

ARTICLE

‘They don’t make us feel like we are seen’

Micro-level harms resulting from migration control practices in Greece and the EU

Jill Stigter

1. Introduction

‘There is something even worse for me like racism or violence: to be ignored and not be considered. They just don’t care about your opinion at all or what you want. This, I think, is even more harmful than violence.’ – Chakir¹

In her book *Globalisation and Crime*, Katja Franko explained how, due to global flows, networks, and mobility, the issues around borders that used to be strictly built on the concepts of territory and state sovereignty, were gradually starting to change.² Globalisation on the one hand would erase and even transcend borders, but would also create and redraw other borders.³ This is also described as ‘globalisation’s corrosive force’⁴ where globalisation did not cause a complete opening of all borders and equality in freedom of movement, but rather an increase in territorial inequality and more closely policed and violent border areas.⁵ In other words, with the growth of global migratory movements came the increased desire to control them, which resulted in processes of migration and seeking asylum becoming embedded within a security paradigm. In addition, with this process of securitisation, a ‘threat’ or ‘danger narrative’ around migration emerged where a connection was drawn with crime, deviance, and social disorder which justified the use of more extreme measures to counter migratory movements⁶ and led to

- 1 All names have been altered in order to protect the identity of my protagonists and ensure their anonymity.
- 2 K. Franko, *Globalization and crime*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications 2020.
- 3 M. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, ‘Re-bordering Europe? Collective action barriers to “Fortress Europe”’, *Journal of European Policy* 2021, 28 (3), p. 447-467; F. Schimmelfennig, ‘Rebordering Europe: External and integration in the European Union’, *Journal of European Policy* 2021, 28 (3), p. 311-330.
- 4 P. Gready, ‘Conceptualising globalisation and human rights: Boomerangs and borders’, *The International Journal of Human Rights* 2004, 8 (3), p. 350.
- 5 A. Benedicto & P. Brunet, *Building walls: Fear and securitization in the European Union*, Centre Delàs d’Etudis per la Pau, Transnational Institute, Stop Wapenhandel 2018, www.tni.org/en/publication/building-walls; R. Shamir, ‘Without borders? Notes on globalisation as a mobility regime’, *American Sociological Association Stable* 2016, 23 (2), p. 197-217.
- 6 T. Sajjad, ‘What’s in a name? “Refugees”, “migrants”, and the politics of labelling’, *Race & Class* 2018, 60 (2), p. 40-62.

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people-on-the-move⁷ being depicted in frames about ‘marginality, dishonesty, a threat, unwelcomed’⁸ or as deviants, aliens, ‘others’.⁹ The use of such tropes in the public and political discourse has had a vital impact on several aspects, mainly public support and the direction of public opinion. In addition, framing has also influenced how causes are identified, moral judgements are made and how solutions are proposed.¹⁰ Consequently, under the guise of ensuring security and safety, states started framing migration through a criminal lens which led to the eventual fusion between criminal and migration law into the concept of ‘cimmigration’.¹¹

The consequences of ‘cimmigration’ or migration control practices occur in a very complicated political forcefield where national, international, and supranational actors are intertwined and involved with the creation of such practices in a ‘pooling of sovereignty’¹² or a ‘hybrid form of sovereignty’.¹³ Due to these complicated power relations that are at play at and beyond the border, it is challenging to analyse the consequences of migration control practices from solely a criminological perspective. Which is why I decided to apply a social harm-based, or zemiological, approach during my thesis research in order to put emphasis on examining how states and entities like the EU operate and how their actions cause harm, regardless of whether these actions can be classified as criminal or whether the harm caused was intentional. To a certain extent I was aware of these harms. However during the four months that I resided in Thessaloniki, Greece, to conduct my ethnographic fieldwork, I was directly confronted face-to-face with these harms and how they mostly remain unseen because migration control practices seem to be so carefully

- 7 For my master’s dissertation and further contributions, I have chosen to use the term *people-on-the-move* instead of differentiating between terms like ‘refugees’, ‘displaced persons’, ‘migrants’, or ‘asylum seekers’. The term aims to take into account the impacts of terrorism, organised crime, economic and social inequality, climate change, and so on. It specifically refers to those who are stranded or in transit and includes all people who, for various reasons, have left their country of origin or have fled from the circumstances there. By using ‘people-on-the-move’ I try to address the problem with categories and to avoid putting certain labels on people that might frame them in a certain way.
- 8 R. Zetter, ‘More labels, fewer refugees: Remaking the refugee label in an era of globalisation’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2007, 20 (2), p. 184.
- 9 H. Albrecht, ‘Fortress Europe controlling illegal immigration’, *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice* 2002, 10 (1), p. 1-22; Franko 2020; E. Kofman & R. Sales, ‘Towards a fortress Europe?’, *Women’s Studies International Forum* 1992, 15 (1), p. 29-39.
- 10 S. O’Neill, H.T.P. Williams, T. Kurz, B. Wiersma & M. Boykoff, ‘Dominant frames in legacy and social media coverage of the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report’, *Nature Climate Change* 2016, 5, p. 380-385.
- 11 K.F. Aas, ‘Crimmigrant bodies and bona fide travellers: Surveillance, citizenship and global governance’, *Theoretical Criminology* 2011, 15 (3), p. 331-346; M. Bosworth & M. Guild, ‘Governing through migration control: Security and citizenship in Britain’, *British Journal of Criminology* 2008, 48 (6), p. 703-719; D.A. Sklansky, ‘Crime, immigration, and ad hoc instrumentalism’, *New Criminal Law Review* 2012, 15 (2), p. 157-223; J. Stumpf, ‘The cimmigration crisis: Immigrants, crime and sovereign power’, *American University Law Review* 2006, 52 (2), p. 367-419; A. Pratt & M. Valverde, ‘From deserving victims to “masters of confusion”: Redefining refugees in the 1990s’, *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 2002, 27 (2), p. 135-161.
- 12 P. Andreas, ‘Redrawing the line: Borders and security in the twenty-first century’, *International Security* 2003, 28 (2), p. 78-111.
- 13 F. Soliman, ‘States of exception, human rights, and social harm: Towards a border zemiology’, *Theoretical Criminology* 2019, p. 4.

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constructed that their consequences are either considered to be ‘part of it’ or are very difficult to be considered as ‘unlawful’. My research participants, or ‘protagonists’ as I will call them throughout this contribution, have each shared their experiences with such harms and have described their frustrations and feelings of anger towards the EU and Greece and towards a system that feels like it is designed to cause confusion, frustration, and suffering for people-on-the-move. It angered them, and me, how easy it seemed for the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, to say that he aimed to construct a ‘strict but fair’ migration policy and to then experience for themselves how distinctly *not* fair and disproportionately strict these policies were for them. Did the government simply not care for the real-life impact these policies had on the lives of people-on-the-move? All of my protagonists would have answered this question with a definitive ‘No’.

