Sustainable Development- ID Thesis

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From Syria to Asylum

Refugee transit migration through Greece

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CONTENTS

Summary

The world is currently facing what Amnesty International's Secretary General describes as "the worst refugee crisis of our era". In the context of this year's migration crisis in the Mediterranean, the case of Syrian asylum seekers entering Europe through its most eastern border is an example of the European Union's failure to uphold standards of protection for refugees. As Europe increases security at its borders and slides into nationalistic anti-migrant sentiment, refugees and asylum seekers fleeing Syria to Greece are systematically blocked from claiming their rights. This research describes their journeys from Syria to asylum in Europe, focusing on their transit through Greece as a mid-point in their trajectory and the first point of entry to European Union. Relating the experience of asylum seekers in Greece, the aim of the research is to focus attention on the migrants' own agency as they pursue their ambitions and aspirations in the face of tremendous barriers. Delving into the situation for refugees in Greece can direct new-targeted policy responses that reflect some of the larger issues around mobility of non-EU citizens in Europe.

Through a trajectories approach, transit through Greece can be understood as a mid-point where new knowledge is gained in attempts to reach other Member States more favourable for them. For Syrians, Greece is the first country they enter which is signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugee Rights. Yet most will attempt to move on. The knowledge gained in Greece about the asylum seeking process as well as irregular methods of transit informs the next move in their journey. Thus, refugees exercise some agency on their trajectories towards preferred destinations of asylum. Informed decision-making by refugees themselves while staying in Greece therefore becomes an important factor in migration patterns, the process of gaining asylum and, more broadly, the extent to which they are able to realize to some degree their aspirations. Greater recognition of the exercise of agency by refugees calls into question current EU asylum policy such as Dublin Regulation. The study concludes with proposals for the implementation of new legal routes for internal migration by asylum seekers within the Schengen area.

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Acronyms

EU- European Union

FSA- Free Syrian Army

ISIS- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

MPI- Migration Policy Institute

MS- Member States

MSF- Médecin Sans Frontière (or Doctors without Borders/ Γιατροί Χωρίς Σύνορα)

OECD- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

UN- United Nations

UNHCR- United Nations High Commission on Refugees

YPG- The People's Protection Units or People's Defence units (In Kurdish: Yekîneyên Parastina Gel)

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I - Introduction

Since the start of 2015, authorities have noted a five-fold increase in the number of migrant arrivals on Greece's shores (Frontex 2015). The crisis on Europe's shores has been widely reported in the media focussing on the haunting imagery of desperate migrants on small unseaworthy vessels. As of July 2015, Frontex has declared Greece as the main country of entry into the EU. It is one of the many countries of passage along long and fragmented migratory journeys to the core of Europe. In Greece, people get stuck, move on, change plans and sometimes settle. Yet, whilst being part of the Schengen Area, there are no open borders for refugees in Greece. EU Member States are therefore systematically denying people the right to asylum by restricting their mobility. The European Court of Human Rights has ruled the situation for refugees in Greece as inhumane, with detention conditions amounting to torture and a complete lack of facilities for housing and care. Despite improvements to the asylum system in Greece, the difficulties faced by asylum seekers are innumerable.

The relatively short distance between Turkey and Greece's border islands has contributed to this route becoming the main point of entry into Europe. With the numbers of irregular entries passing 100,000 so far this year, the reception systems on the Greek islands have virtually collapsed. Increased numbers of asylum claims in 2014 led to improvements in the speed of processing of asylum claims and the opening of a new Asylum Centre in Athens. Nevertheless the increased numbers of arrivals and the deepening of the Greek economic crisis have increased the risk of loss of life. The past months of austerity measures have seen decreasing numbers of staff at the new Asylum Centre, ending with its closure at the end of June. As Greece's economic and political situation deteriorated, the European Union continued to fail those who seek protection within its borders. The insecurity faced by Syrian refugees in Greece is arguably the most severe of all EU Member States.

The trajectory into the EU for this particular group begins in Syria where the population was 20 million before the start of the war in 2011. Since then, an estimated 12 million have been displaced, of which 8 million are internally displaced. Over 1 million have sought refuge in Lebanon and around 2 million in Turkey (UNHCR, 2015). Only 250,000 Syrian refugees have been given a legal status in the EU. This represents less than 2% of the total number of displaced. Currently, refugees of any origin cannot gain asylum from European embassies outside the EU. They can only claim asylum once on EU soil, forcing them to enter via illegal means. Once in Europe, all Syrians are legally entitled to the right to refugee status due to the situation in Syria. Yet in practice, they will not be allowed to exercise this right unless they pay the high personal and financial cost of entering Europe illegally.

In 2015, as the war in Syria drags on and intensifies, an increasing number of refugees are attempting the long and dangerous journey into Greece and often further west and north into Europe. The EU is presently discussing a quota plan for refugees, which would involve allowing asylum seekers to claim their rights within embassies outside national borders. Yet this quota is limited to 20,000 refugees of all origin. If this quota was only applied to Syrians this would represent less than 0.2% of all displaced persons from Syria. Thus the EU is systematically denying the right to over 99% of Syrian refugees who might wish to claim asylum in Europe (Eurostat, 2015). By fortifying its borders, the EU is in effect creating barriers to the exercise of refugee rights along the entire trajectory as a means of limiting entry and the number of claims to asylum.

As a first point of irregular entry into Europe from Turkey, Greece is what can be called a transit country within the EU's borders. With the near closure of the land border between Turkey and Greece, most attempt to cross into Greece through its sea border. Despite the dangers faced by those who attempt this crossing, the image of the uninformed refugee who is desperately smuggled across the Mediterranean on small boats by gangs of traffickers is not representative. The Syrians encountered in this research are well informed by networks and the Internet and knowingly take on the risk of illegal travel as their only option.

Syrians travel to and through Greece with the aim of avoiding authorities due to the fear that it will impact their future potential asylum claims based on the 2013 Dublin Regulation, previously and often still called the "Dublin Convention". The Regulation aims to determine rapidly the Member State responsible for an asylum claim, usually the state through which the asylum seeker first entered the EU. Only those who fail in their attempts to leave Greece irregularly, reluctantly apply for asylum in this country as the Regulation can then restrict their movement to a more preferred destination. They can and usually are registered as asylum seekers on or shortly after landing in Greece. Once registered, they will use their temporary refugee ID as a form of travel document to facilitate their passage to other Member States where they perceive the benefits of gaining asylum as giving them better opportunities. They may have to make a double application for asylum in Europe so as to assert their rights as refugees in these second countries. The Dublin Regulation prohibits the application for asylum in multiple countries to avoid 'asylum shopping'. The volume of asylum seekers and the difficulty of tracking multiple applications are making the implementation of the Dublin Regulation difficult. For example, Germany is not currently applying the Dublin Regulation to Syrians reapplying in Germany or having been finger printed on arrival in Greece and is processing applications made in Germany despite evidence of entry through Greece. Methods of transit through Greece mostly depend on informal financial and social means. Those who have previous experience of air travel or have enough confidence will attempt to fly out of Greece with fake documents. Yet the majority of Syrians will attempt travel via the long and dangerous north-eastern route through Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and Austria.

Despite the building of a common asylum system in the EU, asylum procedures differ in ease and length. Living conditions during waiting periods also vary considerably. In Greece the process is fraught with problems and is weighed down by staff shortages and a high demand for asylum. This research shows that for refugees, the meaning of asylum changes in different countries in terms of its value and the opportunities it affords. For refugees from Syria, gaining refugee status in the EU ensures increased opportunities, security, and protection from

return to Syria (both currently and in the future). Until embassies are able to offer a faster service to gaining asylum, people will continue using traffickers. Asylum status is however not the ultimate goal of refugees. This research shows that whilst the short-term goal of gaining asylum in Europe is the immediate target of most Syrians, their long-term goals include family reunification, education, and jobs, for which further mobility beyond the entry state of Greece is presently essential.

This research therefore investigates the process of mobility of refugees as they attempt to gain asylum in EU Member States. Through a multi-sited ethnographic research combined with interviews, in several locations in Athens and on the island of Leros, this research has found three main methods of transit through Greece. The focus is on the particular case of Syrians in Greece as the current largest group of arrivals, closely followed by Afghans, Eritreans and Iraqis. As a case study, Syrian refugees were interviewed in Greece to assess their mobility experience and changing goals along their entire trajectory from Syria to asylum. The evidence compiled shows how migrants themselves are exercising their own agency in determining their trajectory to a preferred destination country. This research therefore argues that without a better understanding of routes, decision-making and aspirations of refugees themselves, asylum policy will continue to fail in helping these victims of war. It aims at better informing EU asylum policy with the experiences of Syrians in Greece as a mid-point along their journey. The migration of refugees to Europe has the potential to be beneficial to Greece and Europe. With their extensive social networks, access to resources and given the opportunity of increased mobility, the Syrian experience could pave the way for a new vision of asylum procedure in Europe.

The research question for this thesis is: *What is the role of Greece as a host country in the way Syrian asylum seekers attempt to gain asylum in EU Member States?*

This question will be addressed through the following sub questions:

1. *What is the role of Greece as a host country for Syrian refugees?*
2. *How do Syrians migrate towards Greece?*
3. *How do Syrians experience gaining asylum in EU Member States?*

The report will begin by outlining the methods used and the process of research on this topic, empirical chapters investigating migration perspectives, the context of Greece, trajectories into Greece and further mobility into Europe follow. The study concludes with the implications of its finding for policy.

II - Methodology

The research is based on case studies exploring individual experiences and personal narratives with the aim of building "a holistic understanding of complex realities and processes where even the questions and hypotheses emerge cumulatively as the investigation processes" (Desai and Potter, 2006, p116). By using qualitative methods the possibility of 'objectivity' and the formulation of 'grand theories' is reduced, yet the aim is to understand differing and often conflicting 'subjectives' in terms of very different interpretations of 'facts', different meanings and different perceptions. Specifically, this research was conducted through a series of multi-sited ethnographic case studies and interviews with refugees in Athens and Leros, Greece (Marcus, 1995). This was done through multiple interviews from Leros to Athens as well as participant observations such as distribution of food to new arrivals in Leros. The aim of this research is three-fold; first, to consider past trajectories into Greece, then refugee experience of Greece and finally mobility narratives and experiences of potential future moves by refugees further into Europe. Where possible, contact was maintained with those who successfully left Greece allowing for an analysis of mobility after Greece. Through social media, contact was maintained with 5 participants who were able to describe their journey and experiences in claiming asylum in Germany. Contact was also made on social media with 2 participants in Turkey, part of a wider collaboration with researchers in Istanbul. The use of such additional information in this research follows Schapendonk and Steel's (2014) "trajectory ethnography".

Two locations within Greece were used; Athens and the island of Leros. Participants were found in Athens, who had arrived through Leros. Going back on initial participant's trajectory, more participants were found in Leros and followed to Athens where contact was maintained. The research therefore aims to describe refugees' situation in Leros and Athens as periods of immobility within a journey (Schapendonk and Steel, 2014).

Given the precarious nature of refugees in Greece, particular attention is needed in building a methodology that reflects the complicated and often illegal situations refugees can find themselves in. It is also important to build a relationship of trust and understanding between researcher and participants. These considerations take time and were confronted through the use of participatory methods such as participation observation and walking interviews into Greece. The research dealt with these considerations by creating a tight bond with individual members who spoke English, through multiple interviews. These key participants were points of contact for other members of the research who did not speak English. They also informed the research on situations for those with whom direct contact after they had left Greece could not be maintained.

Conducting the research

This research was conducted as a multi-sited ethnographic research, which followed leads to geographical locations that reflect experience of refugees in Greece. This included going to places of living, places where refugees are trying to gain legal status, as well as refugee services such as NGOs and activist communities working with refugees. The specific locations included Asyrmatos in Agios Dimitrios, Athens (see figure 1), where a group of 40 Syrian refugees were placed in emergency housing donated by a community of activists. Other locations included, squares frequented by migrants as well as the Asylum Centre in Katixaki where asylum applicants go for processing. Finally, going back on their trajectory to the island of Leros, where 5 of the participants arrived from Turkey. In the space of a week in Leros, the research noted 3 groups of boat arrivals with a total of 90 refugees of which 65 were Syrian and the rest of Afghani and Iraqi origin. The specific location of this part of the research was the courtyard of the port authorities. Combined with ethnographic and participatory methods in Katixaki, Asyrmatos, Leros port authority, public spaces and the homes of participants, open in-depth interviews were carried out with 17 men and boys from the ages of 13 to 54 , and 8 women and girls from the ages of 10 to 36.

