children. Everyday, everyday, everyday. I have to wash everyday, otherwise the clothes become a mountain". The burden of work is compounded by the lack of appropriate facilities. This is felt acutely by women for which washing by hand was not usual. In Katsikas women agreed that: "We are back to the stone age. We have never before washed with our hands". In Konitsa women had originally been allowed to use washing machines, but this was stopped as the machines were reserved for bed sheets and towels for the entire site, washed twice per month. This again caused distress to many women: "we have regressed back to the times of our fathers and grandfathers' (about washing clothes by hand)".

Hygiene kits, as well as clothes and other essential items, have been regularly distributed in all sites, usually with different items for men and women, as well as children. While these were appreciated - a woman in Doliana stated: "Oxfam gives us items, and volunteers donate us items" but both men and women found that many necessities were never received, while other items were often not replaced when finished.

The clothes received through distributions were deemed to be sufficient, though not always adequate for the warmer weather. The issue of weather and the inappropriateness of some distributions for the particular climate was expressed eloquently by one man in Ritsona who said "in summer we received what we needed in winter and in winter we will receive what we needed in summer". This is an issue of particular concern with winter now approaching in Greece.

The inability to care for their appearance had a profound effect on women already tried by more commonly recognised physical and emotional deprivations. In several sites women stressed how eager they were to acquire underwear. Women, again most of whom were from urban settings, also missed having hand cream, good shampoo and conditioner, and hair dye. A woman in Doliana expressed this eloquently, also pointing to the complexity of emotions and their causes: "I think that my shape and presentation has changed since I am here. I am not used to clothing here and it upsets me the way I look. I am not comfortable in these clothes. I don't like my clothes, and I have no choice but to wear them. I never used to wear sandals and I never used to wear these kinds of clothes. I have come here to progress but I feel like I have gone backwards".

Women expressed the need for modest clothing and in a number of sites spoke about only receiving donations of inappropriate clothing, which they felt they needed to layer in order to retain their modesty in front of so many unfamiliar men in the camp. Other women only felt comfortable wearing the clothes which they arrived in, because they fit and were sufficiently modest - yet those clothes had been worn during the winter months and were unfit for the heat of the Greek summer. "The men can wear whatever they want. We are different, we cannot wear whatever we want. Before ...I felt freer to dress as I wanted, but here since our space is so small, everyone is watching me all the time. We don't have a comfortable feeling because of the way the other men, outside of our immediate family, look at us".

v. General, Sexual and Reproductive Health

Those in the sites visited received primary health care through the Ministry of Health, the Greek military health services and I/NGOs, depending on the location. Most had regular visits from doctors and other health personnel (but no dentists) and of those doctors provided by the authorities, the majority were men. Visits were seen as sporadic and unsatisfactory and with the added problem that most doctors may only speak Greek and often no interpreters were available. An Afghan woman in Doliana summarised the problem: “At the hospital it is very difficult because there is no interpreter so it is very difficult to communicate with the doctors and nurses. When the staff at the hospital speak with me, I don’t understand them”. The lack of interpretation in hospitals is felt particularly acutely by women who in cases where they are being seen by a male doctor and therefore do not feel comfortable exposing their bodies, must resort to verbally communicating about their symptoms.

Most migrants and refugees – both men and women - were troubled by their inability to maintain good health, because of poor food and living conditions, and expressed dissatisfaction with the inadequate health services for both occasional and chronic health problems. Women, who see themselves as primarily responsible for caring for their families expressed particular concern about the lack of access to medicines. Hospitals and other health practitioners provide prescriptions but no medicines, which may not be available nearby and in any case are expensive and not of the type with which refugees are familiar.

A UNICEF Report⁴⁶ covering Lesbos highlights the physical and mental health problems of children and their caretakers in the crisis. The majority of mothers reported difficulties in breastfeeding, linking it to their own lack of food, lack of sleep, and stress. Around a third of the caretakers were feeding their children infant formula, but had problems with cleaning and sterilizing equipment. In Ritsona the Red Cross was issuing formula milk, but already individually prepared, to ensure that bottles were properly sterilized: women present felt that this was appropriate given their inability to do the same on an open fire.

Women often complained of ‘female infections’, which they attributed to having to use western toilets or to struggles in keeping the hygiene standards which they were used to. They requested several times that a female doctor should come and carry out examinations. In Tsepelovo women stressed that: “A female doctor came once and gave us something and it wasn't enough. From all these infections which weren’t treated it now gives us huge problems. They were able to treat thrush in Syria. There is a single suppository. I’ve told my husband to buy it and given him the name and he didn't find it”.