While conducting my fieldwork from the start of February 2022 until the end of May 2022, I was an intern at both the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) and Mobile Info Team (MIT) and I was part of the volunteering team at *Filia*,¹⁴ one of BVMN’s anonymous partner organisations in Thessaloniki that provides basic humanitarian aid¹⁵ for people-on-the-move. Every person who frequented *Filia*’s community centre, including the community volunteers, carried stories with them about the consequences of migration control practices. This included experiences with violent encounters at the EU’s external borders with pushbacks, but also with detention, (lack of) access to asylum and being undocumented. The number of stories that people carried with them led me to the decision to include my protagonists’ stories and narratives throughout my dissertation and this contribution as a recurring theme in my critical analyses of migration control practices and their consequences. The places where I have chosen to include a certain narrative or observation are bordered and written in italics. This way, I aim to differentiate between the national, local, judicial and policy-related contexts and how these have impacted their micro-level experiences. In addition, this creates the possibility for me to zoom in and zoom out throughout this contribution on certain subjects and bridge the abstract level between the EU and Greece’s migration control policies and the more tangible ground-level experiences of my protagonists with the consequences of these policies. Finally, with my protagonists’ stories, I intend to construct an opposing narrative to the existing dominant narrative(s) around people-on-the-move and migration with the aim to transform these dominant narrative(s) or, at the very least, challenge them.

- 14 In order to respect the organisation’s request for anonymity, I decided to not disclose their official name and will therefore refer to them as *Filia*, the name by which they are informally known as among the community. The name *Filia* comes from the Greek conception of hospitality, or *filoxenia* (φιλοξενία), meaning ‘love (*filia*) of the stranger (*xénos*)’.
- 15 This includes daily medical assistance, opportunities for people to charge their phones, do their laundry, take a hot shower, and the distribution of hot meals, blankets and sleeping bags, season-appropriate clothing, hygiene products, or a ‘new-arrival’ backpack with basic necessities which is specifically for people-on-the-move who have newly arrived in Greece and have the intention to soon move on towards other European countries.

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2. 'You should know the rules before coming here' – The EU and Greek context

2.1 *Fortress Europe*

We can see that over time border policies have undergone many changes in response to constant shifts in economic and geopolitical power relations.¹⁶ For Europe one important turning point was World War I, which introduced more administrative barriers such as passports, visas and increased regulation of the border's 'porosity'¹⁷ in order to control the flow of people moving across borders. After World War II, Europe became a key destination for immigration.¹⁸ Especially in the first decades after the war, changes in national immigration policies served as the primary driver of this transformation and were often related to the decolonisation process of the former colonial powers who controlled and facilitated the influx of people from their former colonies.¹⁹ On the other hand, as a result of the labour shortages after World War II, Northern European countries actively started recruiting immigrants, primarily from Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Turkey to cater to the demands of the national labour markets.²⁰ The 1970s were marked by the oil crisis, which led to the development of policies that aimed to control and reduce migration. However, the number of foreign residents kept increasing due to a shift from circular to chain migration in European migration systems and the national growth of migrant populations.²¹ The restrictions that were put on the entry of non-Europeans into North-Western Europe led to a diversion of the migratory flows in the mid-1980s towards countries like Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain that were experiencing labour shortages and did not yet have well-developed immigration legislation and border control policies.²² The trend of intercepting and regulating migratory flows continued in the 1990s and onwards. However, the patterns of migration underwent significant changes since people were now also increasingly moving because of violent conflicts like, for example, the Arab Spring.²³

The attacks on 9/11 in the United States caused a huge Western security paradigm shift towards a stronger focus on securitisation where, in addition to immigration and mobility being treated as issues that needed to be controlled, they were also increasingly perceived as a threat to European security and the security of its

16 S. De La Rica, A. Glitz, & F. Ortega, 'Immigration in Europe: Trends, policies and empirical evidence', in: B. R. Chiswick & P. W. Miller (eds.), *Handbook of the economics of international migration*, Amsterdam: Elsevier 2015, p. 1303-1362.

17 Benedicto & Brunet, 2018, p. 12.

18 De La Rica, Glitz, & Ortega, 2015.

19 De La Rica, Glitz, & Ortega, 2015; C. Van Mol & H.A.G. De Valk, 'Migration and immigrants in Europe: A historical and demographic perspective', in: B. Garcés-Masareñas & R. Penninx (eds.), *Integration processes and policies in Europe. Contexts, levels and actors*, Dordrecht: Springer 2016, p. 31-55.

20 De La Rica, Glitz, & Ortega, 2015; J. Heyman, 'Capitalism and US policy at the Mexican border', *Dialectical Anthropology* 2012, 36 (3), p. 263-277.

21 De La Rica, Glitz, & Ortega, 2015; Van Mol & De Valk, 2016.

22 Van Mol & De Valk, 2016.

23 Albrecht, 2002; Franko, 2020; Van Mol & De Valk, 2016.

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Member States.²⁴ In this context the term ‘Fortress Europe’ was coined to describe how the EU abolished their internal borders, increased securitisation of their external borders and started regarding ‘non-citizens’ as ‘intruders’ in order to safeguard the economic, cultural, and social life of their citizens.²⁵ However, in their 2014 brochure on the Schengen Area, the EU denied the existence of a ‘fortress’ by stating that ‘efficiently controlling the external border does not imply that Europe is turned into a fortress’.²⁶ This seems hard to imagine with the number of physical walls and fences that have been constructed since the 1990s (e.g. Hungary-Croatia, Hungary-Serbia, Greece-Turkey, North Macedonia-Greece).²⁷ Apart from physical walls, other walls have also added to Fortress Europe, for example the ‘expansion of control, surveillance, analysis and data collection systems’²⁸ (virtual walls) and the increased perception of people-on-the-move as external ‘enemies’ through politicised racism, discrimination, and xenophobia (mental walls).²⁹

Zygmunt Bauman differentiated in his analysis of the human condition in a globalising world between the ‘tourist’ and the ‘vagabond’ to illustrate differences in mobility. Both types are ‘on the move’, but movement for the tourist is ‘effortless and desirable’³⁰ and they have the privilege to enjoy and go wherever they please since borders are essentially ‘levelled down’ for them. In the EU, for example, the ‘tourist’ includes actual tourists, but also expats and highly skilled or educated professionals who are recruited to be incorporated into the national labour markets. Whereas movement for the vagabond is ‘burdensome and forced’³¹ and they continuously feel the constraints of local space. In stark contrast to my protagonists and many other people-on-the-move, I travel with ease. The people I gather pushback or border violence testimonies from, the people in detention who are experiencing dehumanising conditions, the undocumented people who are living a life of uncertainty and unsafety; they are the vagabonds whereas I am the tourist. Living conditions are unsustainable and they drive people to embark on immensely challenging, risky, and unsafe journeys even if they have experienced first-hand the consequences of these journeys. Borders, fences, and hostile environments are hallmarks of their journeys. They face a hazardous existence once they get at never-final destinations. The prospect of being denied access to asylum, being arrested for being undocumented and risking deportation, not being able to work or receive a fair salary keeps the

- 24 Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2021; C. Menjivar, ‘Immigration law beyond borders: Externalizing and internalizing border controls in an era of securitization’, *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 2014, 10 (1), p. 353-369.
- 25 A. Armstrong, ‘You shall not pass: How the Dublin system fuelled fortress Europe’, *Chicago Journal of International Law* 2020, 20 (2), p. 332-383; Benedicto & Brunet, 2018, Kofman & Sales, 1992.
- 26 European Commission, *Europe without borders. The Schengen area*, 2014, p. 8.
- 27 Armstrong, 2020; Benedicto & Brunet, 2018.
- 28 Benedicto & Brunet, 2018, p. 34.
- 29 Armstrong, 2020; Benedicto & Brunet, 2018; Y.N. Vigil & C. Abidi, “‘We’ the refugees: Reflections on refugee labels and identities”, *Refuge* 2018, 34 (2), p. 52-60.
- 30 Bauman, 1997, as cited in K.S. Kristensen, ‘Vagabonds and tourists’, in: G. Ritzer (ed.), *The Blackwell encyclopaedia of sociology*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons 2007, p. 1-4.
- 31 Bauman, 1997, as cited in Kristensen, 2007, p. 1.