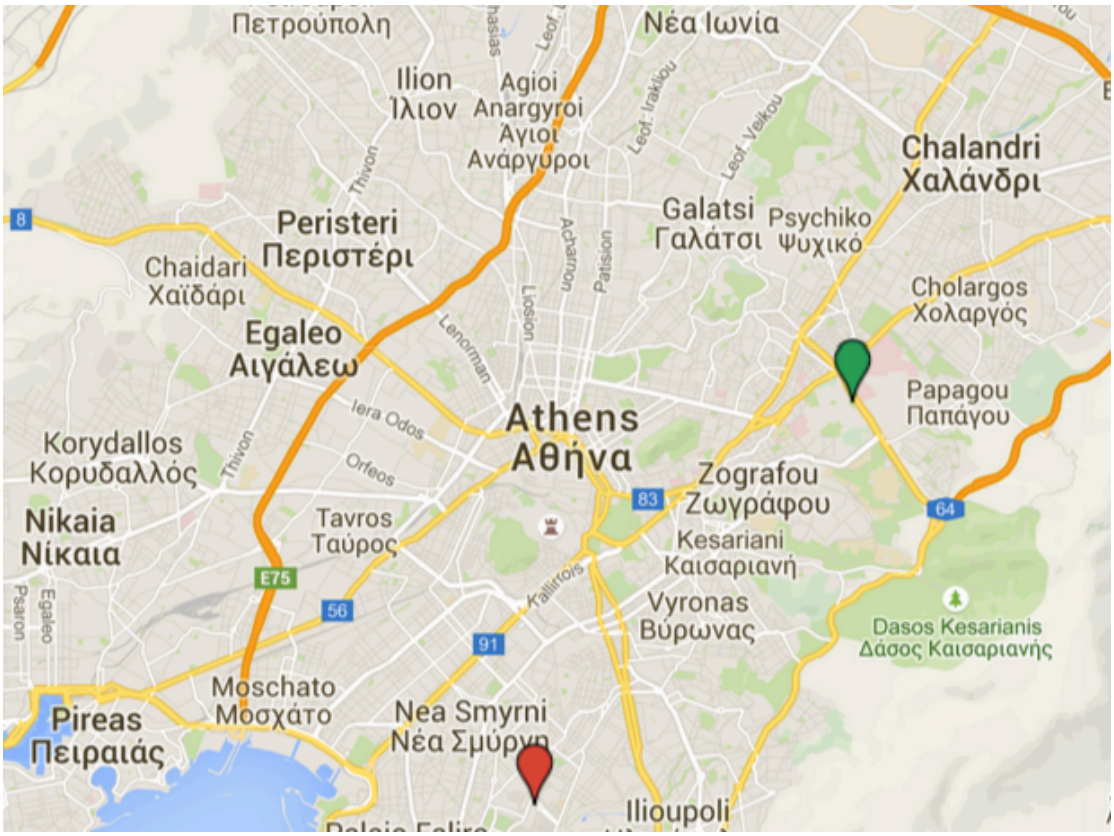

Figure 1 Athens map- Asyrmatos Community Centre (Red) and Asylum Centre Katixaki (Green)

Given the ethics involved in research with such a vulnerable group, this four-month research comprised three stages; first contacting with over 100 refugees through networks of refugees and activist organisations, building trust relationships through participant methods as well as unrecorded open conversations with the groups from Asyrmatos and Leros, and finally conducting in-depth interviews with 25 refugees out of the original sample. Participant methods were part of both building the trust relationship as well as gaining perspective and information on culture and living conditions of participants. Through often long open interviews in locations, which made participants, feel comfortable (housing and public spaces) in facilitating the description of mobility experiences and their conceptualisation of transit migration. Repeated participant observations with participants in different locations through continued contact were used to discern points of interest that could be further elaborated later during interviews. Walking interviews were particularly interesting in better understanding the lived experience of a refugee in Athens through their interactions with people and their environment.

The first contact and interview was through a Facebook group dedicated to Syrians in Greece. Having sent a message to the group administrator, a preliminary conversation face-to-face in a café was conducted with Mohammed and Ahmed. After this preliminary meeting, the research moved next to Asyrmatos, where the first two participants were living. Here 40 Syrian refugees shared their stories of leaving Syria and coming to Greece with the help of Mohammed as a interpreter. In-depth interviews were carried out with 12 members of the group. These took place in the centre itself as well as in cafes or through walking interviews in central Athens. These interviews informed much of the research on gaining asylum in Greece. As another line of enquiry, participant observation took place with asylum seekers who were queuing to enter the Asylum Centre in Katixaki Athens. Contextual information was also gained through conversations with volunteers at Praksis as well as Apostolis Veizis, a member of the Athens team at Médecin sans Frontière (MSF).

Table 1 Participants from Asyrmatos community centre in Athens

Partici-pant (Initial)	Sex M/F	Origin	Time spent in Greece	Chosen destination	Motivation for continued travel	Successful travel out of Greece/ route	Cont act Y/N	Relations in Europe
M.	M	Damascus	7 months	Germany	Reunification/ Studies	Yes- ID	Yes	No
H. (M. father)	M	As Suwayda	7 months	Germany	Reunification/ work	Yes- ID	Yes	No
N. (M. Sister)	F	As Suwayda	7 months	Germany	Reunification/ Studies	Yes- ID	Yes	No
A. (M). Sister	F	As Suwayda	7 months	Germany	Reunification/ Studies	Yes- ID	Yes	No
Ahmed	M	Damascus	5 months	Germany	Reunification/ work	Yes- ID	Yes	No
N.	M	Aleppo	8 months	Netherlands	Work	Yes- ID	No	No
K.	M	Homs	1 month	Sweden	Work	Yes- ID	No	Greek cousin
M. (K's wife)	F	Homs	4 months	Sweden	Work	Yes- ID	No	No
K's son	M	Homs	4 months	Sweden	School/ studies	Yes- ID	No	No
K's daughter	F	Homs	4 months	Sweden	School/ studies	Yes- ID	No	No
M. (amputee)	F	Aleppo	9 months	Unk.	Reunification/ work	Yes- ID	No	No
M's daughter	F	Aleppo	9 months	Unk.	Reunification/ school	Yes- ID	No	No

As participants found in Athens had been in Greece for over 6 months and had sought help from the Greek community, those who did not share contact information were difficult to contact. It was therefore helpful to go back on a trajectory to meet people on arrival so as to better understand the mobility experience of those who have just arrived. Thus after establishing a trajectory through Leros for 5 participants in the research, the investigation went back on their trajectory to this island. The head of mission at MSF in Greece, Stathis Kyrousis, was able to give contact details with local activists in Leros. Here, Panos and Matina of the Leros Solidarity Network, informed the researcher of new boat arrivals and where to find them. Joining them in the provision of food and clothes, interaction with over 90 refugees took place. These preliminary interactions with arrivals informed much of the research on the island, whilst 13 arrivals were interviewed in-depth (see table 2). Maintaining contact with these arrivals was difficult as they moved onward towards Athens. Many did not stay long in Athens, butt on return to Athens contact was made with 4 asylum seekers from Leros. These 4 participants stayed in Athens for over 2 weeks and informed much of the research on informal transit through Greece. These participants were also in contact with other members of the boat arrivals via social media and shared information with the research on their current situation.

Table 2 Participants from the island of Leros

Partici-pant (Initial)	Sex M/F	Origin	Time spent in Greece	Chosen destination	Motivation for continued travel	Successful travel out of Greece	Cont act Y/N	Relations in Europe
D.	M	Al Hasakah	Unk.	Unk.	Work	Unk.	No	No
D's Wife (6months pregnant)	F	Al Hasakah	Unk.	Unk.	Healthcare	Unk.	No	No
F.	F	Homs	Unk.	Germany	Reunification/ studies	Unk.	No	Germany farther
A. (F's brother)	M	Homs	Unk.	Germany	Reunification/ studies	Unk.	No	Germany farther
K.	M	Latakia	1 month	Germany	Studies	Yes - Air	Yes	Switzerland / Germany/ Denmark
N.	M	Latakia	3 weeks	Germany	Studies	Yes - Air	Yes	UK cousin
T.	M	Iraq	3 weeks	Finland	Work	Yes - Air	Yes	Belgium Uncle
T's cousin	M	Iraq	2 weeks	Unk.	Studies	Yes -Land	Yes	Belgium Uncle
I.	M	Homs	3 weeks	Germany	Work	Yes - Air	No	Sweden cousin
L.	M	Afghanistan	Unk.	Unk.	Work	Unk.	No	No
M.	M	Iraq	Unk.	Unk.	Reunification/ work	Unk.	No	No
A.	M	Kobani	2 weeks	Germany	Reunification/ school	Yes -Land	Yes	No
M. (A's cousin)	M	Kobani	2 weeks	Germany	Reunification/ studies	Yes -Land	Yes	No

Of those who left Greece, it was possible to maintain contact with 5 members of the research contact group (2 from Asyrmatos and 3 from Leros). All arrived in Germany and claimed asylum there. They were also able to act as mediators to let the researcher know how other members of both sets of groups were doing as well as stories of other refugees they met once in Germany. For this part of the research, contact was maintained using Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype and e-mail. Social media and refugee networks were therefore a key part in gaining current information on migration trajectories particularly in experiences of migration within the EU's borders. In comparison, mobility and trajectories to Greece were noted through story telling.

Methods in refugee studies

The main method of this research is ethnography, a view into society and cultural phenomena from the perspective of the participant (Brewer, 2000). As stated by Peteet (2005), "the contemporary ethnographer in a crisis situation still observes and records, but without reifying cultural traditions, and (…) locates these processes in more complex global and historical terms." Ethnographic methods are particularly adapted to research with refugees due to the vulnerability of this group. Developed since the era of salvage anthropology, ethnographic methods position the researcher to produce scholarship on the everyday experience and meaning of suffering and "refugeeness" (Peteet, 2005). As the researcher is witness to human rights violations and tales of suffering, it becomes imperative for both participants and the researcher to "tell". The ethnographer thus becomes the intermediary to the voices of pain. In the right circumstances, this can be therapeutic and empowering (Hayner, 2001). Yet as stated by Peteet (2005), it is not recommended to remain a mere witness. Participatory methods add to ethnographic research by allowing the researcher to gain a sense of purpose but also for refugees to gain trust in the researcher.

Through this multi-sited research combined with maintained contact with maintained contact via social media, a comprehensive view of trajectories from Syria through Greece and beyond can be studied. As stated by Schapendonk (2012): "This methodological design can best be understood as a trajectory ethnography, which is mainly inspired by Marcus's (1995) multi-sited ethnography". Different groups and different experiences of migration into the EU's south eastern border as well as further into Europe were explored precisely because different groups are found in different places. Those met on arrival in the islands intended to leave Greece immediately and therefore did not seek help from NGOs once in Athens. For each individual at different periods of the journey, the knowledge and aspirations of mobility are different. The state of mind of participants was also very different between these two locations; ethnography in Athens emphasized immobility and waiting, whilst in Leros the research could be described as witnessing and recording an "ethnographic emergency" (Feldman, 1995)

Finally, walking interviews were used in Athens to record the way a change in environment affects mind-frame. Walking interviews involved conducting interviews whilst walking in public spaces where changing environments make participants feel at ease. Since the research concerned mobility, interviews 'on the move' came quite naturally. Evans et al (2011) found that interviews were "profoundly informed by the landscapes in which they take place, emphasising the importance of environmental features in shaping discussions". It benefited both the researcher and the participants, as refugees who often had had difficult experiences of Athens were able to discover another side of the city, whilst for the researcher it was interesting to see interactions between participants and their environment. Walking also stimulates reflections particularly of memories of life in Syria; many compared the old town of Athens to that of Damascus.

As described by Legard et al. (2003, p138), "In-depth or unstructured interviews are one of the main methods of data collection used in qualitative research". These methods are important to better grasp people's point of view as well as build personal accounts of experience, descriptions, and explanations of aspects of the world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In-depth interviews are often described as a form of conversation (Burgess, 1984). In in-depth interviews, a narrative and oral history approach can help understand a cultural milieu and social world through personal accounts and narratives of a particular experience (Legard et al., 2003). Although unstructured and open to topics the interviewee may want to broach, in-depth interviews are led by key themes. The key themes approached in this research were migration trajectories, (im)mobility experience and decision-making, changing aspirations, and perspectives on livelihood opportunities in Greece and in Europe. As these in-depth interviews took place over a period of time in multiple locations and involved conversations surrounding illegal activities as well as difficult personal stories, these were not recorded directly. The research was however chronicled through daily diary entries so as to note key phrases, themes brought up by participants, locations and stories, as well as reflections on the part of the researcher.

The selection of refugees was based on snowball methods, using a first point of contact to later meet larger networks of refugees themselves, NGOs and activist communities. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which study participants direct the researcher towards future contributors among their networks. Cohen et al (2011) explains that "The effectiveness of this method has been recognized as significant in a variety of cases, mainly regarding marginalized populations". Refugees can be difficult to classify. However, as the study focused on Syrians, this was less of a problem than other researches on refugees. For the few participants that were not Syrian , refugees were defined as forced migrants, which refers to the coerced movement of away from their home or home region (IOM,2015). Defining those in transit (Duvell, 2012) was based on aspirations and plans to move by refugees themselves thus including those who are immobile but wish to move as well as those who had made previous attempts, were planning future attempts and held a long term wishl to leave. Although, as stated in the theory, it can be difficult to classify transit migrants, in this study all those approached planned to move in the near future. Periods of transit were at most a year and a half (for one participant) and at the least 2 weeks (3 participants).

Comparison with the research in Turkey was conducted by collaborating with researchers in Istanbul. This helped establish how people arrived in Turkey, conditions in Turkey, as well as gathering the stories of those who wanted to go to the EU or who had attempted travel to Greece. Direct contact via Facebook was also made with two participants in the research in Turkey who were planning a to take boats to Greece. This comparison and contact with participants allowed for a perspective on the entire trajectory so as to better understand motivations to leave Turkey. The collaboration with the group in Turkey was also served to add a location to the multi-sited nature of the research.