In the FGDs the need for contraception and condoms was raised, and the reactions from men and women were contrasting. Men denied that this was a priority or even a need. A man in Ritsona explicitly said: “Sex is not a problem that is on my mind. My wife is like my sister now”. Similarly, a man in Tsepelovo remarked that: “We don't need contraception because there is no privacy anyway”. In most sites, on the other hand, many women were either on the pill (which they had asked for from MDM, to the surprise of others), or had an intrauterine device fitted before leaving

⁴⁶ UNICEF, *Assessment of infant and young child feeding practices among refugees on Lesbos Island, Greece, 2016.*

home; others unanimously agreed that they needed contraception, and some of them were interested to follow up as until then they: “didn’t know they would give me condoms and so I didn’t ask”. The demeanour of men and women was also very different when discussing these issues: women were boisterous and laughing about what was obviously a suggestive topic, while men remained serious and fairly dismissive. This difference could, in part, be attributed to the fact that the facilitators were all women.

Anxiety and depression were commonly mentioned in the conversations with refugees. Extreme and traumatic experiences at home and *en route* are compounded by boredom and isolation, affecting mental health. As the FGDs were held in Ritsona noisy planes flew overhead, and all those present were visibly upset: “We don’t run for shelter but the plane is the same. The children wake up in terror and the plane goes overhead every morning at 6am”.

Stress is exacerbated by frustrations at the living conditions; at having skills and capacities which are not valued and not used (in the sites we encountered accountants, seamstresses, tailors, teachers of many subjects, medical practitioners and pharmacists, plasterers, carpenters, and a civil engineer just to mention a few); at the lack of progress in legal matters, and at promises that are not kept. As a man in Tsepelovo stated: “I have been here 3 months and every time an organisation comes here we don’t see any action. We say these things to lots of organisations. Same meeting, the same talk and it’s all lies.”

Almost all refugees and migrants researched were eager to be more active, knowing well that this would alleviate at least some of the symptoms of depression. As a woman in Doliana said: ‘If we had [English] lessons we would feel more useful. We may have to stay here sometime so it would be good to do something useful.’ Also in Doliana a man expressed the same sentiment: “Yesterday was a good day because we cut down a tree and we felt useful because we had actually done something”.

The above affect both men and women, in different but often hidden ways. Women repeated they are exhausted by relentless childcare in situations full of physical dangers (even of small children slipping out of tents in the middle of the night), from which there was rarely relief provided by a school or relatives. Several women mentioned that children are becoming more violent, fighting each other and impossible to control. These women felt they lacked the support structure which they were accustomed to in their home country. Many women we met were also singularly responsible for large families, with their husbands in Germany or Austria, waiting for their families to join them. Even in those instances with a father present, one woman in Katsikas said, “a lack of stability means fathers aren’t helping with raising the children. Because of lack of stability we are losing control of our children. They are becoming more violent and hitting each other”.

For men, there were indications that the circumstances are affecting their own sense of being men and though this was not openly discussed, there were remarks pointing to this: “[Here] there are no men. Because we cannot practise our manhood in any way” was the offhand joke of a man in Tsepelovo. A young man in response to a question about the possibility that he may find a wife in Katsikas, replied: “I cannot look after myself here, let alone another person”.

In different locations comments were made by both men and women about the increase in cigarette and alcohol consumption among men. This is being seen by some humanitarian actors as a worry when considering the planned transition to cash distributions on a larger scale than currently. However, it is worth noting research which indicates that this perceived and feared “anti-social” spending on alcohol or cigarettes can have “a positive psychosocial impact...in certain cases, men were able to buy their friends drinks increasing their status in the community, and gaining good will for hard times when they might need assistance”.⁴⁷

Some psychosocial support was available, mainly from MSF. But both men and women felt some reluctance to seek it, for different reasons. Men stated to be too proud to do so in the first place, while women would consider it but believed that if they were seen to receive care, they would be considered mentally ill, and viewed with disdain.

⁴⁷ WFP and UNHCR, *Examining Protection and Gender in Cash and Voucher Transfers*, 2013. Pg 3.

Conclusions

The research found that the response was ensuring that the immediate needs of men and women were being met. This, according to the opinion of humanitarian actors interviewed, was in part thanks to the improved leadership and coordination of the Government of Greece. However, in most sites facilities and services available to refugees and migrants were far from fully satisfactory.

Also in the opinion of practitioners interviewed as part of the research, the many gaps and challenges that remain are due to several causes (some outside their control): one is the fact that with the EU-Turkey Agreement the situation on the ground changed extremely rapidly, requiring sites to be prepared in great haste without appropriate planning, making remedial measure both expensive and problematic, especially in terms of protection considerations. Other reasons include the limited financial and human resources of the Government of Greece, and the uncertainty with regard to how many refugees and migrants will remain in the country after pre-registration and for how long.