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vagabond on the move. Ranbir is one of my protagonists living an undocumented life and when we spoke on how being undocumented has affected him, his answers were laced with frustration and desperation, and reflected the life of the vagabond. ‘What is this life? How can we spend life here? It’s not a normal thing, you know?’ His voice cracked a little at the ‘you know’. ‘We cannot work properly, we cannot fulfil our needs properly, we cannot live properly. I want to fulfil my needs, every day. Now I hate it here [in Greece].’ At some point, he had started shredding his to-go coffee cup he was holding, the angry ripping sounds filled the silence between us. ‘I want to live my life, earn money, and, you know, fulfil my dream.’

The so-called ‘EU migration crisis’ in 2015 became another turning point when the EU recorded an unprecedented number of people-on-the-move – around 1,5 million – crossing the southern external borders of the Schengen area.³² The number of people crossing the external borders began to increase already back in 2013, but reached its all-time highest number due to several long-lasting conflicts in various Middle Eastern and African countries worsening and coinciding in 2015.³³ In addition, the simultaneous withdrawal of both the EU and the United States from Syria and the lack of humanitarian assistance for the millions of Syrian refugees in Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan resulted in many people taking the Turkish-Greek maritime route.³⁴ From there, people intended to travel to countries like Austria, Germany, and the northern EU Member States, which resulted in the countries along the so-called ‘Balkan route’³⁵ becoming transit countries.³⁶ Following the migration crisis in 2015, the two ‘March measures’ were implemented in 2016 which included the closure of the Balkan route and the EU-Turkey Statement and aimed to ‘end the daily movement of extraordinarily high numbers of refugees and migrants’.³⁷ In the end both measures had several consequences. On the one hand they succeeded in their goal to decrease the number of people-on-the-move arriving in Greece and moving further upwards to other EU Member States. On the other hand, however, instead of actually being closed the Balkan route was redirected, now with its entry point at Bulgaria’s land border with Turkey. In addition, in February 2020, Turkey decided to ‘no longer accept additional refugees [and] accommodate renewed inflows’ and thus halted their prevention of people from travelling to Greece since the EU had ‘unfulfilled

32 B. Weber, *The EU-Turkey refugee deal and the not quite closed Balkan route*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Dialogue Southeast Europe 2017, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/13436.pdf>.

33 J. Zaragoza-Cristiani, *Analysing the causes of the refugee crisis and the key role of Turkey: Why now and why so many?*, European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, BORDERLANDS Project 2015, https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/38226/RSCAS_2015_95.pdf?sequence=1.

34 Weber, 2017; Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2015.

35 The Balkan route ran from Turkey via Greece and Bulgaria, through North Macedonia and Serbia via Hungary. After the completion of Hungary’s border fences with Serbia and Croatia in September 2015 and the closure of the country’s borders, the travel route was diverted to Croatia and Slovenia.

36 Weber, 2017.

37 Weber, 2017, p. 12.

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commitments under the [EU-Turkey] statement’.³⁸ Up until that moment, only a little over 2,000 people had been returned from Greece to Turkey due to the fact that Greek courts, in many cases, did not consider Turkey to be a ‘safe third country’ for people to be returned to. Moreover, the EU had resettled only approximately 32,472 of the 3,6 million Syrians who had arrived in Turkey since 2016, leaving many people-on-the-move ‘in limbo’ and unsure of their future.³⁹

2.2 Greece: The national legal and policy context

With its accession to the EU in 1981, Greece found itself becoming an ‘immigrant-receiving [and] a common transit country’.⁴⁰ Especially since 2015, Greece has been disproportionately burdened by the migration crisis where the country was treated as a buffer.⁴¹ This led the Greek government to develop a ‘continuous exclusionary rhetoric’⁴² that called for a ‘tough on migration’ policy and stricter border controls, which led to the 2015-2019 Syriza government implementing a specific security and deterrence-focused migration policy.⁴³ Following the July 2019 elections, Kyriakos Mitsotakis became Prime Minister of Greece and announced a change to Greece’s migration and asylum policies in order to decrease the number of arrivals, increase the number of returns and implement stricter border controls.⁴⁴

2.2.1 The International Protection Act

In November 2019, the ‘International Protection Act’ (IPA) was approved by the Hellenic Parliament which radically amended the national legislation on asylum and reception. The IPA, among other things, implemented an accelerated border procedure, made it more difficult to determine vulnerability, introduced new procedural formalities, and made rejecting applications easier. Consequently, multiple national and international human rights and civil society organisations (e.g. the Greek Ombudsman, GCR, UNHCR, Amnesty International, Refugee Support Aegean) expressed their criticism regarding the IPA and its attempt to ‘lower protection standards and create unwarranted procedural and substantive

38 A. Rettman & N. Nielsen, *Turkey calls for EU action on Idlib*, 4 March 2020, <https://euobserver.com/world/147627>, last consulted on 6 March 2023.

39 Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2021; International Rescue Committee (IRC) Germany, *What is the EU-Turkey deal?*, 18 March 2022, <https://eu.rescue.org/article/what-eu-turkey-deal>, last consulted on 6 March 2023.

40 C. Kasimis, *Greece: Illegal immigration in the midst of crisis*, 8 March 2012, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/greece-illegal-immigration-midst-crisis, last consulted on 6 March 2023.

41 J. Hernández, *Greece struggles to balance competing migration demands*, 25 September 2020, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/greece-struggles-balance-competing-migration-demands, last consulted on 6 March 2023.

42 M. Krzyzanowski, A. Triandafyllidou, & R. Wodak, ‘The mediatization and the politization of the ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe’, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 2018, 16 (1), p. 1-14.

43 K. Tsitselikis, ‘Refugees in Greece: Facing a multifaceted labyrinth’, *International Migration* 2018, 57 (7), p. 158-175.

44 Hernández, 2020; Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) & Asylum Information Database (AIDA), *Country report: Greece. 2021 update*. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) 2022, <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/>.