Ethics

This research aimed to explore refugees' mobility experiences, aspirations and current situation in Greece. As a case study on 'vulnerable' individuals, it was important to take into account ethical considerations. Düvell et al. (2010, 228) explains that: "In general, qualitative interviews and participant observation usually produce highly personal and confidential data." This raises issues of the legal status and limited rights of individual participants. Black (2003, p45) argues that research on how "migrants/asylum seekers move when controls are tight" can be difficult as they can "serve state interests in clamping down". Düvell et al. take the position that the professional responsibilities of the researcher lie in investigating "irregular migration and informing society about the phenomenon in a manner that does not contribute to discrimination against these groups but, instead, improves understanding" (2010, p229). Black (2003) advises researchers to focus less on describing how certain aspects of illegal migration take place such as routes and costs, but should instead reflect on subjects such as refugees' aspirations, motivations and decision-making processes. Yet as described by Düvell et al. (2010), it should ultimately be the participants who decide what they choose to say, if they decide to participate at all. In this case study, the narrative of Syrian refugees in Greece delineated their different methods of transit and the way the relative safety/danger of these options had become a key topic of information sharing in their networks. Building a connection was therefore linked to sharing information on mobility methods gathered during the research with participants themselves, thus joining networks of information sharing. Finding common ground where the researcher and participants could help each other proved key to building a good relationship and thus to collecting the evidence for this study.

In this light, many factors were considered in the construction of a methodology for qualitative research with refugees. These include notions of vulnerability and sensitivity, Johnson and Clarke (2003, p422), point out that "direct contact with vulnerable people, with whom sensitive and difficult topics are often raised and sometimes raised within difficult contexts" presents a high degree of sensitivity.

Thus according to Düvell et al. (2010) research such as this, which includes "interviews, participant observation or personal data in any respect, is considered to be highly sensitive in nature" (p 230). In terms of vulnerability of the participants, it is important to consider the 'illegal' status of the migrant. The networks of irregular migrants may include criminal structures such as human trafficking that facilitate entry, exit and stay in the country. Since irregular migration is often linked with rights violations, research activities could put participants at risk (Beyrer and Kass, 2002). It is also important to consider the oppressive society and culture Syrians are coming from and the paranoia and fear they expressed when describing experiences in Syria and during interactions with people outside their network. Finally the position of the researcher was regarded by the participants as one of a member of an ethnically, socially and financially privileged group. Sieber (1992) argues for an emphasis on cultural sensitivity in such research; "Cultural sensitivity has (…) to do with respect, shared decision-making and effective communication. Too often, researchers ignore the values, the life-style and the cognitive and affective world of the subjects. They impose their own, perhaps in an attempt to reform people whose culture they would like to eradicate, or perhaps simply out of ignorance about the subjects' reality" (Sieber, 1992, p129). He points to the importance researchers should place on first learning about research participants' lifestyles, beliefs and values, suggesting that researchers should take the time to learn how to communicate in ways that the individuals understand (Sieber, 1992). Issues of respect and trust were fundamental in forming a trusting relationship between researcher and participants which is why the research was built on maintaining contact through multiple meetings, walking around Athens and discussing topics linked to cultural differences such as answering participants' questions about Greek and other European cultures.

Methods of analysis

The results are presented in the following empirical chapters as a story-telling narrative of trajectories along a geographic timeline. Descriptions of commonalities in trajectories and experiences, record the trajectories of

participants from Syria to the last destination within the time frame of the research. Through multiple narratives of trajectories a common thread is drawn to humanise the stories and experiences of refugees as they migrate from Syria all the way to what can be viewed as a temporary destination. As stated by Peteet (2005): "Working with populations at risk or in a state of emergency heightens the anthropological imperative to go beyond the constitution of the refugee by a traumatic history and to explore agency." Through the construction of the story-telling narrative of refugees, the results seek to dissolve the moral gap between the subject and reader (Peteet, 2005). The geographic timeline aims to portray refugee mobility by tracking and understanding social change through the concepts of place, identity and human agency in the face of formidable obstacles. The results section creates a loose narrative, with boxes inserted into the timeline to focus on key policies and practices that refugees confront as well as their decision-making and the psychological impact of their experiences. For the purpose of this research real names are used where participants permitted, whilst other remain anonymous.

Limitations

Some limitations to this research were present in the sampling and selection of research participants. With a focus on Syrians to begin with, the experience of refugees in Greece could be biased, as it does not represent those of other nationalities such as Iraqis and Afghans who face even bigger legal hurdles. Yet both these nationalities were encountered and, though their experience is comparable, it is important to note that Syrians have favourable claims to asylum in Europe as a whole. Secondly, the sample was predominantly male which to some extent reflects the reality of the composition of those arriving in Greece. Yet, communication with women was also harder as they tended to have less fluency in English. The research was thus conducted in English with those that spoke fluently, and was interpreted by these same participants for those who only spoke Arabic. Another limitation is in the scale of the research sample. With more time, the sample could be expanded to incorporate other case studies from other nationalities as well as from other locations in Greece and Europe as a

whole. Ideally this research would have been multi-sited across the entire of Greece including the north and west borders. The research could even follow the entire journey to Germany or other destinations to describe more fully the experiences of refugees in other countries of transit in Europe.

Location & Partner Organisation

Athens, Greece. Partner organisation include the following NGOs:

- Praksis
- Leros Solidarity Network
- As well as local branches of MSF (Athens, Kos)
- Finally local activist groups in Athens

Operationalization

The sample size for this research will be of 30 people from the following groups:

- Refugees in Athens Greece; refugees are defined by the UN 1951 convention on refugees as: 'Any person who: owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country '(UN, 1951).
- A focus will be taken on undocumented refugees, those who may be seeking asylum, as well as those who have successfully gained documentation.

The research is measured on the follow key concepts:

- Trajectories; focus on previous mobility experience, the barriers faced along these trajectories, and trajectories further into Europe. The academic literature on migration often suggests that push and pull factors are static and one-dimensional; in fact, migrants make active choices at each step of the journey and often recalibrate their priorities in transit or in anticipation of secondary movements. Moreover, studies often suffer

from a destination bias, in that they analyse migration journeys from the perspective of host countries and those select migrants who have succeeded in reaching their destination.

- Mobility; focus on mobility once in Greece, where people have moved or become immobile in Greece and more broadly in Europe including failed attempts at mobility.
- Decision-making: The agency of refugees as they take decision on their migration routes and methods as well as destinations.
- Aspirations/ motivations; based on peoples changing social, economic, political goals and their current and future aspiration to move to a new location.
- Livelihood situation; these are based on perceptions of opportunity and limitations by refugees in Greece and in Europe

III - Migration, Asylum and Refugee Trajectories

This research takes a trajectories approach to the study of transit migration by investigating transit through Greece as a midpoint in the entire journey of Syrians towards asylum. This approach focusses on the influences on decision-making by migrants and asylum seekers as they shift between mobility and immobility in entering Greece and attempting to leave Greece. As a transit country within the EU's borders, Greece is currently dealing with a large influx of refugees. This research thus brings together the concepts of transit migration, refugee mobility and trajectories as a means to study the movement of refugees fleeing from their home to the point where they gain asylum. As discussed in the following chapters, Greece is a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention which, amongst other things, defines the rights of asylum seekers. The EU has also committed itself to building a Common European Asylum System based on the full and inclusive application of the UN Convention. The low number of asylum applications as a proportion of arrivals in Greece indicates that mobility for refugees does not end at the point of entry into the EU asylum system. The aspirations of refugees and their long-term goals must be considered to understand better their decision making around mobility both along their trajectory and once within EU borders.

Transit migration and a trajectories approach

Despite becoming a central feature in current migration debates in Europe, transit migration poses some problems as a tool for understanding the migration process (Düvell, 2012). Although on the surface transit migration appears to be a more dynamic categorisation that breaks the dichotomy of sending/receiving country in migration research, it maintains the difficult notion of temporary or permanent settlement and reinforces the notion that migration has fixed points of departure and arrival. Düvell (2012) argues that the concept has often been applied in a rigid way by states to pin down particular categories of migrants and to rebrand them as people who should leave. Transit migration can also be

misrepresentative by disregarding the fact that journeys can take years and target destinations can change on multiple occasions.

Defining transit migration at first glance appears straight forward as it refers to the migrant's period of waiting in-between the countries of origin and destination (Schapendonk, 2012). It offers a classification for the 'break' or waiting period during a migrant's journey (Collyer, 2007). It transcends migratory categories, such as regular/irregular migrants or refugees, and denotes a migratory phase of the journey (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008). Yet classifying migrants as transit migrants brings up an analytical problem where migrants on the outskirts of Europe may be perceived as in transit despite a lack of evidence that they are in the process of continuing their journey (Collyer *et al*. 2012). Schapendonk (2012) argues that this conceptualization and categorization is based on Eurocentric perceptions of core and periphery countries. By classifying all migrants in the outskirts of Europe as in transit, these countries are ignored as destinations in their own right. Similarly, periphery countries within Europe can be both destinations and countries of transit to EU's core.

Categorizing migrants as in transit can thus be problematic. Transit research has previously used differing definitions to classify migrants as 'in transit'. Düvell (2008) suggests a timeframe of more than one week up to three months in a country that is not intended as a destination for migrants. Such a timeframe allows researchers to distinguish transit migration from other migratory phenomena, for instance, stepwise migration (Schapendonk, 2012). Yet delimitating a timeframe can easily overlook migrants whose transit may take years due to complications such as periods of detention. The focus on intentions of migrants can also be problematic due to fluctuations in 'vague' plans of migrants as they move across borders (Schapendonk, 2012). Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008, p5) choose to depict transit migration in a less concrete manner by defining it as a "situation that may or may not develop into further migration". This definition allows for the vagueness of travel plans yet limits its' utility, as it is applicable to almost every migrant situation (Düvell, 2012).

Schapendonk (2012) chooses to concentrate on the relationship between migrants' mobility and immobility during transit migration. Transit migration is thus defined by Schapendonk (2012) as a period of immobility in the process of movement through the migratory trajectory. It delineates migrants' *aspirations* of mobility within a period of involuntary immobility (Carling 2002). For the purpose of this research, transit migration will be defined as a period of immobility within a migratory trajectory where there are aspirations of continued mobility.

Whilst a transit path can be mapped retrospectively, until a potential return or unless settlement is permanent, it can never be known if a trajectory is over (when return is possible). The migration process and the periods of transit can therefore be life-long. It is thus important to understand how aspirations change over time and space. Taking a trajectories approach to the issue of transit migration, the concept of 'fragmented' journeys has been put forward to denote the breaks in trajectories (Düvell, 2012). As can be visualised in the map below, by mapping the complex trajectories migrants take, many migration journeys that can appear as smooth moving from one stable state to another, are in reality far more fragmented (Düvell, 2012). Considering this line of thought, individual's experience of transit resembles a disjointed succession of changing projects, community attitudes and state categorisations. Düvell (2012) argues that this dynamic way of understanding migration "is not only relevant in the context of 'transit migration', but also to achieve a more empirically-founded understanding of migration processes".

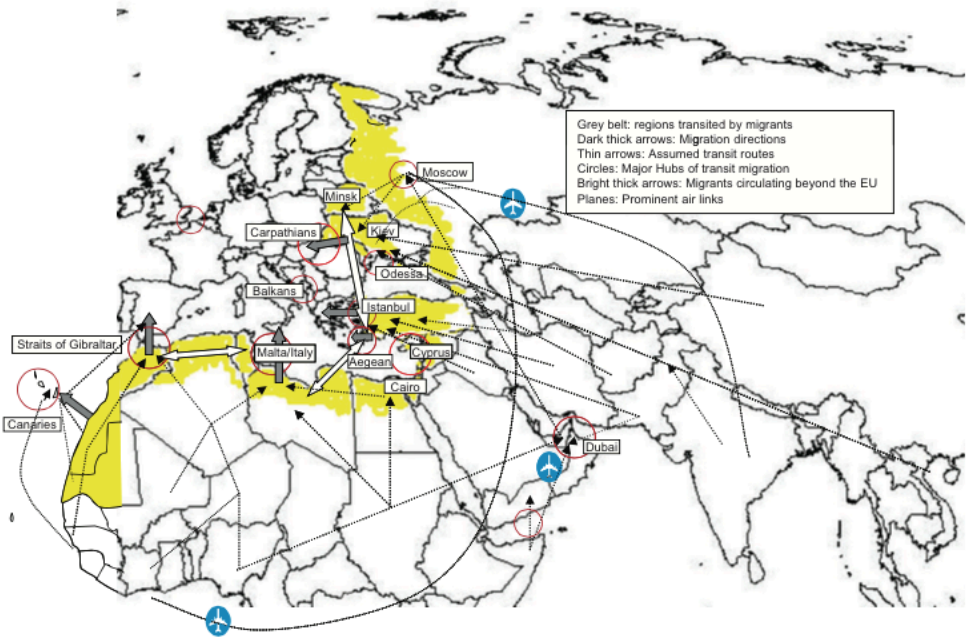

Figure 2. Fragmented journeys (Collyer & Haas, 2012)

As confirmed by Schapendonk (2012), the journey taken by migrants into the EU can be long and fragmented. Taking a trajectories approach, the entire journey from 'sending' to 'receiving' countries can be viewed as a fragmented process of decision making by migrants, where information on the migration process is learned and updated along the way. The trajectory may also involve periods of immobility as well as the more publicised moments of mobility. Schapendonk (2012) describes these journeys as turbulent, explaining that, "the notion of the turbulence of migration stresses the multi-causality and multi-directionality of contemporary migration". From a migrant's perspective, these journeys can be life changing and can have enormous impacts on how they make their decisions and aspirations. In transit migration literature, it is stressed that transit migrants in EU borderlands such as Turkey have somewhat utopic conceptions of Europe (Collyer, 2007). Migrants see Greece as an access point from where the rest of the EU can be easily reached (Schapendonk, 2011). In the past year, the UNHCR (2014) has seen a shift in this narrative with anecdotal evidence of migrants warning each other about Greece's attitude towards migrants. These narratives have impacts on transit migrants' decision-making and trajectories. Trajectories are not singular, but rather multiple sets of journeys where destinations change

(Grillo, 2007). In Schapendonk's words "migrants are on the move, but so too are their aspirations" (2007).