At the beginning of this report it was stated that a different view is needed to avoid perceiving migrants and refugees as a helpless and indistinguishable mass. This is the approach that guided this research and the findings summarised below.

Across the sites visited refugees and migrants were anything but helpless. They had demonstrated their resilience and overcome huge risks to seek a safer life, in a Europe that would welcome them and their children, and offer opportunities to become active and productive citizens (“producers, not consumers”, as a man in Konitsa put it). Most understood the EU-Turkey Agreement, the politics and policies behind their current plight, and valued the efforts of the Greek people and Government, and of the humanitarian community.

All the same, both men and women felt keenly their inability to realise their choices, because of the slowness of the legal processes, limited information, inability to influence duty-bearers and poor communication, especially in relation to various aspects of the asylum options open to them. In this context, the research also concluded that not enough is known about the gendered implications of policy changes, including those associated with the EU-Turkey Agreement.

Other fundamental obstacles to the refugees’ ability to act on their choices is the lack of money, the isolation of some of the sites, the sense that their plight is not understood and their skills not valued, and the feeling that they are caught in an insensitive political game played by European countries. For women all of this is exacerbated by more frequent language barriers and gender specific tasks that impair their participation in events and exchanges in which they may take active part.

One of consequences of this situation is the limited means through which refugees and migrants, women in particular, organise collectively to inform and influence decisions, or for other purposes beyond very basic activities such as cleaning bathrooms. The declared interest of women and men refugees and migrants to learn languages like English and (less so) Greek was a reflection of their desire to control better their current situation by being better able to communicate, as well as to prepare for a future in another European country.

Men and women agreed that the good will of the Greek people and the efforts of humanitarian actors were essential to their survival. They also agreed on their discontent for many services and facilities, on the dissatisfaction with the type of food provided, and the paramount need for cash through which they could supplement and improve both. The research also concluded that those we spoke to were not an undifferentiated mass; on the contrary, they have different opinions, needs and capacities.

Many women felt overworked, namely because of having to wash clothes by hand and to clean, often without appropriate tools and sufficient material. Supplementing the inadequate and unappetising food for the family was an especially arduous task, given on one hand the absence of facilities for individual or communal cooking they really preferred, and on the other hand the lack of money to acquire fresh and chosen groceries. Having responsibility for childcare was rendered difficult by the challenging surroundings and by the fact that children were becoming undisciplined from a lack of schooling, structure, authority figures and other occupations.

Women had fears for their physical security, modesty and reputation, because of the presence of animals and insects in sites, and because of the type and location of their accommodation and of sanitary facilities (in dark or far corners of the site, or not separated from those for men). The presence of men and women from a variety of nationalities, within a small, confined space exacerbated fears and tensions. Where available, women appreciated the use of Women and Girls' Safe Spaces, as an opportunity to relax, meet other women, and receive information. They were in need of reproductive health and family planning assistance (now difficult to access also because of the scarcity of women doctors and of interpreters); as well as of ways of accessing mental health services without stigma. They appreciated distributions of clothes and other items, but felt both should be much better tailored to their actual needs and cultural preferences (summer clothes, underwear, good quality shampoos, hair die, insect repellent, etc.), and replaced when finished.

Men expressed their boredom and frustration at being inactive. As a reaction, they valued any opportunity to take part in sport and other recreational activities, to undertake tasks like collecting wood and making fires for cooking, and in some cases they organised themselves in informal groups to resolve disputes or communicate with authorities. Where an opportunity to join a productive group was made available - for example, the construction group in Katsikas - this gave the opportunity for men to be productive and increase their social status and reputation in the site. However, alternative structures have not been established to facilitate women's improved status or the opportunity for women to influence and inform decision making.

Men were discouraged by their inability to fully provide for and protect their families, and concerned about the safety of women and girls, leading to feelings of inadequacy as men. Some of these tensions turned into conflict within families and between nationalities, which undermine social cohesion and what remains of people's energies and long term resilience. The possibility that some (or many) men and boys may now choose to be smuggled towards other European countries raises serious protection concerns. Those who remain feel ignored and used, thrown back to a lifestyle of the 'stone age'.

Recommendations

Going forward, in addition to needing to continue the practical improvements to the services and facilities already provided, the response must **recognise, value and respond to refugees' different choices, opinions and desires**. This is also an opportunity to address the culturally specific gender differences of the refugees and migrants, as well as **the obligation to promote gender equality and women's rights at all levels of the response**.