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hurdles' for people-on-the-move and to subsequently increase the risk of being returned without having their case adequately assessed.⁴⁵ Since the entry into force of the IPA in July 2019, several amendments have been submitted and adopted by the Hellenic Parliament, such as an increase in the number of allowed rejections of asylum applications and several provisions which make arbitrary detention of people-on-the-move possible.⁴⁶ In addition, by way of a Joint Ministerial Decision, the IPA offers the possibility of creating a list of safe third countries which resulted in the publication of a new Joint Ministerial Decision⁴⁷ in June 2021 by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Migration and Asylum which identified Turkey as a safe third country for asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Somalia.

Prior to November 2021, arrivals to the Greek mainland were subject to a self-registration mechanism which relied on the Regional Asylum offices to record their asylum applications. By calling on Skype with the Greek Asylum Service, people had to pre-register their claims and schedule a time to complete their registration at a Regional Asylum Office.⁴⁸ However, this system was incredibly flawed as it expected people to speak one of the eighteen available languages and have access to a smartphone or laptop with a working camera, access to Wi-Fi or money for data, a strong signal and the knowledge to download and use Skype. In addition, there was only one hour per week available for most people to attempt a connection with the Asylum Office via Skype, where they would either not get through or were told to try another time.⁴⁹ Moreover, people who did not speak one of the available languages were left at the mercy of the Asylum Office staff and had no choice except to email or constantly show up in person at the Asylum Office with the hope of securing an appointment to file their application.⁵⁰

2.2.2 *The Circular and Clarification amendment to the IPA*

On November 24, 2021, the IPA saw its most impactful amendment to the reception and asylum application procedures. The Skype pre-registration system was terminated with the Circular and Clarification amendment to the IPA. According to

45 GCR & AIDA, 2022, p. 31.

46 Hernández, 2020; GCR & AIDA, 2022.

47 JMD 42799/2021, Gov. Gazette 2425/B/7-6-2021; Press Release of the Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration and Asylum, *Ασφαλή τρίτη χώρα χαρακτηρίζει για πρώτη φορά η ελληνική νομοθεσία την Τουρκία. Αφορά αιτούντες άσυλο από Συρία, Αφγανιστάν, Πακιστάν, Μπαγκλαντές και Σομαλία* [For the first time, Greek legislation characterizes Turkey as a safe third country. It concerns asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia], 7 June 2021, <https://migration.gov.gr/asfali-triti-chora-charaktirizei-gia-proti-fora-i-elliniki-nomothesia-tin-toyrkia-afora-aitoyntes-asylo-apo-syria-afganistan-pakistan-mpagklantes-kai-somalia/>, last consulted on 6 March 2023.

48 GCR & AIDA, 2022; Greek Ombudsman, *Border procedures, reception and application for international protection*, Greek Ombudsman, International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) 2021, www.nationaleombudsman.nl/system/files/bijlage/Greek%20ombudsman%20reception%20and%20integration.pdf.

49 GCR & AIDA, 2022; Mobile Info Team (MIT), *Blocked from the system: Voices of people excluded from the asylum procedure on mainland Greece, Crete and Rhodes*, 2022, <https://mobileinfoteam.org/blockedfromthesystem>.

50 MIT, 2022.

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the amendment, applications would only be accepted in ‘designated locations’,⁵¹ which meant they could no longer be lodged in the existing offices of the Asylum Service on the mainland unless the applicant had already been subject to reception and identification procedures.⁵² Consequently, the majority of people were left without access to asylum on the Greek mainland, Crete and Rhodes, and without any protection, which increased their risks of ‘homelessness, destitution, ill health and exploitation’,⁵³ since people are not entitled to any basic services (e.g. shelter, financial support, healthcare) until they have spoken with the Asylum Service and subsequently received an Asylum Seeker Card.

‘Nobody guided me,’ is what Fahmi told me when I asked him how he came to know about Greece’s asylum procedure. ‘I know about how to claim asylum from the [MIT] Facebook page, but for three years I didn’t realise, nobody gave me guidance about the papers, how to make asylum, how to do asylum.’ Similarly, Ramesh, Osman, Amandi, and Mohammad explain how, upon arrival, they did not know anything about the procedure and had little to no access to information. They felt like they were left to their own devices to figure out how to apply for asylum, how to get legal counsel and other support services. In the end, they managed to be informed about the procedure. Mohammad was informed by an unnamed organisation that supports people-on-the-move, that told him that he needed to ‘do it through the cops’. Mohammad shook his head in disapproval when he told me this. ‘It means that I need to go and identify myself in the police station or have a police note. I went, but the cops, they didn’t want to do that for me.’ Going to a police station for a police note puts the person at a great risk of being arrested and sent to a detention centre or even pushed back, especially in the time period when Mohammad went there, since the authorities were actively arresting undocumented people in Athens and Thessaloniki.

Ranbir, on the other hand, figured the asylum procedure out on his own by extensive googling about the asylum process in Greece and how to contact the Asylum Service. However, he told me, ‘I send so many emails there [to the Asylum Service], but they didn’t respond. I applied for asylum; I submitted an application for asylum, but they didn’t respond to me. I called them but they didn’t answer me.’ He became more frustrated the longer he talked about his experience with the Asylum Service. ‘I tried so many times, it’s so very hard. For three months, I tried every day. I watched my email every time, but I didn’t get a proper response.’ Mohammad, Amandi, and Eka all had similar experiences while trying to reach the Asylum Service where they tried for several months, but never had their calls answered. After having been referred to the Skype registration process by the organisation, Mohammad tried for six months and eventually found out that they had halted registrations through. Skype.

51 Press Release of the Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Διαδικασία Υποβολής Αιτημάτων Ασύλου [Procedure for submitting asylum claims], 24 November 2021, <https://migration.gov.gr/en/diakikasia-yovolisis-aitimatton-asyloy/>, last consulted on 6 March 2023.

52 GCR & AIDA, 2022.

53 MIT, 2022, p. 8.

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One of the most difficult things to hear from my protagonists during our conversations were their answers to my question ‘How does being undocumented make you feel?’. It was as if that question either opened the floodgates immediately or left them quiet for a long time to gather their thoughts. In the end, all of their answers were laced with feelings of insecurity, fear, desperation, dejection, and uncertainty. Having to live an undocumented life for them feels like a standstill, a moment in time where they cannot move forward and are ‘forced to accept it all’. What they really want is to just be given a fair chance, a fair assessment of their situation, and to not be treated like ‘less than an animal’. ‘I wish only for them to listen to me,’ is what Mohammad ends our conversation with. ‘And after, they have all the right to reject me or accept me, but at least give me the chance. We just want to live a life in dignity, but we cannot.’