Immobility and aspirations

Much research into trajectories has outlined paths into Greece either crossing the Evros River from Turkey or across the Mediterranean to many of Greece's' island territories (Cavounidis, 2002). The UNHCR (2014) has gathered data pointing towards changes in trajectories from land to sea routes due to the intensification of border controls in the Evros region. Main entry and exit routes can be identified, but these movements alone do not deliver informed understandings of the undercurrents of individual migration trajectories. Yet, whilst considering transit as a part of long and fragmented journeys, demarcating periods of immobility is as important as portraying periods of mobility. Schapendonk (2012) distinguishes 'experienced immobility' from 'physical immobility'. Periods of immobility amongst those with the aspiration to enter the EU whilst on the its borders , , may be linked to numerous entry attempts and further local migration. Yet once inside the EU's southern borders, many migrants may face extended periods of detention in harsh conditions and for uncertain periods of time (Triandafyllidou et al, 2014). As well as detention, the potential for crossing into Italy, is increasingly limited with documented *refoulement* from Italy to Greece (UNHCR, 2014).

Irregular migrants in Greece are increasingly resorting to long journeys across multiple countries to reach other EU member states (OECD, 2014). Complex and multiple issues are therefore linked to migrants' periods of immobility in Greece. It is of particular interest to understand refugee motivation for mobility, as for refugees it is often assumed that this mobility is linked to gaining refugee status. Schapendonk (2011) describes three types of immobility outside the EU's borders, including; 'stranded migrants' who experience a sense of immobility in a particular direction (the EU in this case), second are 'stuck migrants' who are blocked in almost every direction, and finally there are those who may be stuck but do not wish to move and can be considered 'satisfied'. These categories

describe how aspirations and their multi-directional aspects in conjunction with mobility opportunities affect the lived experience of migration for refugees.

Refugee identity and meaning of refugee status

Taking the perspective of refugees as a starting point, Europe and the EU countries in particular represent aspirations of social, political and economic freedom. Yet once migrants arrive in Greece, they face indefinite periods of immobility. Regularisation in Greece and onward movement within Europe is difficult, impacting mobility as well as living standards in Greece. Although they have made it to Europe they may find themselves "stuck in transit" (Brekke and Brochmann, 2014). The situation in Greece for refugees is troubling and many choose to attempt long and dangerous journeys to more affluent EU member states (UNHCR, 2014). Therefore the concept of transit within the EU as applied to refugees is complicated. To begin with, application processes for asylum vary considerably between member states. As stated by Arboleda and Hoy (1995): "varying interpretations of the [UN] Convention refugee definition breed ambiguity, inconsistency and unpredictability, and the variations between national determination systems render futile any attempt at harmonizing the implementation of the definition and the 1951 Convention as a whole". Despite the Dublin Regulation being founded on the principle of equal processing systems across Member States, the practicalities of processing vary greatly. Greece's relatively new Asylum System and Centre for processing is marred with bureaucratic and physical impasses (UNHCR, 2014).

The meaning in practice of refugee status in different member states also varies considerably. Under the UN 1951 Refugee Convention, protection is granted to those who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'. Many asylum seekers today, including some Syrians, may not fit strictly within these parameters, but do merit international protection in accordance with Article 33

of the 1951 Convention, predominantly because of situations of widespread violence that exist in their countries of origin (Arboleda and Hoy, 1995). Various States have thus implemented different, relatively ad hoc, procedures to provide protection to a wider group of asylum seekers. International migration is multi-dimensional and inter-related, generated amongst other things by wars, including civil wars, human rights deprivations, natural calamities and poverty. While the causes of some international migrations and refugee movements can still be isolated, most are the result of varied and intricately entwined factors (Arboleda and Hoy, 1995). Despite the immediate threat of conflict, those fleeing war may face new threats and instability along their entire trajectory.

Whilst processing and qualification for refugee status varies tremendously, so do the purposes of gaining this status for those fleeing their homes. As described by Frederico (1991), "human tragedy cannot be measured with theoretical concepts and standard definitions. These can only help in the *study* of the suffering of human beings. Theoretical definitions and concepts, when combined with 'double standard' approaches, merely become instruments that help to further perpetuate the existing hypocrisy of governments in their policy towards the weak, the oppressed, the voiceless and the poor people". Understanding the meaning for refugees themselves of gaining refugee status therefore moves the focus away from the concept of refugees as agentless and "hopeless" cases that deserve humanitarian aid. Reflecting this reality in theory is difficult as it begins to blur the line between forced and voluntary migration. Yet the agency of refugees in their migration is key to gaining asylum as they navigate complex policies and laws so as to claim the rights to which they are entitled.

Refugees must construct an identity that is linked to asylum procedure to benefit from protection. Rajaram (2002) argues that "humanitarian agencies represent refugees in terms of helplessness and loss", suggesting that "this representation consigns refugees to their bodies, to a mute and faceless physical mass". It is therefore important to consider the many varying aspirations and ambitions that are linked to gaining asylum and regularization to understand how refugees give meaning to their identity during migration and after successful asylum.

The following chapter will discuss Greece more specifically as both a host country and a country of transit for Syrians within the wider context of asylum in Europe. It will lay out conditions on arrival for refugees and historical movements through Greece with the aim of geographically placing Greece in terms of migration within the greater context of large-scale movements of people from east to west. More specifically it shows how the conceptualisations of migration described in this chapter exist in practice. This includes representations of transit, asylum processes as well as the realities of being a refugee in Greece. Finally, this next chapter discusses the Syrian refugee crisis as a whole and the issues surrounding mobility of refugees as they attempt to gain asylum in Europe.

IV - Greece as a Host to Syrian Refugees

Most refugees flee to the closest safe place, either within their country or neighbouring countries. Yet many continue their journeys further afield. It is estimated that the migrant population in Greece is close to one million, including regularized migrants, returnees, refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants (Cavounidis, 2002). Despite the low total number of registered asylum seekers and refugees in Greece over the past decade, the number of applications has boomed, increasing by 185% between the periods of 2003-2007 (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008). Over the last two years Greece and neighbouring Mediterranean states have been experiencing an increase in the number of refugees and migrants arriving by sea, many seeking to move on to other EU states. In 2014, around 43,500 refugees and migrants arrived by sea in Greece, a 280% increase from the previous year. The majority of people come from Syria (around 60%), followed by Afghans, Somalis and Eritreans (UNHCR, 2014). The living conditions of those who arrive in Greece are poor with many having little money, poor housing and relying on donations from NGOs. Despite having entered the EU, refugees in Athens still face many hardships including homelessness, lack of services, xenophobia and uncertainty (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008).

Many refugees, including participants in this study, move on to other EU states (UNHCR, 2014). Historical data surrounding refugees is limited in Greece and often based on estimates and on the number of border apprehensions (Papadopoulou- Kourkoula, 2008). This lack of data can be linked to a general migration policy framework focused on deterring migrant flows and settlement. Papadopoulou- Kourkoula (2008) argues that the focus on Greece as a transit country has allowed for a shift in responsibility towards 'traditional' destination countries. Transit migration has significant repercussions for host countries. One consequence is a failure to regularise migrants based on the assumption that they will move on to other countries. This raises legal as well as moral and ethical questions about the countries' commitment to safeguarding the rights of

migrants (Papadopoulou- Kourkoula, 2008). By tolerating illegal entry and undocumented stay, smuggling and trafficking thrives raising security, political and economic issues. This has also exacerbated a socio-political trend of rising xenophobia (Papadopoulou- Kourkoula, 2008). A lack of regularisation of migrants has further impacts on the functioning of an integrated migration policy within the wider European context.

The European Union's ambition to create a harmonized reception system for migrants and refugees in particular clashes with the realities on the ground. Differences in national reception conditions as well as migrants aspirations and mobility, give rise to the secondary migration that challenges the basis of an effective common migration system under the Dublin Regulation (Brekke and Brochmann, 2014). For refugees, transit between states in search of asylum or reception can become increasingly problematic, gradually leaving them in a state of uncertainty and irregularity. Considering Greece's migration situation as a destination and transit country, as well as the barriers faced by refugees, the question of whether refugees are in transit or simply choose to move on due to uncertainty and insecurity is debatable. It is therefore important to understand better refugees current situation in the continuously changing social, economic and political climate in Greece since the beginning of the crisis in 2008.

Transiting through Greece

Historically, Greece has been a country of emigration with Greek populations settling around the world. Yet since the late 1990s, the trend has reversed towards increased immigration into Greece (OECD, 2014). As the "Achilles heel" of the EU shifts around its frontiers, Spain, Italy and more recently Greece are described as gateways into Europe. The EU border agency FRONTEX (European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union) has identified the overland and sea routes to Greece as the last 'leak' in the EU's southern border regime. FRONTEX has estimated that 80% of the total number of irregular migrants to the EU passes through Greece (Schapendonk, 2012). Since 2014, the near closure of the

land border across the Evros has led to a shift in trajectories into Greece with a majority of irregular migrants entering via its sea borders (UNHCR, 2014).

Changes in EU regulations make Greece and other 'periphery' countries responsible for EU border control. Under the 2013 revised Dublin Convention now known as the Dublin Regulation, irregular migrants are legally obliged the to register in the first member state entered, making southern Mediterranean countries the load bearers of European migration (Brekke and Brochmann, 2014). These changes are aimed at restricting the possibility of 'transit' through Greece. However, for migrants and refugees Greece is a transit country, where migrants enter on their way to the EUs 'core' member states in search of a better standard of living as well as regularisation. Particularly for refugees, inconsistent migrant processing across the EU has contributed to the irregular movement of migrants across borders towards more prosperous nations (Brekke and Brochmann, 2014). With these changes, Greece has the double burden of responsibility in enforcing border control to limit the entrance of irregular migrants whilst upholding a duty of care towards migrants, especially refugees. Greece is currently failing to meet these responsibilities and has been heavily criticised on both counts. (Papadopoulou- Kourkoula, 2008).

It is in this context of the EU's focus on the security dimension of migration, that *transit migration* to the EU has become a central topic of debate for both policy-makers and academics (Collyer et al. 2012). Transit migration traditionally describes the situation of countries such as Turkey and Morocco that receive large numbers of migrants for brief periods on their way to Europe. The concept challenges many of the static dichotomies that have dominated our understanding of migration and brings into view the importance of key stages within migrants' journey (Collyer et al. 2012). Research on transit migration has yielded valuable information on migrants' journeys while they are stuck or moving to their destinations (Collyer, 2007). Although they are often assumed to be short term and temporary, transit stays may end up being long term and semi-permanent (Sørensen, 2006). In 2011 it was estimated that there were a maximum of 350,000 migrants in Greece, based on apprehension data

(Maroukis, 2012). These migrants who find themselves in Greece for prolonged periods are generally considered transit migrants, yet their fragmented and changing plans for a potential move calls for a deeper analysis of this classification.

Whilst the concept of transit migrations is helpful, it is based on the assumption that people have a mapped trajectory and a grand plan that includes a final destination (Düvell, 2012). Greece is not perceived by EU and Greek policy makers as one of these destination countries and is therefore a place of transit that people enter on their way to more prosperous nations (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008). This simple narrative ignores the complexities of migrants' own decision-making around their movement and distorts policy making. Approaching the situation from a trajectories perspective, brings into view the aspirations, decisions and opportunities of migrants as they change over the course of their journey, ultimately dictating the 'end' of the trajectory; if there is an end. Trajectories can be described as periods of immobility and mobility during the process of migration (Schapendonk, 2012). From a trajectories approach, the process of migration can be understood in its fragmented intricacies. It helps understand how migrants' changing opportunities, aspirations and motivations impacts their decision to move, in what direction and how.