The Government of Greece should:

1. Communicate to refugees and migrants information on eligibility for asylum, and the time frame of relevant processes, in languages that men and women of all nationalities can understand, both to minimize the existing psychological and physical discomfort and harm to them, and to allow for effective individual and humanitarian planning.
2. Sensitise camp managers, staff and others taking part in the humanitarian response (e.g. doctors and hospital staff) to gender, nationality and ethnic differences, and to the pre-existing inequalities and power relations, so that they are not magnified and exacerbated.
3. Find solutions, whether with communal or individual household cooking facilities (complemented by cash transfers), to make food provision an activity (involving refugees and migrants) that recognise food's nutritional function, and also its emotional and social value.
4. Guarantee sufficient numbers of women doctors and other medical staff in public hospitals - aided by women interpreters - so that women feel comfortable to consult them, including but not exclusively for gynaecological problems and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
5. Ensure increased and active presence of sensitized and capacitated gender-balanced security forces to guarantee safety in sites.
6. Adopt agreed standards and guidelines for the prevention of SGBV (such as the IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action) as well as those developed to ensure gender sensitive programming (such as the IASC Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs-Equal Opportunities) when designing and setting up sites for refugees and migrants.

Humanitarian actors should:

1. Improve and expand ways to meet the information and communication needs of men and women, in adequate languages and forms, as well as feedback mechanisms to promote transparency and accountability in the response. Ensuring the voices of women are captured.
2. Adopt an understanding of the nuanced ways in which gender norms and inequalities shape women' and men's' experience in the sites, beyond the recognised criteria of 'vulnerability' In designing, planning, and implementing all programmes.
3. Increase collaboration among all humanitarian actors, to ensure the presence of more legal advisers (with interpreters) who can consider people's individual cases and advise them on their options.
4. Encourage and support the emergence and functioning of refugees' structures (committees and councils) separately for men and women and people of different nationalities and ethnic groups, that may be elected to collect, coordinate and communicate refugees needs and opinions as well as resolve, as far as possible, disputes. The different structures instituted for men and women should have equal recognition, and equal power and capacity to be effective.
5. Speedily implement plans to adopt cash transfers to men and women (including to female-headed households), but not at the cost of a reduction in other distributions, such as NFIs. Cash transfers should be executed in ways that prevent thefts and other dangers to women, and accompanied by solutions to problems such as access to markets – including provision of transportation in sites that are remote and isolated.
6. Recognise and use the skills, capacities and personal resources of both men and women. Provided with the necessary psychological and material support (and remuneration), they can contribute immensely to their own wellbeing and that of others.
7. Adopt agreed standards and guidelines for the prevention of SGBV (such as the IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action) as well as those developed to ensure gender sensitive programming (such as the IASC Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs-Equal Opportunities) in designing, planning and implementing all programmes.
8. Ensure that SGBV survivors have access to multi-sectoral coordinated response services (medical assistance, safety/security, legal assistance and psychosocial support) from staff who have received training on, and have an adequate understanding of, SGBV.
9. Create more Women and Girls Safe spaces for improved networking and the fostering of community cohesion amongst women.
10. Institute more educational, recreational and productive activities where men and women can actively and creatively engage in practical activities, and employ and share their skills. These

activities will alleviate the boredom and dejection of individual men and women, as well as children, and foster community cohesion. This should include activities outside the sites (celebrations, cultural and sports events) both for the same purpose, and to mitigate the erosion of the support and solidarity of host communities.

11. Enable single-headed households with child care responsibilities to access services through the provision of crèches and organized activities for children. These should be prioritised for their intrinsic value and in particular to allow women time to engage in non-caring activities and respite.
12. Guarantee sufficient numbers of women doctors and other medical staff in I/NGO run medical facilities - aided by women interpreters - so that women feel comfortable to consult them, including but not exclusively for gynaecological problems and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
13. Provide different means of contraception, starting with the visible availability of condoms in selected spaces, to be accessed privately and discreetly.
14. Distribution of NFI and clothes should reflect needs (of men, women, and children), and especially for women consideration of modesty, and of the deep desire to maintain a tidy, respectable and attractive appearance, contributing to improved emotional wellbeing.
15. Prevent incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by I/NGO and UN staff against the migrants and refugees by setting up confidential reporting mechanisms and taking action when incidents do occur.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Brief Summary of Sites Visited

Name of Site	Location	Accommodation	Number of refugees	Nationality	Management
Tsepelovo	Epirus (50 kilometers from Ioannina)	Building	132	Iraqi, Syrian	Greek Army (Building owned by the municipality)
Doliana	Epirus (40 kilometers from Ioannina)	Building	175	Afghan, Iraqi, Syrian	Greek Army (building owned by municipality)
Katsikas	Epirus (8 kilometers from Ioannina)	Tents	544	Afghan, Iraqi, Syrian	Greek Army & IOM (
Konista,	Epirus (64 kilometers from Ioannina)	Building	169	Syrian	Ministry of Social Welfare
Ritsona	Attica (60 kilometers from Athens)	Tents	750	Syrian, Iranian, Iraqi	Greek Air Force and IOM