Only those who were deemed vulnerable⁵⁴ after providing evidence of their vulnerability had access to ‘referral pathways’ to be able to lodge their asylum applications more quickly.⁵⁵ These referral pathways remained in place even after the Circular and Clarification amendment. According to the IPA only medical practitioners who are contracted with either the Medical Screening and Psychological Support Unit of the Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) or the Greek State are authorised to identify whether a person is vulnerable or not. In practice. However, there was a lack of access to information regarding the referral pathways, a lack of access to RICs on the mainland, people were not allowed to make use of the public healthcare system and rarely have the means to seek care from a private-sector medical practitioner.⁵⁶ Additionally, if a person was able to be screened by a medical professional on their vulnerability, there was a general lack or even absence of psychological assessment, poor quality of medical screening and psychosocial support, but also a lack of clarity on the Asylum Service’s threshold to be considered vulnerable and questionable results regarding the classification of (non-)vulnerability.⁵⁷

2.2.3 Police notes

There was only one limited alternative for persons who are not considered vulnerable to try to apply for asylum on the Greek mainland – a police note, often also known as a *khartia*.⁵⁸ This is a document given by the Greek police to people without a valid visa typically after they have been in detention and their identity has been registered by the authorities. There are two different types of police notes: one with a ‘willingness number’, which indicates the person has the intention to

54 According to Articles 39(5)(d) and 58(1) IPA, the following people are considered vulnerable: (Unaccompanied) minors, direct relatives of those killed in shipwrecks, people with a mental or physical disability or serious illness, elderly people, pregnant women, single parent families with minor children, victims of human trafficking, and person who have been subjected to torture, rape, or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or exploitation.

55 Greek Ombudsman, 2021; MIT, 2022.

56 GCR & AIDA, 2022; MIT, 2022.

57 GCR & AIDA, 2022; MIT, 2022.

58 MIT, 2022.

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apply for asylum, and one without, which is typically obtained for two reasons: 1) the person has no intention to apply for asylum or 2) the police station was unable to register the person due to being overwhelmed by the number of people wanting a police note.⁵⁹ A note without a willingness number essentially sets a deadline for the person to voluntarily leave the country and a note with a willingness number sets a deadline for the person to submit an asylum application, but both notes prevent police from deporting or arresting the person until the note’s expiration.⁶⁰ The duration of time before the note expires is typically after one to six months and is determined by the person’s nationality, individual situation and the situation in their country of origin. However, even with a police note, the person cannot travel to other European countries without the necessary documentation, such as a UN travel document issued by the Greek Asylum Service; as a result, people would renew their police note by going back to the police station to ask for an extension.⁶¹ Although extensions are technically not permitted by law, they are frequently issued due to the large number of people-on-the-move in Greece.⁶²

One important development after the Circular and Clarification amendment was that those who were in possession of a police note would have the opportunity to book an appointment with a Regional Asylum Office to register their asylum application. Despite the fact that this made police notes suddenly very important for people to have in their possession, many still remained unwilling to go to a police station or approach police officers to ask for a police note. Many of the people I spoke to believed that they would be arrested, detained, pushed back, or deported by the police if they set foot in a police station. And these were not unfounded beliefs.

Public transport in Thessaloniki and other municipalities was often subject to ‘immigration checks’ by the Greek authorities in order to identify and apprehend undocumented persons. Kady, one of my protagonists who was pushed back from Greece to Turkey told me how he had been on his way back from visiting his girlfriend when the bus he was in was stopped by Greek police officers. ‘They asked for documents, so I showed them my White Card⁶³ and UNHCR cash card. I was telling them really kindly that I have asylum here and just went to see my girlfriend.’ Kady also had received a positive decision on his asylum claim and was at that time only waiting for the official paperwork to be concluded. ‘They broke my cash card and ripped my White Card. They accused me of smuggling. They told me: “All the people who are on this bus undocumented, you brought them.” I was handcuffed and put on the ground. They started beating me with their batons.’ What followed was a very violent and traumatic sequence of events where Kady was taken to a building close

59 M. Kasra, O. Mohammad, R. Saad, I. Terzi, & A. Khatri, *To integrate or to move on? A case study of refugees in towns: Thessaloniki, Greece*, Refugees In Towns (RIT) 2020, www.refugeesintowns.org/thessaloniki, last consulted on 6 March 2023.

60 Kasra, Mohammad, Saad, Terzi, & Khatri, 2020; MIT, 2022.

61 Kasra, Mohammad, Saad, Terzi, & Khatri, 2020.

62 MIT, 2022.

63 The Asylum Seeker Card, also colloquially called ‘White Card’, proves a person’s legal basis to stay in Greece and their right to have access to aid services like shelter, financial support, and healthcare.

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to the Greece-Turkey border which was used as an unofficial holding facility. After being detained there together with what he estimated were around a hundred other persons, he was loaded into a truck, brought to the Evros/Meriç River and subsequently pushed back across the river by Greek authorities.

Stories like this always spread quickly among the people who frequented the community centre and, naturally, confirmed and fuelled people's fear of coming into contact with the police since it apparently did not matter whether you had valid papers or not. In addition, people often had first-hand experiences with pushbacks or long periods of detention and were, understandably, highly reluctant to approach the police for a police note.

According to a case analysis by MIT,⁶⁴ the issuing of police notes seemed to be very inconsistent, with people not receiving them even when they specifically requested them. Moreover, MIT reported that, rather than offering support when asked for help, police instead provided contradictory and inaccurate information on the asylum application procedure, which is contrary to European law on the common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection.⁶⁵ For example, people reported to MIT how they were, on the one hand, advised to register their asylum application on the Aegean Islands and on the other hand were told that it was impossible to claim asylum.⁶⁶ Furthermore, if a person succeeded in getting a police note they still experienced problems with getting access to the asylum application procedure via the Regional Asylum Offices due to the pandemic, since the Skype registration system had been terminated and physical presence was only allowed if the person had managed to book an online appointment.⁶⁷ This led to people emailing the appropriate Regional Asylum Office along with a copy of their police note, however most of these emails remained unanswered, leaving people without support or access to the asylum system.⁶⁸

2.2.4 Criminalisation of solidarity

In a report I co-wrote of the BVMN, *Accused of Solidarity*, an account is given on the decreasing safe civic space and the criminalisation of civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that offer support to people-on-the-move and monitor human rights violations across the Balkan.⁶⁹ In Greece, specifically, the 2015 'migration crisis' and the government's crackdown on 'illegal migration' also brought a stricter state approach towards CSOs and NGOs

64 MIT, 2022.

65 Article 6(1) Directive 2013/32/EU specifically states that Member States need to ensure that authorities 'have the relevant information [and] the necessary level of training which is appropriate to their tasks and responsibilities to inform applicants as to where and how applications for international protection may be lodged'.

66 MIT, 2022.

67 GCR & AIDA, 2022; MIT, 2022.

68 MIT, 2022.

69 Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN), *Accused of solidarity: A report on incidents of criminalisation targeting BVMN member organisations and their team members in 2021, 2022*, www.borderviolence.eu/criminalisation-report-accused-of-solidarity/.