The situation for refugees in Greece is of particular importance. Since the 2011 *M.S.S. v Greece and Belgium* judgment, the UNHCR maintains the stance that EU countries should not send asylum seekers back to Greece, under the Dublin Regulation, on the grounds that refugees face precarious conditions and are unlikely to gain legal status (UNHCR, 2014). The process of registration of refugees in Greece is long and laden with bureaucratic complexities. This forces refugees into irregularity and they become grouped with irregular migrants. The boats arriving in Greece are classified as bringing illegal migrants, yet the majority of their passengers are eligible for asylum, such as Syrians. Yet, many refugees cannot gain legal status and find themselves in forced detention and under pressure from deportation orders (Triandafyllidou et al., 2014). Refugees

unable to find stability in Greece may choose to leave irregularly towards more favourable destinations. The UNHCR has also reported on refugee reluctance to declare themselves in the Evros region and begin the process of formalisation due to fear of violence and *refoulement* (UNHRC, 2014). From a refugee perspective, Greece may be both a geographical and a bureaucratic 'impasse'. Mobility around the EU for unregistered refugees is highly restricted forcing those who choose to continue their journey into Europe to take dangerous routes relying on informal networks and traffickers (UNHCR, 2014).

Shifting social and political landscape

Over the course of the research for this study from December 2014 to July 2015, the context in Greece has considerably changed. Processing of refugees had improved in the first 4 months of the year, particularly for Syrians. The UNHCR (2014) indicates "significant improvements have taken place in the quality of the adjudication of asylum claims and of decisions. These include the reduced timeframe under the new procedure for completing the examination of cases at first instance and appeal, the improved quality of interviews and decisions, as well as the observance of procedural guarantees". Whereas in 2014, 791 Syrians gained asylum in Greece, with 161 lodging applications in the first 4 months of the year, 476 applied for asylum in the first four months of 2015(UNHCR, 2015); "Given the high protection rate for Syrians, the registration of asylum applications of Syrians holding an identity document, and the decision-making in these cases, has been fast-tracked since August 2014" (UNHCR, 2014). This marked increase reflects the previous and the current governments' attempts to apply a 'fast tracking' of Syrians in the asylum process.

While improved access to the asylum procedure still remains difficult. Less than half of the number of Regional Asylum Offices prescribed by law have been set up (five out of eleven). Moreover, the Athens Asylum Centre is staffed at only 75%. While the authorities have made efforts to process the more than 37,000 appeals pertaining to cases under the old procedure, the backlog still remains (UNHCR, 2014). The UNHCR points out that "Persons who do not manage to file

an asylum application face the risk of being detained and removed as irregular migrants. Administrative detention is generally applied without an individual assessment or considerations of alternatives to detention". Those who are undocumented, already in detention and seeking asylum, remain in detention at least until their asylum application is registered, which can take several months. The UNHCR (2014) in its review of Greece as a country of asylum argues that: "These significant shortcomings in the asylum procedure and the policy of administrative detention contribute to the reasons why a considerable number of persons in need of international protection do not wish to apply for asylum in Greece".

Over the period of this research, there has been considerable change in conditions both in Syria and Greece. There was also a marked increase in the number of arrivals. According to the Hellenic police database, the numbers of arrivals and apprehensions at the border increased from an estimated 4,500 arrivals in the first four months of 2014 compared to over 26,000 in the same period of 2015 (astynomia.gr). This increase can be linked to the increase in the intensity of the war in Syria and an increased flow of refugees into Turkey in this same period. In the week of 16th of July, over 13, 000 Syrians fleeing their homes were estimated to have crossed in Turkey after an increase in fighting between ISIS and Kurdish fighters in Northern Syria. The political and economic context in Greece has also impacted migrants as Greece has gone through turmoil and uncertainty with a new government , prolonged negotiations with creditors on debt and bailout packages and the implementation of a new migration policy. During the tense negotiations over a new economic programme, treatment of migrants appeared to be used as a political tool by a member of the coalition government (see image below).

VICE NEWS Anger at Greece's Threat to Unleash Wave of Migrants and 'Jihadists

Anger at Greece's Threat to Unleash Wave of Migrants and 'Jihadists' if Europe Leaves it in Crisis

By Mike Meehall Wood

March 11, 2015 | 11:40 am

Germany has responded with outrage to a threat by Greek ministers to unleash a flood of migrants and jihadists upon Europe — and particularly Berlin — should the EU fail to help Greece out of its economic crisis, with politicians and security officials branding the remarks irresponsible and "racist."

Greek Defense Minister Panos Kammenos, leader of the right-wing, anti-austerity Independent Greeks (ANEL), the junior coalition partner to Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' Syriza, warned of "a wave of millions of economic migrants" who could potentially enter the European Union via Greece if their relationship with the bloc was to falter.

Figure 3 News excerpt from Vice News - Greece threatens Germany with migrants

Efforts to improve the asylum system have come during a period when the financial situation of the Greek government deteriorated. This was reflected in cuts in staff at the Asylum Centre in Athens, causing in particular shortage of Arabic interpreters. This reached a peak in May 2015, when Syrians began protesting once again in front of police headquarter offices (see image below) after translation services were suspended. The Asylum Centre has currently shut its services, redirecting refugees to the old department of migration.

Figure 4 Syrians protesting due to lack of translators (Enikos.gr)

This continuously changing situation included the sinking of a boat off the coast of Libya and the loss of an estimated 800 migrants (guardian.co.uk). The tragedy provoked the EU Council to adopt a number of commitments aimed at protecting those in need and preventing further loss of life at sea, targeting the criminal networks of people smugglers and traffickers, addressing the root causes of illegal migration and providing avenues for legal migration. . The Council plans were criticised by many NGOs as being 'too little too late' (Amnesty.org). The solutions proposed by the Council focus on deterrence of migration, smuggling and deportations, and include "reinforcement and amendment of the Frontex legal basis to strengthen its role on return". This new move is particularly worrying for asylum seekers entering Europe illegally and risks increasing the occurrence of '*refoulement*'.

Key Actions **European Commission, 13.05.2015**
A funding package to triple the allocation for Triton and Poseidon in 2015-16 and to finance an EU-wide resettlement scheme. **• Immediate support to a possible CSDP mission on smuggling migrants.** **• A legislative proposal to activate the emergency scheme under Article 78(3) TFEU by the end of May, on the basis of the distribution key included in the Annex.** **• A proposal for a permanent common EU system for relocation for emergency situations by the end of 2015.** **• A Recommendation for an EU resettlement scheme by the end of May followed if required by a proposal for more permanent approach beyond 2016.** **• EUR 30 million for Regional Development and Protection Programmes.** **• Pilot multi-purpose centre established in Niger by the end of 2015. Addressing the root causes through development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.** **• Making migration a core issue for EU delegations.** **• An action plan on smuggling in May 2015.** **• Stronger action so that third countries fulfil their obligations to readmit their nationals. • Adoption of a Return Handbook and monitoring of the implementation of the Return Directive.** **• Reinforcement and amendment of the Frontex legal basis to strengthen its role on return. Strengthening Frontex's role and capacity.** **• Union Standard for border management.** **• Strengthening EU coordination of coast guard functions.** **• A revised proposal on Smart Borders.** **• Strengthening the capacity of third countries to manage their borders. Establishing a new monitoring and evaluation system for the Common European Asylum System and guidance to improve standards on reception conditions and asylum procedures.** **• Guidelines to fight against abuses of the asylum system.** **• Strengthening Safe Country of Origin provisions of the Asylum Procedure Directive to support the swift processing of asylum applicants from countries designated as safe** **• Measures to promote systematic identification and fingerprinting.** **• More biometric identifiers passed through Eurodac.** **• Evaluation and possible revision of the Dublin Regulation in 2016.**

Figure 5 List of Key Actions by European Commission Emergency Committee on Migration

In the summer of 2015, the persistence of this increased flow of migrants through Greece's islands has once again hit international media. Frontex reported a record number of 49 550 migrants arriving in the European Union through its Greek borders in July, surpassing in a single month the number of migrants detected in the region in all of 2014. Frontex (2015) states that: "Even though Italy continues to deal with a massive number of arriving migrants, in recent months the route through Greece has taken over as the path into the EU most affected by migration flows." In the first seven months of 2015, almost 130500 migrants have entered the EU via Greece's external borders. This

maintains the five-fold increase from the same period of last year. Whilst the media continues to portray these arrivals as migrants, according to Frontex (2015), Syrians and Afghans accounted for nine out of every ten migrants detected at the Greek borders this year. It is likely that most would qualify as refugees. During this period, the Greek economy slid back into recession as tense negotiations with the creditor institutions on the terms of a new bailout programme. Disruption to government services and the banking system added to the pressures on the system for handling migrants and refugees resulting in conditions both on arrival and in Athens deteriorating significantly over the summer.

Syrian perceptions of Greece as a host country

In these politically and economically uncertain times, Greece is thus facing a humanitarian crisis at its borders. With 26,496 'illegal' entries recorded by Greek authorities in the first 4 months of this year, a mere 476 Syrians have applied for asylum in that same period. As found in this research, most Syrians do not view Greece as a destination but as the only option for entry into Europe. In Athens, cuts to staff, particularly Arabic interpreters, and to funding means the newly formed Asylum Service is unable to process the large number of arrivals. In addition, funding of other services refugees need on arrival and throughout the application process such as legal aid, medical aid, food and shelter, is being reduced or simply suspeneded. These harsh conditions add to the reasons why Syrians do not intend staying in Greece. Nevertheless for those interviewed in this research, their aspirations of increased employment and education opportunities, security, protection from return to Syria (both currently and in the future) as well as reunification with family members remain the main reason for their mobility. In Greece's economic downturn, Syrians do not see such opportunities and perceive their chances of a new start at life as limited. Having left the extreme uncertainty of a country at war, they worry about the uncertain economic and political outlook of Greece. They also described Greece as 'the poorest country in Europe'.

In this context, Syrians are therefore desperately attempting to leave Greece to reach more affluent countries. For the majority this means exiting the Schengen area and undertaking a long and dangerous journey across Macedonia, Serbia, only to re-enter the EU via Hungary and Austria. Others attempt to obtain black market documents, which they use to leave by plane. Security at the EU's internal land borders, controls at airports as well as Italian sea ports have been strengthened. As experienced by one participant in this research, private airline companies have also increased their checks at ticket inspections concerned about the repercussions of being found to be transporting undocumented migrants.

Whilst exiting Greece is increasingly difficult, entering has shifted from Greece's land border to its sea border with Turkey. Combined with the marked increase in number of arrivals, this has put pressure on local reception facilities across the many Greek islands flanking Turkey's shores. In August 2015, police in Kos used fire extinguishers to disperse a crowd of over 1000 migrants attempting to push their way forward in the queue for temporary papers. As internal document checks within Greece increase, migrants are unable to board the boat to Athens from Kos without their temporary documents. This has prolonged the periods of immobility on the islands and conditions for those unable to leave have deteriorated (BBC News, Aug. 2015).

The following chapter describes these arrivals in Greece and investigates the particular trajectory of Syrians from departure to arrival in Greece and, more specifically, Athens. As Greece faces a humanitarian crisis on its islands this summer, the trajectory described is being undertaken by increasing numbers of desperate migrants whilst the conditions of reception in Greece are deteriorating. It is therefore all the more crucial to better understand the entire process of transit through Greece as one of the many countries Syrians must cross to reach, safety, stability and successful asylum claims.

V - Mobility from Syria to Greece

Discussion about migration to Europe is heavily laden by images of overcrowded dinghies filled with desperate people as this year's number of boat arrivals exponentially increases over previous years (UNHCR, 2015). As this research began in the winter of 2014, civil society activists were warning of the likely rise in boat arrivals, but these fell on deaf ears (amnesty.org). In April 2015, as the 'migratory season' began, a new wave of tragedies in the Mediterranean struck (guardian.co.uk). While EU member states held emergency meetings in reaction to the death of an estimated 800 migrants on route to Italy, the small Greek island of Leros continued to receive large daily arrivals from Turkey. The photographic images of desperate migrants in crowded boats made international news, the individual stories of those on board and the trials they face once they have made it to 'safety' is left largely unheard. For most, this story does not begin on a boat, nor in the hands of traffickers in Turkey. The majority of current arrivals have come from the war torn country of Syria. This is where the narrative of this research begins.

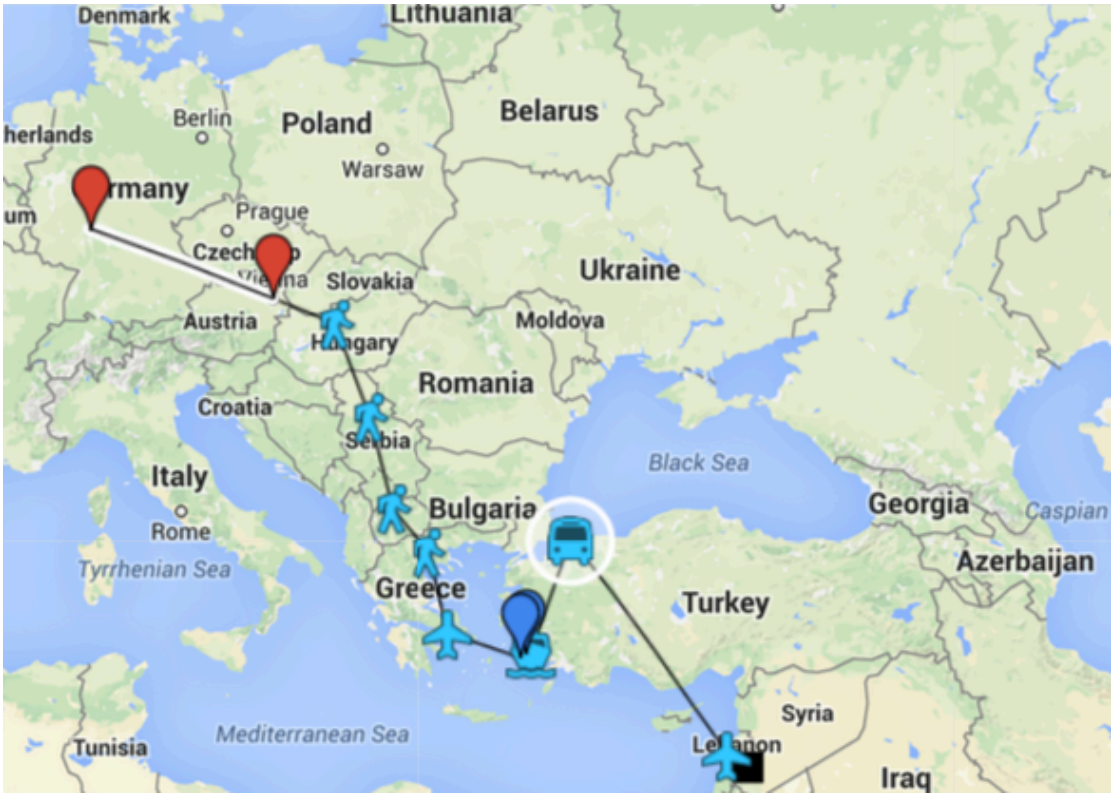

Figure 6 Example of trajectory from Syria to Germany

Syria- leaving war

For over 4 years Syrians have suffered daily oppression, danger and conflict. For many young people arriving in Greece, their story began in 2011 as Syria joined the wave of protest of what was described as the Arab Spring. They saw and took part in mass gatherings in streets and squares across the country. Hope for a new generation of politically conscious citizens spread across the country and was supported in the international media. Following crack down on peaceful protest by the security forces of the government the conflict turned into a complex civil war. Although for some time civilians tried to continue their normal lives as workers, employers and students, the number of injuries, deaths, disappearances and internal displacements steadily rose. The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2015) has stated that: "The human cost of the on-going conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic is immeasurable. The scale of human suffering has grown as the conflict has escalated".

According to the International Commission on Syria (2015): "Since March 2011, males perceived to be of fighting age, including minors, have been targeted in military assaults, shelling and by sniper fire, for arrest and detention, and recruited for participation in hostilities. As the conflict has escalated, males of fighting age have emerged as the main targets of violence". Some 85.1 per cent of the victims documented by the Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic commissioned by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR, 2015), were male. According to the International Commission on Syria "government forces have engaged in mass arrest campaigns leading to the enforced disappearance of fighting-age men in areas that have fallen under their control, and men residing in or travelling to government-held areas". Boys and men are thus at persistent risk of being targeted by all parties in the conflict; the UN states that "Government forces, ISIS, and the YPG have all pursued a concerted effort to conscript young men into their ranks" (2015).

Participants in this research stated that they fled the country as conscientious objectors, not willing to take part in armed conflict. One participant, who wishes to remain anonymous, felt that he was under threat from government forces for activities helping civilians with food and medical needs. The UN Human Rights Council (2015) states "where frontlines have stalled, the Government has employed a strategy of controlling the population, combining long-lasting sieges with continuous air and ground bombardment. Civilians are targeted on the basis of their perceived opposition to the Government".

The majority of participants in this research were male between the ages of 13 to 54 (18 men and boys), although 7 women and girls from the ages of 10 to 36 also participated. Some of these participants were university students in Syria, from Damascus, Aleppo, Idlib, Latakia and Homs. The men below the ages of 30 had been studying at bachelor and masters level. As students they avoided compulsory military service. Syrian military service lasts 2 years, but since the start of the war, soldiers are obliged to stay on after the end of their service and risk their lives if they desert their posts. For students, there is a 6-month period after graduation before they are obliged to join the military. Participants in this research all described roadblocks and continuous document checks by military and police which aimed to check whether they were avoiding military service. They described friends and family, who had been forced into the army, where they were ordered to target civilians. One participant, Mohammed, a 23 year old math student, said "either I fight with the army or the opposition". Given this situation, all decided to flee the country leaving family, friends and relationships behind.

They considered the first part of their journey as the most difficult. As they leave Syria, they are in danger from military assault and being caught by authorities. Depending on their location, accessing the border can be difficult. A participant explained that crossing government held territory was extremely dangerous. Some described spending large amounts of money, up to $1500, to be trafficked to Lebanon or Turkey. With the country in war and high inflation, the value of the Syrian Pound, as well as assets in Syria, have plummeted. The decision to flee

is one that has been taken by an estimated 4 million Syrians since the start of the conflict (UNHCR, 2015). The majority have fled to neighbouring countries, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq.

First port of safety

With a population of 4.5 million, Lebanon has taken in over a million refugees from Syria. The situation for Syrians in Lebanon is difficult and opportunities for young graduates, such as those described in this research, are limited. According to the UNHCR, Syrian refugees, like the Lebanese in local communities most affected by the influx, are becoming increasingly vulnerable as the crisis continues. The UNHCR states "while the country is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and despite restrictions imposed at the border, it is expected that Syrians in need of immediate protection and assistance will continue to find safe haven in Lebanon". In practice, it is however hard to reach this safe haven. One participant described checks at the Lebanese border which restrict entry, only allowing passage if refugees have a passport and if there is proof of a hotel booking, flight, embassy meeting or for 'tourism'. The principal fear of refugees from Syria in Lebanon is deportation. Despite a public policy of welcoming refugees from neighbouring Syria, , participants worried about their safety in Lebanon. Those who are able to afford travel left as soon as possible after arrival.

With a Syrian passport in hand, they were able to fly to Turkey. Other participants were able to reach Turkey directly, particularly at the start of the conflict. Participants described the current route across the Syrian-Turkish border as incredibly dangerous. Depending on which group controls the border, passage may be impossible due to roadblocks and affiliations. Following gains in territory by ISIS, the Turkish army has increased checks at the border which participants described as making the passage out of Syria difficult as. However, Turkey continues to accept refugees from Syria, checking them at the border and either letting them join relatives or bringing them to camps. Turkey currently officially hosts 1.8 million registered Syrians (UNHCR, 2015). However, all participants in this research were incredibly frustrated with statistical estimates

of numbers of refugees, internationally displaced and victims of the war. They believe that there may be at least double these figures, particularly in the estimates of fatalities from the war.

Turkey has declared a temporary protection regime, ensuring *non-refoulement* and assistance in 22 camps, where an estimated 217,000 people are staying as reported to the UNHCR. For many, a conscious decision is made to not stay in designated refugee camps. Ahmed, 31, described these camps as prison, never considering the possibility of seeking refuge in one. For him, going to a camp was akin to giving up on hope of a future and reunification with his wife, still in Syria. The aspirations of many Syrians, including reunification, are difficult if not impossible to achieve from refugee camps, in their opinion. Some estimates of the number of Syrians in Turkey go as high as 3 million (syrianrefugees.eu). With such large numbers of Syrians in Turkey, conditions for employment, education and housing are difficult. Mohammed described working 12-hour shifts for little pay on construction sites for over a year in central Turkey, saving money to help half his large family cross into Europe.

For a majority of Syrians, Turkey is at least a short-term destination. There, they will attempt to begin new lives, set up businesses, continue their education, work and integrate into Turkish society (See Thesis by Smorenburg, T., van Der Sar, T., Dermaux, J., Pereira, P., 2015). Of those encountered in the research, people had spent between two weeks and 4 years in Turkey. Yet for many, their hopes and dreams reach beyond Turkey. As described by respondents from the research in Turkey, the hope of a new life in the EU with greater opportunity, particularly for higher education, is always in their minds. Networks of Syrians in Turkey continuously share information of both successful and failed attempts at asylum in the EU. Epic stories of those who 'made it' galvanise young people in particular who see their lives ahead of them and more opportunity in Europe

Entering 'fortress' Europe

The land border existing between Turkey and the EU is incredibly difficult to cross. Since the building of a fence in the Evros region of northern Greece, the numbers of land and sea crossings have switched. In 2013, there were over 14,000 crossing by land and 1000 by sea, but the 2014 figures show over 14,000 sea crossings and 1000 by land. With the fortifying of the EU's land borders, the crossing has thus become more dangerous and the trafficking of migrants by boat has flourished. In the first four months of this year, Greek police statistics (see figure 9) show over 26,000 people arriving by boat compared to an estimated 4,657 for the same period of 2014. None of the research participants ever considered crossing the Evros on foot, all arrived by boat in the past year. Some had attempted to cross into Bulgaria but had been sent back to Turkey.

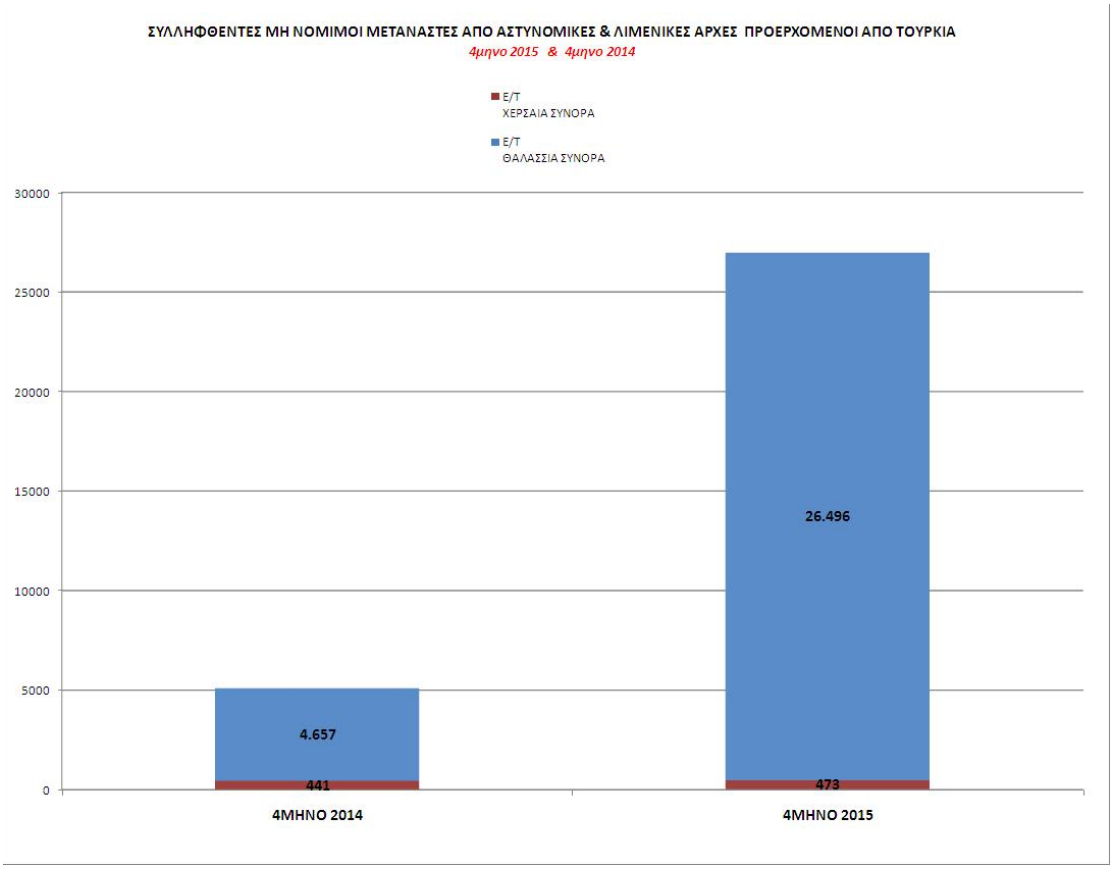

Figure 7 Police statistics on border apprehensions in Greece (RED in Evros region, BLUE on islands) for the first 4 months of 2014 and 2015

From the coast of Turkey, many of the Aegean islands of Greece are easily visible. Well-organised gangs of traffickers operate networks along the entire coast of Turkey. Participants on the island of Leros, described three major heads of traffickers each controlling a segment of the coast from Bodrum to Izmir and Istanbul. They described the ease with which they were put in contact with traffickers either through sharing of mobile numbers among refugees or through Facebook or a physical location frequented by Syrians. Traffickers have varying reputations of success, quality and safety. Playing on the hopes and dreams of people fleeing war, they offer a way out of Turkey on small unseaworthy vessels. Once in touch with traffickers, they are covertly transported to beaches on the coast to await their boat, which is navigated by a refugee. A participant in Leros, described waiting in the deathly cold of night for over 10 hours, before being loaded onto his boat at an unknown location. Most participants described spending between 1000 and 2000 euros on boat travel from Turkey to Greece, which is the equivalent of half the value of a small property in Syria.