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which include police harassment, bureaucratic barriers, sanctioning through administrative penalties, defamation in the media, smear campaigns and (attempted) criminal prosecutions of civil society actors.⁷⁰ To illustrate, Vosyliūtė and Conte reported that, since the EU-Turkey Statement, over 53 incidents of legal proceedings against CSOs and NGOs have been documented in Greece and there have been numerous complaints of police harassment of volunteers and public scapegoating of CSOs and NGOs.⁷¹

Moreover, Greece has implemented several laws or amendments that limit the working space for civil society. In February 2016, Greece passed Law 4368/16⁷² which made it easier to prosecute CSOs and NGOs for providing ‘food or shelter outside the legal boundaries’ and to demolish their facilities. Consequently three self-organised shelters in Thessaloniki were destroyed and its occupants were charged with violating the Property Code.⁷³ More importantly, in a Joint Ministerial Decision⁷⁴ and the NGO Registry Law⁷⁵ in Spring 2020, Greece adopted new registration rules for NGOs working with people-on-the-move and their staff, which included extensive mandatory registration requirements for all organisations, individual registration of all members, staff and volunteers, and harsh procedural deadlines for all registering organisations. The ‘unduly broad powers’ the NGO Registry Law would give to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum to reject the registration of an NGO and the risk of discriminatory treatment against NGOs supporting people-on-the-move was cause for many concerns from civil society actors.⁷⁶ In addition, the law would have a huge impact on the smaller organisations on grassroots level which are often not able to register due to not having the correct documentation.⁷⁷ Filia is one of these smaller grassroots organisations that was unable to register in the new registry portal and obtain the mandatory Greek tax number. This left Filia in a legal limbo and at risk of being shut down at any moment.

70 BVMN, 2022; L. Schack & A. Witcher, ‘Hostile hospitality and the criminalization of civil society actors aiding border crossers in Greece’, *Society and Space* 2021, 39 (3), p. 477-495.

71 L. Vosyliūtė & C. Conte, *Crackdown on NGOs and volunteers helping refugees and other migrants*, Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum (ReSOMA) 2019, www.ismu.org/en/crackdown-on-ngos-and-volunteers-helping-refugees-and-other-migrants/.

72 Law 4368/16, Gov. Gazette 21/A/21-2-2016.

73 Y. Maccanico, B. Hayes, S. Kenny, & F. Barat, *The shrinking space for solidarity with migrants and refugees: How the European Union and Member States target and criminalise defenders of the rights of people on the move*, Transnational Institute (TNI) 2018, <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-shrinking-space-for-solidarity-with-migrants-and-refugees>.

74 JMD 30/63/2020, Gov. Gazette 1382/B/14-4-2020.

75 Law 4686/2020, Gov. Gazette 96/A/12-5-2020.

76 Refugee Support Aegean (RSA), *Repression continued: Greece further restricts civil society supporting refugees and migrants*, RSA Comments 2020, https://rsaegean.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RSA_Comments_New_NGO_Registry-1.pdf.

77 BVMN, 2022.

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2.3 Thessaloniki: The local legal and policy context

Colloquially known as the ‘Mother of Migration’, the city of Thessaloniki has for a long time been considered a place for people to seek refuge.⁷⁸ For example, the Sephardic Jews in the 1400s after their exile from Spain and the Greek refugees in the early 1900s after the Greco-Turkish War. Until the 2015 migration crisis, Thessaloniki accommodated only around two percent of people seeking international protection in Greece, a number that began to rise quickly at the start of 2015 and transformed Thessaloniki into one of the main transit cities.⁷⁹ However, when in 2016 the Greek-North Macedonian border was permanently closed, Thessaloniki became one of the main places of permanent settlement where around 10,000 people-on-the-move were transferred to.⁸⁰ Under these circumstances a set of reception and integration policies were designed by the Municipality of Thessaloniki to accommodate such a large number of people.⁸¹ Mayor Yiannis Boutaris (2011-2019) implemented a ‘wide *horizontal coalition*’⁸² where local civil society actors, representatives of surrounding municipalities and other local stakeholders were invited to discuss a plan to address the consequences of the closure of the Balkan route. In addition, the Municipality invested in building strong relationships with supranational actors, such as UN agencies and the EU, which led to large funding flows from these supranational actors and international private donors. However, while the local government had developed its own reception and integration policies for people-on-the-move, the cooperation between the local and national levels of government remained superficial and only took place when there was an ‘urgent need’⁸³ for an issue to be resolved. Unfortunately, while the municipal council had initially approved an ‘Integrated Action Plan for Integration of Refugees’ in 2018, the local government under Mayor Boutaris failed to formally adopt and implement the local migration policy framework and integrate migration governance into the municipal administration in 2019 due to political disagreements within Boutaris’ party and due to opposition by members of the municipal administration.⁸⁴

After the elections in 2019, Konstantinos Zervas became the current Mayor of Thessaloniki. Under him, a Deputy Mayor for Business Planning, e-Government and Migration Policy was created who attended to matters of migration and integration. Moreover, the Major Development Agency Thessaloniki S.A. Organisation for Local Development (MDAT S.A.) was appointed in 2021 to implement projects with financial instruments from the EU, Greece, and other private donors.⁸⁵ These projects are focused on providing social services to target

78 Kasra, Mohammad, Saad, Terzi, & Khatri, 2020.

79 T. Sabchev, ‘Against all odds: Thessaloniki’s local policy activism in the reception and integration of forced migrants’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 2021, 47 (7), p. 1435-1454.

80 Sabchev, 2021.

81 Sabchev, 2021.

82 Sabchev, 2021, p. 1442, emphasis in original.

83 Sabchev, 2021, p. 1445.

84 Sabchev, 2021.

85 Cities Network for Integration Greece (CNI Greece), *Municipality of Thessaloniki*, 2022, www.cnigreece.gr/en/municipalities/thessaloniki/, last consulted on 6 March 2023.

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populations that, due to a variety of factors, do not have full access to services and as a result are more likely to be marginalised and socially excluded (e.g. people-on-the-move, homeless people and those at high risk of becoming homeless).⁸⁶ In addition the Municipality of Thessaloniki was committed to the Refugee Assistance Collaboration Thessaloniki (REACT) 2021 project, an urban reception project to house people-on-the-move in private apartments which were rented by municipal authorities.⁸⁷ This project became part of the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) 2021 program,⁸⁸ a UNHCR-funded urban accommodation program for vulnerable asylum seekers launched in 2015 that had a capacity of more than 23,000 places in December 2021.⁸⁹ However, in February 2022, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum announced that instead of expanding, it would be cutting back to 10,000 places by April and that the program would be terminated completely by the end of 2022.⁹⁰ This led to daily evictions of people-on-the-move using accommodations under the ESTIA program and the closure of the 'Filoxenio' refugee shelter in Thessaloniki which was financed by the ESTIA program and the only reception and accommodation structure for people-on-the-move in Thessaloniki.⁹¹ Ioanna Kosmopoulou, the Deputy Mayor responsible for Social Policy, commented on the matter at a council meeting, stating that 'the matter of continuing the operation is not in the hands of the municipality, but the central government'.⁹²

In April 2022, after receiving reports and testimonies from the community and a press release by the Directorate of Foreigners in Thessaloniki,⁹³ the BVMN expressed their concern about the so-called 'police broom operations' in

86 CNI Greece, 2022.

87 Sabchev, 2021.

88 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *ESTIA – A new chapter in the lives of refugees in Greece*, <http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/home/>, last consulted on 8 March 2023.

89 M. MacGregor, *Greece: ESTIA housing scheme for vulnerable asylum seekers to close for good*, InfoMigrants 23 December 2022, www.infomigrants.net/en/post/45627/greece-estia-housing-scheme-for-vulnerable-asylum-seekers-to-close-for-good, last consulted on 8 March 2023; F. Schmitz, *Greece: Asylum-seekers moved back into refugee camps*, Deutsche Welle (DW) 7 February 2023, last consulted on 8 March 2023.

90 Press Release of the Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration and Asylum, *Ολοκληρώνεται το πρόγραμμα στέγασης 'ESTIA II' το 2022* [Completion of the housing programme 'ESTIA II' in 2022], 22 February 2022, <https://migration.gov.gr/oloklironetai-to-programma-stegasis-estia-ii-to-2022/>, last consulted on 8 March 2023.

91 AfterThess, *Εκλείσε εν μια νυκτί το Φιλοξενείο προσφύγων του δήμου Θεσσαλονίκης στην Κάτω Τούμπα* [The refugee shelter of the municipality of Thessaloniki in Kato Toumpa was closed overnight], 3 January 2023, <https://alterthess.gr/ekleise-en-mia-nykti-to-filoxeneio-prosfygon-toy-dimoy-thessalonikis-stin-kato-toympa/>, last consulted on 8 March 2023.

92 AfterThess, 2023.

93 Directorate of Foreigners of Thessaloniki, *29-04-2022: Δραστηριότητα της Διεύθυνσης Αλλοδαπών Θεσσαλονίκης κατά το τελευταίο 24ωρο* [29-04-2022: Activity of the Directorate of Foreigners of Thessaloniki during the last 24 hours], 29 April 2022, www.astynomia.gr/2022/04/29/29-04-2022-drastiriotita-tis-diefthynsis-allodapon-thessalonikis-kata-to-teleftaio-24oro/, last consulted on 9 March 2023.

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Thessaloniki.⁹⁴ During these operations Greek police would patrol areas which were generally known as areas frequented by people-on-the-move and undocumented persons, and apprehend and subsequently detain large numbers of people. Similar reports of such operations in Athens had already surfaced in March 2022,⁹⁵ where ‘hundreds were arrested and later transported to detention centres’.⁹⁶

In Thessaloniki, and specifically around Filia’s community centre and distribution site throughout May and June, police would be present at least once a week in either unmarked cars or on motorcycles. Generally, they would wait until the distribution activities were concluded after which they would raid the area and apprehend anyone who did not have valid documentation. In February 2023, even after changing the location of the distribution site, authorities continue to carry out these operations on a ‘regular basis’ where they raid specific areas of the city (e.g. informal but known housing settlements) to apprehend people without valid documentation.⁹⁷ At Filia, those who were in possession of a valid ID were all urged to always bring it with them when they would come to the community centre. Those who were not in possession of a valid ID or police note were at these instances at a very high risk of being arrested and, if we were aware of the police presence ahead of time, they were warned to avoid the area or send a friend with valid papers to collect the food or other aid packs Filia would distribute daily. Often two volunteers were assigned the task to walk around the neighbourhood before the distribution started to see if police were parked somewhere or patrolling around the area.

However, we did not always know beforehand whether the police were patrolling or not. One evening, while I was at the Filia distribution site together with Nazim and in the middle of a conversation with him, he suddenly jumped up and shouted something in Arabic which prompted several people to run from the distribution site. While I had not immediately understood what Nazim had shouted, it became clear very soon it was a warning that the police were there when I spotted two police officers on motorcycles driving by on the road parallel to where the Filia distribution site was located. Their presence puts everyone on high alert. The volunteers were making sure everyone had their IDs with them, their masks on, and were keeping a sufficient distance from each other since Greece was at that time still under strict

94 BVMN, *Press release: Greek police launched operations targeting people-on-the-move in Thessaloniki*, 30 April 2022, <https://borderviolence.eu/reports/press-release-greek-police-launched-operations-targeting-people-on-the-move-in-thessaloniki/>, last consulted on 9 March 2023.

95 S. Shahabi, *Greece: Racist sweeping operations in the center of Athens*, The Fire Next Time 23 March 2022, <https://firenexttime.net/greece-racist-sweeping-operations-in-the-center-of-athens/>, last consulted on 9 March 2023; Y. Souliotis, *Επιχείρηση ‘σκουπά’ στο κέντρο της Αθήνας* [‘Broom operations in the center of Athens’], Kathimerini 16 March 2022, www.kathimerini.gr/society/561763918/epicheirisi-skoupa-sto-kentro-tis-%20athinas/, last consulted on 9 March 2023.

96 BVMN, *Balkan regional report – March 2022*, 25 April 2022, <https://borderviolence.eu/reports/balkan-regional-report-march-2022/#more-20102>.

97 BVMN, *Follow up statement: Persistence of Greek police operations targeting people on the move in Thessaloniki*, 15 February 2023, <https://borderviolence.eu/reports/follow-up-statement-persistence-of-greek-police-operations-targeting-people-on-the-move-in-thessaloniki/>, last consulted on 9 March 2023.

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COVID-19 regulations. In the end, the police officers made a big circle where they drove past the community centre and straight through the distribution site where they slowed down and just observed us. ‘It’s their typical way of intimidating us. They just drive around, sometimes they stop and ask for papers. I had mine ready in my hands, just in case.’ Nazim told me this after they had left, and I asked if this happens often. ‘They do it to scare us. But we don’t let them scare us away.’ Even if this felt very intimidating, we were lucky they just drove through. In the past, officers had interrupted the distribution operations to ask for IDs and work permits and had arrested around twenty people without documents who were reportedly pushed back to Turkey.⁹⁸

Even though the presence of police officers falls under their legal obligations and was during the lockdown justified as being part of COVID-19 measures, it still interferes with Filia’s daily operations and causes fear among the community volunteers and service users, who often are undocumented and afraid of being arrested or pushed back. As a result, people no longer feel safe enough to visit the community centre to receive their basic humanitarian necessities, such as food, sleeping bags, blankets, clothing, hygiene products, and medical attention. In addition, the COVID-19 regulations forced Filia to move their distribution activities outside instead of holding them inside the community centre. Consequently, people felt exposed or unsafe outside, and therefore either did not come or left very quickly after collecting their food, which also affected the community bonds. When the community centre was still accessible for the service users, people would be in a much more comfortable environment to sit down, enjoy their food, catch up with each other, watch tv, et cetera. Luckily, shortly after I left in June, restrictions were lifted, and the community centre was fully accessible for everyone again.

3. ‘They just don’t care about your opinion at all or what you want’ – Stories of harm

Harms can take place on various levels, both visible and invisible, but it is often the ‘banality of harm’⁹⁹ on the micro-level which affects the daily lives of people-on-the-move and is recognised by them as being harmful. In previous research, Hillyard and Tombs¹⁰⁰ established the three concepts of physical, emotional and social harms to which Canning¹⁰¹ has added three more types of harm on the micro-level in the context of migration control practices, all of which I also have recognised and observed during my fieldwork: 1) autonomy harms, 2) relational harms, and 3) temporal harms.

98 See the BVMN testimony of this event here: <https://www.borderviolence.eu/violence-reports/june-6-2020-0100-meric-river-ipsala/>.