The first attempt is not always successful. Some never make it past Turkish waters, either due to mechanical failures, misdirection, navigation failures on the part of the inexperienced refugees put in control of the boat or capture by Turkish authorities. It is difficult to estimate the success rate of these trips, and accounts of these crossings are bleak, marred with fear and desperation. They take place in the dark of night. Arriving on the boat, the migrants discover that the safe boat they were promised is in fact a small inflatable dingy. It is too late to turn back. After walking into freezing water, women and children are placed at the centre, men on the outside. Many do not know how to swim, some have bought life vests, those who cannot afford them, either go without or make do with an old tire. As the journey begins, participants described fear setting in. Not knowing which direction to take, the realisation that they may not survive haunts all those on board. Of those encountered on Leros, one boat had been lost at sea for over a day with 25 Syrians on board surviving off biscuits and little water. Another boat arrival explained that they had attempted a first journey, only to be stranded in Turkish waters with a failed motor within sight of a Greek land.

Those who did not make it describe harsh treatment by Turkish sea patrols. Yet once released, they would make another attempt. Participants, including Mohammed, described accounts of pushbacks or *refoulement.* This is when migrant boats after crossing into Greek waters are pushed back towards Turkey by a Greek boat. One migrant on his boat put a knife into the inflatable boat, with the knowledge that Greek authorities would be forced to rescue them. Unable to swim properly and with his sisters and father at sea, he swam towards the Greek boat. As he reached for the ladder, a gun was pointed at him and he was ordered to denounce the person who had sunk the boat. Desperate, he explained that he could not swim and that his family was also at sea. After helping them on board the drenched and tired migrants were interrogated in order to find the culprit.

Despite assurances of *non-refoulement* by Greek authorities, pushbacks have been documented by NGOs active on the islands. Detention and imprisonment of 'traffickers' in Greece has proved futile to stemming the flow of arrivals. An estimated 240 traffickers (astynomia.gr) have been caught this year according to Greek law enforcement, yet these numbers are questionable as those arrested are more likely to be refugees themselves. Of those who landed, some perceived themselves as having been lucky to survive and land on the Greek military island of Farmakonisi, half way between Turkey and Leros. Ahmed also described landing on an island only to find it to be uninhabited, after hours of desperation they were found by a military patrol.

These crossings take place on a nightly basis along the entire western coast of Turkey; the majority of refugees arrive on the larger islands Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Rhodes. Yet with hundreds of smaller islands along this border, many uninhabited, stopping such travel is nearly impossible due to the proximity of these islands to Turkey, as well as the sheer determination of those attempting travel.

Landing on Europe's most eastern frontier

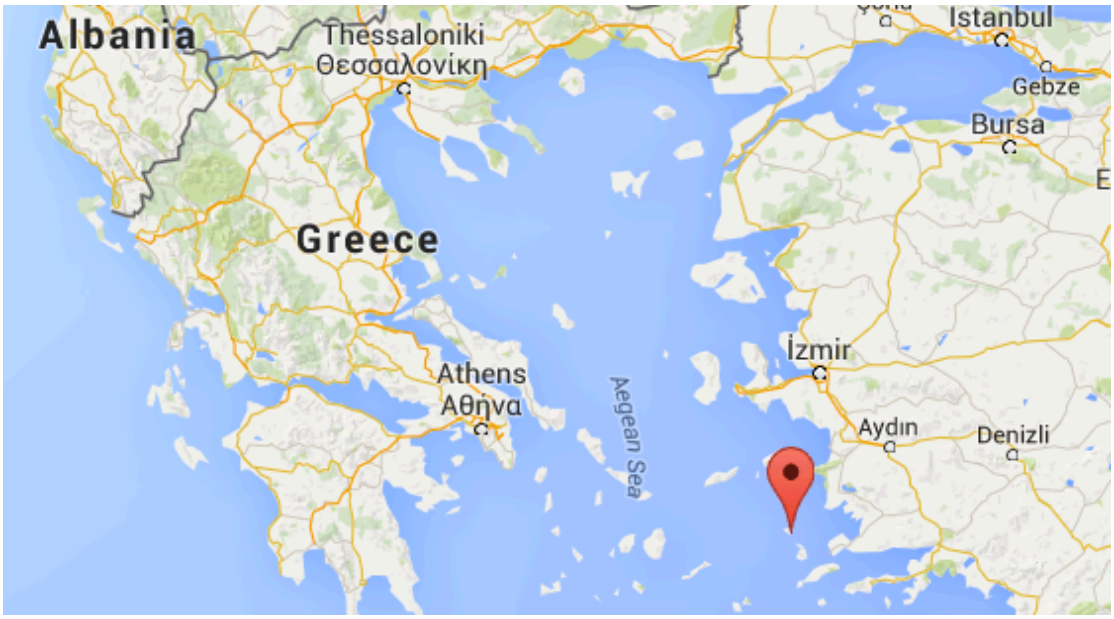

Figure 8 Map of Greece including border to Turkey and island of Leros

The UNHCR and Médecin sans Frontière, have recorded a clear jump in arrivals since the start of spring 2015 and the new 'migrant season'. Currently, around 600 migrants reach Europe's south eastern frontier daily. MSF is leading in the provision of care for refugees as they arrive cold, wet and in need of medical assistance. Yet with little support and shortages in staff, they are unable to give support to smaller islands struggling to receive this large influx (see map). Stathis Kyrousis, MSF head of mission in Greece, explains, "There is no reception system in place. In Leros, a reception facility was made available but has been left unused. And in Kos, in the first week of April, the police station was crammed with more than 200 people including pregnant women and children. They stayed in an awfully small space and were offered very limited assistance" (MSF Website, 2015). The following extract from the research field diary describes the observation made on the island of Leros.

> *"In Leros, Stathis Kyrousis put me in contact with local activists, Panos, a secondary school teacher and Matina, a retired lawyer. On the morning of the 20th of April, I was told of the arrival of 25 Syrian refugees. Arriving at the port authority in the morning, with little knowledge of the group composition and procedures that were to unfold, I was put to*

work helping make and distribute cheese sandwiches and water. This will be the first and only food they will receive till the evening. A daily food allowance of a mere 5 Euros per person is available to the locality and locals donate this food so as to give arrivals some respite before their first proper meal in the evening. Clothing has been donated from all over Greece, and is stored in a local building. With the help of my friend Iris, of French and Turkish origin, we began to talk to the newly arrived. The arrivals spoke little to no English. The women and children were the first to receive help, yet one of the young boys was clearly struggling with hypothermia and dehydration. Another women, whose Syrian-Kurdish husband spoke some Turkish, explained that his wife was 6 months pregnant. Explaining this to port authority, which had thus far not noted the pregnancy, they were both brought to the local hospital for medical care and a check-up. Another young man with a broken collarbone had received medical care on arrival. He was refusing to leave with a port officer, who wished to bring him to the pharmacy to buy a sling for his arm. The young man was worried about being taken away from the group not understanding the purpose of this trip. A chain of translation was thus created with port authority explaining the confusion to me in Greek, which was translated to Iris in French, who then interpreted in Turkish to the Kurdish Syrian man, who finally explained the situation in Arabic to the young man with the broken arm. The chaos and confusion in dealing with arrivals on this small island at the frontier of Europe's migration route is undeniable." (Excerpt from Field Diary, 23/04/2015)

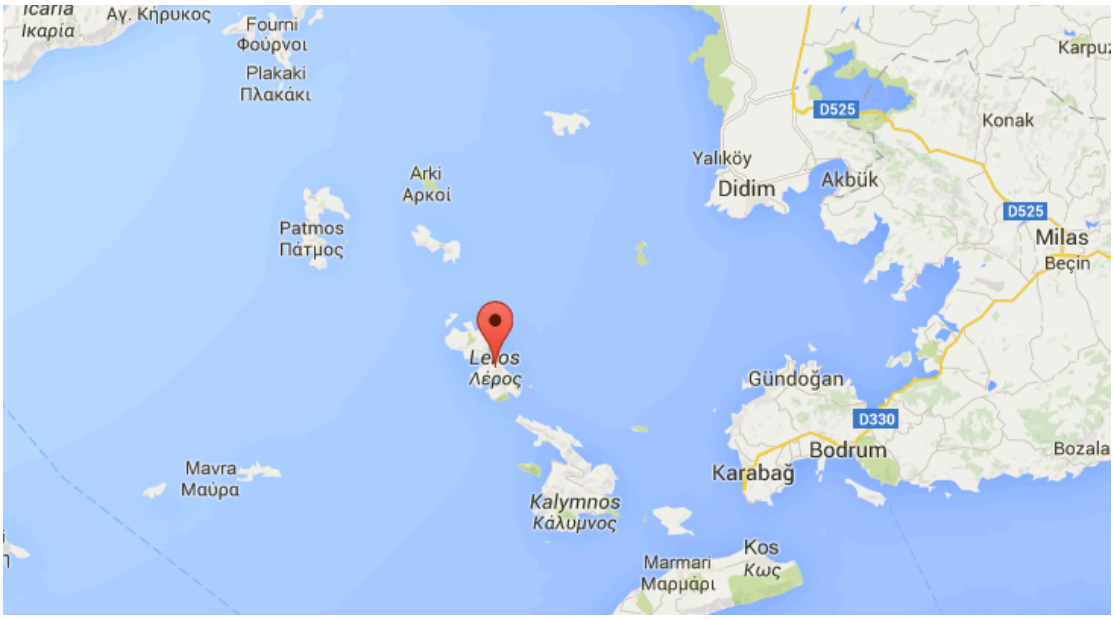

Figure 9 Map of Leros

With a population of around 8000 people, the island of Leros has a small police station and an understaffed port authority. From the start of April, the Solidarity Network of Leros has noted a clear rise in number of arrivals. Through a collective of volunteers, food and clothes are distributed to wet, hungry and tired newcomers. With no interpretation available, port authorities attempt to document each person's name, age and origin. As people wait in the port court yard to be called for photographs, refugees begin to ask question as to where they are, how long they will be detained and what will happen next. Volunteers circulate a small leaflet in Arabic, Farsi or English from MSF, which lists names and locations of organisations in Athens working with refugees and vulnerable people. Confusion reigns throughout the group, as they wonder which island they have landed on and what is happening. On two of the three arrivals noted by this research, one member of the group spoke some English; this person became the official interpreter for the group. In broken English port authorities try to explain that the group went through a preliminary check at the port authority before being brought to police. Here, they receive a piece of paper giving them the right to stay in Greece up to 6 months for Syrians and 1 month for the others, before they face potential deportation. Yet communication is near impossible, and the tired and confused refugees are fearful of authority.

The process of reception in Leros begins on the military island of Farmakonisi if boats are found at sea or land on that island. After disembarkation, participants described their properties and persons while being checked by the military for security reasons. Once the refugees had been deemed safe, they either spend the night on the island in military facilities or are transported by port authorities with the remains of their boat to the island of Leros. Syrian refugees who landed directly on Farmakonisi described bursting their inflatable boat from fear of being sent back on it. After port authorities have taken control of the group and brought them to their base, they give them a number, which is noted with pen onto the hands of each new arrival, and begin processing. This processing includes noting all arrivals age and origin and whether they are accompanied. One by one, individuals are called by their numbers. The rest wait around in the courtyard. The conversation quickly turns from asking about their current situation to planning the next stage of their journey.

After the preliminary processing by the port authority, the group is transferred to Agia Marina Police station on the other side of the island. Here they are fingerprinted and given their temporary papers. As witnessed by the research, this small police station quickly became over crowded with refugees as they wait to be called. If the entire group has not been processed by 22h30, all the refugees are kept in custody for the night. The women and children sleep in a small room kept aside in the hospital, while the men are detained in the cell overnight. This cell is built to accommodate 6 people. Panos, of the Solidarity Network of Leros, described up to 20 people staying in this cell overnight. This loose network of volunteers has managed to secure a suitable house in the grounds of the hospital, which is surrounded by fencing and has half a dozen rooms available (see figure 10). Yet unless pressured by volunteers or if the number of arrivals is too great, the police systematically refuse to use the building. As the refugees are still under police custody, police officers are reluctant to take night shifts at the house. If kept in the cell overnight, the refugees are locked in and left until morning. Of the three groups witnessed for this research, one stayed in the house, as they were 38 people in processing. As the number of arrivals rises the pressure on local resources, civil services and volunteers are increasingly

strained. Whilst most arrivals in Leros have come from Syria, on the last day on the island the volunteer network of Leros, noted the first arrival of three refugees from Yemen.

Figure 10 Photos of the house and rooms offered by the Leros Solidarity Network (2015)

The entire procedure of reception and processing can take up to three days. While the port and police authorities work to ensure that refugees can leave to Athens on the night ferry, refugees find some shade to rest in the port authority courtyard. This is the first stage of waiting in Greece. The first trip is overnight to Athens on a commercial ferry at a personal cost of 38 euros. An Afghan member of the second boat arrival in Leros, was unable to pay the cost of the taxi ride to the port and the boat to Athens and was left stranded in Agia Marina. His fate is unknown to the researcher.

In the courtyard, the clash between the urgency of the need to move onward and the continuous periods of waiting in immobility is stark. Although volunteers recommend to Syrians to get help from NGOs in Athens and claim asylum in Greece, most refugees confide that they will not do so. They have all heard of the Dublin Regulation and fear being sent back to Greece if they reach their destinations having been registered by Greek authorities. Some speak of going to Germany due to the presence of relatives, opportunities for further study as well as successful applications within their wider network. Two young Syrians, a brother (23) and sister (21), call their father in Dortmund to tell him they have

arrived in Greece. They want to know whether with his legal status as a refugee in Germany he can come get them in Athens. Others plan to gain refugee status in Sweden.