99 V. Canning, ‘Zemiology at the border’, in: A. Boukli & J. Kotzé (eds.), *Zemiology. Reconnecting crime and social harm*, London: Palgrave Macmillan 2018, p. 183-202.

100 P. Hillyard & S. Tombs, ‘Social harm and zemiology’, in: A. Liebling, S. Maruna & L. McAra (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017, p. 284-305.

101 Canning, 2018.

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Autonomy harms are defined as harms that affect a person's self-worth or esteem. They can occur from the deprivation and lack of access to opportunities to participate in 'worthwhile' or daily activities. For my protagonists this included having little to no (legitimate) access to a place to live, not being able to choose where to live as well as having little to no access to education, employment and entertainment (e.g. a sports centre or library in the detention centres). Access to these activities is directly influenced by legislation and political decisions. People are essentially coerced into what Canning calls 'infantilized dependency' where they have little to no control over their actions or whereabouts.¹⁰² Relational harms are described by Canning as the forced exclusion from social relationships, which includes limiting people's ability to visit relatives, communicate with friends and family, or make use of support services that are outside of walking distance since public transport is rarely affordable with the meagre resources people are forced to rely upon. On the one hand, I observed how my protagonists gathered a lot of strength from their social relationships, whether this being their partner, family, or their religious or ethnic community, since the people they surround themselves with often have either gone through the asylum process themselves or are in a similar position as them and thus know exactly how the system works. On the other hand, relational harms are a regular and serious occurrence among my protagonists, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions which limited people from, for example, visiting Filia's community centre to socialise and relax with each other. Many of my protagonists reported consequences on their mental health this had and increased feelings of not being grounded anymore within their community. Lastly, temporal harms are related to the arduous road people-on-the-move have to take when seeking asylum which was also observed and perfectly described by Bosworth: "Their lives felt stuck, as if time had stopped."¹⁰³ The inability to predict one's immediate or even long-term future, the always-present risks of detention, deportation or pushbacks, and the uncertainty of where you or your family may be in a month or a year from now are all additional factors to these temporal harms. My protagonists who work or have worked illegally to avoid destitution – all the while experiencing bad working conditions and exploitative hours which in turn have harmful effects on their physical and mental health – feel like their lives are continuously put on hold. They feel like they cannot live their lives: '*we are in prison, even if we are outside*'.

Following from my ethnographic observations and conversations, I wish to add to this body of research about harms in the context of migration control and introduce the concept of *harms of dismissal*. This includes harms which are rooted in the feeling that one is not heard nor seen, not being considered, not being cared for. I observed that these harms were especially prevalent within my protagonists' stories about their experiences while in detention. They described their treatment by the detention centres' staff (e.g. detention officers, medical personnel, translators, legal advisors) as there being a lack of care, consideration and attention.

102 Canning, 2019, p. 194.

103 M. Bosworth, *Inside immigration detention*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 125.

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Generally, they felt like the detention officers do not care about their wants and needs, regardless of what these were, and would ignore them systematically. This resulted in my protagonists feeling like there is no place for them to voice their concerns about their situation, about their treatment, and about the conditions they live in. Additionally, translators and legal staff reportedly are either not available or present at the detention centres at all, or they do not provide adequate or accurate translations or legal advice. Not having independent monitoring organisations present at the detention centres or not providing what people ask for reinforces the feelings that they are not being heard and purposefully ignored. This also extends to my protagonists’ treatment by medical staff at the detention centres. Their issues are often disregarded and not taken seriously by the staff, even though many of my protagonists have described and expressed their explicit need for physical care and psychological care, specifically their struggles with depression.

Yassir is the only one of my protagonists who is actually (supposed to be) being treated for depression at the detention centre. He has a history with attempting suicide and feels plagued by suicidal thoughts every day. ‘I have depression and get thoughts about suicide,’ he starts, the topics of his depression and suicidal thoughts have been very prevalent throughout our conversation. Nazim, who translated during our conversation, later told me that it was almost all Yassir could talk about, and it made his job of adequately translating very difficult since in almost every sentence Yassir included how depressed he felt. ‘Sometimes I just put a knife to my head. My friends have helped me [to not harm himself]. I tried already to attempt suicide. But if this will keep happening, for sure I will commit suicide.’

Harms of dismissal were also prevalent within my protagonists’ stories about being undocumented. Overall, they felt like they were left to their own devices to figure out how to apply for asylum, how to get access to legal counsel and other support services. If a person was able to contact an actual immigration lawyer, it was still the question if they were willing to provide actual advice that would help them navigate through the labyrinth that is the Greek asylum system. Due to the many administrative and legal barriers that have been put up by the Greek government, my protagonists often feel misled about the information they do receive and abandoned by the system when they are not even given the opportunity to lodge an asylum application and are forced to live their life undocumented. Having to live like this feels for them like a standstill, a moment in time where they cannot move forward and are ‘forced to accept it all’. What they really want is to just be given a fair chance, a fair assessment of their situation, and to not be treated like ‘less than an animal’.

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4. Discussion and conclusion

'I wish only for them to listen to me. And after, they have all the right to reject me or accept me, but at least give me the chance. We just want to live a life in dignity, but now we cannot.' – Mohammad

To conclude, my analysis of people-on-the-move's everyday experiences with harm shows how they seem to be directly attributable to political actions that have been taken or have been neglected to be taken. However, these decisions and (in)actions do not come from just one sole actor; they emerge from a complex historical context around borders and movement and from a plethora of actors and entities with differing interests even if they all seem to have the goal of 'ensuring security' in common. I might be asking an obvious question here, but who is considered 'deserving' of security and why does the answer seem to not include 'people-on-the-move'? In my dissertation, I constructed the term *harms of dismissal* to illustrate the feeling of my protagonists that they are not being listened to, not being considered, not being cared for. This is, I believe, illustrative to the current situation where people-on-the-move and their experiences with the harmful consequences of migration control practices are not being taken into consideration on a structural level. They are recognised by certain (humanitarian) actors and entities, but we seem to be stuck at the point of taking the next step towards including people-on-the-move in the goal of ensuring security. In this context, it is also important to recognise how the research field on crimmigration has a tendency to predominantly limit its views and analysis to a crime-based categories of harm despite the fact that many of the consequences resulting from crimmigration or migration control practices fall in a very grey and vague area where it is unclear if they can be considered as 'crime' or 'unlawful'. A social harm-based approach therefore offers a different but valuable perspective that is able to distance itself from state-centric definitions of crime and deviance and focus on the broader forms of harm and their structural causes.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the harms that I have observed are not always solely and directly related to crimmigration or migration control practices, but can also be linked to civil law, social policy and social control, and are certainly not always inflicted intentionally. In order to identify the harms and consequences of migration control practices, we cannot stay within the state-defined boundaries of what is considered harmful and must also centralise the voices of people-on-the-move in order to truly grasp the harmfulness of migration control practices.

104 F. Webber, 'The war on migration', in: P. Hillyard, C Pantazis, S. Tombs, et al. (eds.), *Beyond Criminology: Taking harm seriously*, London: London Press, 2004, p. 133-155; Canning, 2018.