All speak of going to a place where they are sure to gain asylum, where they have an opportunity to study and work or where they can be reunited with family members. Most expect to attempt the long walk through the north eastern route to Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and Austria. This route is dangerous, but these well-informed travellers do not feel that they have any other option if they are to claim asylum in their country of destination. They ask how long it would take to gain asylum in Greece and ask how they are to survive during the 3 month wait. They do not see a future in Greece during its period of crisis and are unsure of what would happen were they to travel after gaining a status in Greece.

Arriving in Athens

Most refugees end up along their journey in the capital of Greece, Athens. The islands on which they have landed nearly all have direct ferry links to the port of Athens, Piraeus. The Syrian refugees from Leros and other islands arrive in this bustling port, where they attempt to find the metro to the heart of the city. They have been directed to find a hotel in the city centre near the metro station of Omonia. Here, they find a room for around 10€ per person per night. The standard of many of these hotels is poor and some locations are dangerous. A Syrian and Iraqi participant described wandering not far from their hotel only to stumble on an alleyway frequented by drug addicts and littered with used needles . For many it is the first time they see such sights. The harshness of life in parts of Athens and the encounters they experience, for most, is their first introduction to Europe. One respondent explained that such sights did not exist in Syria, and perceived this as a sign of the poverty of Greece. Of those encountered on the island of Leros, most were able to find short-term accommodation not far from their initial hotel through informal networks within and outside Greece. Others end up in unofficial housing, homeless or sheltered by NGOs and community organisations.

For some, Athens is a mere stepping-stone along their trajectory, yet for others it is a pool where the most desperate, who have often failed all attempts at leaving and lost the majority of their funds, are rendered immobile. For all, Athens is where they begin the process of planning the next move. This process often takes longer than refugees had originally planned, creating what they described as a frustrating feeling of immobility. The main route out of Greece used to be a mere ferry ride from Patras or Igoumenitsa to Italy. With heightened border controls, and the setting up of a FRONTEX base on the western coast of Greece, this route has been for the most part closed. Two participants described travelling to both Patras and Igoumenitsa, only to be stopped, detained and told to return to Athens. Apostolis Veizis of MSF's team in Athens also explained that flying out of Greece used to be much easier . Under pressure from Northern EU member states, Greece's airport border staff, as well as private air carrier companies, have increased the frequency and sophistication of their passport checks.

Refugees and Transit

The journey refugees face once they have fled not only their homes, but their country is complex and fraught with danger. Whilst it is clear that refugees must be considered as desperate individuals in need of humanitarian assistance, investigating the entire trajectory to Greece shows how each person takes individual decisions based on their immediate needs, financial capacities, mobility experience whilst maintaining a longer term vision of where and how they will live their "new lives" in the future. Managing these complex decisions under many external pressures is extremely difficult and dealt with differently by each person. Understanding this individual decision-making and long-term aspirations can therefore greatly assist analysis of patterns of mobility amongst refugees. Whilst many may stop along the trajectory they undertake, increasing numbers are continuing to enter the EU with the hope of a brighter future than that they expect in Lebanon or Turkey. As a midpoint along the trajectory and as a member of the EU, the experience of Greece as a host to refugees is a clear example of how gaining official recognition of refugee status is not the main determinant of the mobility of refugees.

Asylum is, however, a pressing need that will help in the long-term goals and aspirations of refugees. The contrast between the urgency of immediate aid and the establishment of a degree of stability in which refugees can begin to start their new lives is sharp. Many of the journeys to asylum involve periods of immobility that to refugees are much too long. After the long journey into the EU, most refugees are frustrated at the slow processing on the islands as they are keen to move onwards. With increasing numbers of arrivals and a collapsing reception system fragmented across over 100 small islands, this waiting period has increased and the conditions on the islands have deteriorated alarmingly (MSF, 2015). Whilst claiming asylum in Greece is an option, in practice it does not give refugees the right to short term aid or loner term economic opportunity. According to this research, Syrians arriving in Greece have the clear goal of leaving the country as soon as possible. The following chapter will describe how the participants of this research continued their journey onward and how they experienced transit through Greece with the goal of gaining asylum in other EU Member States.

VI - Gaining Asylum in EU Member States

Once in Greece, the Syrians as well as Iraqis and Afghans encountered in this research all attempt to move onwards towards northern Europe. Although passport controls within the 26 countries party to Schengen Agreement ease international movement, leaving Greece is currently increasingly difficult for refugees. This research found three methods of leaving Greece described as follows: the north-eastern land route, air travel and through double asylum claims. Yet many are getting stuck in Greece as they run out of funds through multiple failed attempts.

The most common but most dangerous route is the north-eastern one. This expensive and testing journey out of Greece involves leaving an EU Member state with the aim of re-entering usually through Hungary. Whilst some participants used air travel, border control is more strict at airports. This route is also limited to those who are at ease in the airport setting and is usually taken by lone travellers to remain inconspicuous.

This chapter concludes by describing how application for asylum in Greece is used as a method of transit to exit Greece legally. Whilst this is the only legal way of leaving Greece, the Greek refugee status only gives residency in Greece and allows for travel for up to 3 months. To be able to stay in another EU country, therefore involves the illegal reapplication for asylum in a second EU member state. The chapter continues the narrative of trajectory according to interviews as it describes the danger and uncertainty refugees face despite having entered Europe's borders whilst they attempt onward movement.

The road to Macedonia

With increased border controls on exiting Greece, the options for sea and air travel have narrowed and the majority of refugees have turned to the long and arduous land route through Macedonia and beyond. Although, some attempted to navigate this route using GPS and Google maps on a smartphone, most pay up

to and over 6000€ per person to be guided on foot along the entire way. A majority of those taking this route are young men. Yet both women and children as young as 13 participating in this research, either planned to travel on foot, had attempted and failed, or had succeeded. Among those who succeeded were a young Syrian and his 13-year-old cousin, Adnan. Adnan's parents, who could only afford the trip for one person, sent the young boy on this month long journey. Now in Germany, his aim is to reunite his family. To reach Germany, Adnan and his older cousin travelled from Athens to Northern Greece, where they journeyed to the north most border of the country. Greek authorities have caught many before they are even able to make it to the Macedonian border. Those who reached the border, walked across hills and countryside to central Macedonia. From there they moved onward to Serbia and Hungary. The final leg of the journey on foot was across the border and into Austrian territory, where Adnan and his cousin were able to take a train to Germany.

This journey is fraught with danger and challenging barriers along the entire way. Crossing the Macedonian border, most follow the train tracks that at times go through one-way tunnels. Mohammed described running through tunnels with his farther and sisters, as they feared the arrival of a train. Many migrants lose their lives on these tracks, the numbers of deaths at this border are unknown (Amnesty.org). Some do not manage to take this route and are pushed back to Greece. This included Mohammed and his family, who were caught by Macedonian police in the border region. They were placed in police vehicles and began the journey back to Greece. Mohammed attempted this journey five times over the space of 2 months before giving up hope and returning to Athens. Others make it further, yet at each border crossing, if caught they will be sent back to the previous country. Those who made it further into the country may be caught and detained in harsh conditions. This incredible journey across the western Balkans takes a minimum of 2 weeks. For the duration of these two weeks, capture by authorities or gangs hostile to migrants is the principal danger and fear. Amnesty International has recorded stories of migrants being captured by criminal gangs under the pretence of helping them navigate the route, only to be extorted of their remaining money.

Flying out of Greece

In comparison, the trials of those who choose to travel by plane may seem less arduous. The cost of an air ticket can be considerably lower. A cheap counterfeit European ID goes for as little as 200€. While this may seem like a good option, most of these IDs are confiscated at passport control and their holders detained for questioning. The process of finding these travel documents is long and dangerous. Finding and meeting with traffickers at all hours in an unknown city was described as incredibly nerve-racking. Of those met in Leros, a group of 4 refugees (three from Syria and one from Iraq) stuck together and helped each other both emotionally and practically, often meeting traffickers in groups of two. In between meetings, continuous discussion took place on the quality of the papers, the standards of traffickers as well as their tactics in attempting to get past passport controls. Their own agency is key to their attempt to slip through passport control, and becomes central to self-criticism after failed attempts. For a considerably larger sum, which varies depending on the deal brokered with traffickers, they are able to negotiate multiple airport attempts.

Nour, a 25-year-old accounting graduate, managed to acquire a real Belgian passport with a close to matching photo. Once the deal had been made, he was prepared to leave at any time of day or night. During this particularly stressful period of waiting, the trafficker holds onto the passport and buys him a flight. At any given notice, Nour can be told to travel to the airport and will be given all his travel documents. From here on, it is up to him. After checking in, the second test of passport control tests his nerves. Luckily for him he was able to pass. Yet, once he arrived at the gate his nerves began to show, the Lufthansa ticket inspection became suspicious. They asked him to do his signature over five times. Unable to replicate the signature on the passport, he was taken down to the police station below the airport. With another 3 detainees, he decided to admit that he wass Syrian when asked where he was really from. This specific encounter with police was somewhat informal and good-humoured. Once Nour had explained that he was Syrian, the police asked him a few more questions and he was able to ask

police how they had recognised him. After a brief conversation, he was told to leave the airport and the passport was confiscated.

This attempt was the first of many for Nour. Ahmed also described attempting to travel on a Belgian as well as an Italian passport. He was stopped both times when he was unable to respond to more than a few simple phrases in the respective language of the passport he was holding. For Nour, the deal he had made with his trafficker involved multiple tries. At the cost of the trafficker, a new passport and ticket were issued and Nour renewed his attempts. At every return to his flat in Athens, discussion was intense. How had he been caught. The failures of the trafficker, who had once again booked a flight on Lufthansa where the same flight attendant recognised Nour. What could be done to calm his nerves. Taking the advice of his fellow travellers, he finally was able to travel to Austria with the help of a more expensive trafficker and better documents. Yet for many these discouraging attempts are fruitless. The risk of losing all the money they have saved for their trip is daunting.

Of those encountered in Leros, to the knowledge of the researcher, four successfully managed to leave Greece by plane. Some succeeded in leaving on foot. Yet for over 70, their fate is unknown. Having fallen into the underworld of trafficking networks in Athens, their experience of this city is physically and mentally draining and with this, their will to leave Greece increases with each passing day. Despite being within the EU's Schengen Area, freedom of movement for those of Syrian origin (and other refugees) is illusory. For many, their time in Athens left mixed emotions. They felt that the Greek people were caring and understanding, whilst the Greek system was harsh and corrupt. Having witnessed corruption first hand in Leros and Athens as well as the relative impunity under which traffickers operate, they believed that the Greek system was failing in many ways. They also recognised much of the Greek culture and environment from their own back in Syria and appreciated the difficulties faced by Greeks in the tough economic climate. If the circumstances were not so difficult they could envisage living in Greece, yet the lack of job and study prospects make the chance at building new lives here inconceivable.

Stuck in Greece

With the closing of the EU's internal borders, an increasing number of migrants and refugees are 'stuck' in Greece (UNHCR, 2015). The group of Syrians protesters met in this research were indeed in this situation. One of the participants, who wished to remain anonymous, had been in Greece for over 6 months and stated that "Greece is a big prison, I just can't leave". This group of 40 Syrians living together in Asyrmatos had a particular experience of Greece that to some degree reflects the conditions that many Syrians face whilst stuck in transit, yet can also be seen as exceptional. All had arrived in Greece the previous summer on boats to the Dodecanese islands. Arriving in Greece they immediately attempted to leave on foot via the north-eastern route. After multiple failed attempts, the loss of large sums of money, capture by authorities and in some cases periods of detention, they reluctantly returned to Athens with nowhere else to turn. A few had also unsuccessfully attempted flying. With nowhere to go and little money, they were drawn to Syntagma square in the centre of Athens in front of parliament where hundreds of Syrians where protesting for their rights, humanitarian aid, and if this was not possible safe passage to countries where help is available (enikos.gr).

Figure 11 Syrians protesting in Syntagma Square (Dimitris Sideridis, 9/12/2014)

In the cold winter months towards the end of November and the start of December, with nowhere else to turn, they stayed on the square night and day. Tensions around Greece's political-economic situation were high at this time and the future of Greece within the Euro Area and even the EU was being questioned in the media. At the start of December and with elections looming, the plight of these refugees was well publicised and many were interviewed by the media. During this period, two Syrian protesters lost their lives, one to hypothermia and the other attempting to cross into Macedonia (guardian.co.uk). After weeks of protest, local Syriza activists as well as a community group came to the help of those who remained. A list of names was drawn up and the process of asylum was explained to them. They were told that this list would be prioritized. A community centre, known as Asyrmatos in Agios Dimitrios, was converted into temporary shelter. Donations, in the form of mattresses as well as daily food supplies, were made to the community centre. By the start of 2015, most of the refugees had been in Greece for over 4 months. They had begun this long bureaucratic process with the promise of gaining asylum on a fast track program.

The experience of two asylum seekers in this process illustrates the difficulties and frustrations the refugees face. Taking the metro from Daphne station, Mohammed and Ahmed made the 40-minute journey from their hostel to Katixaki, where the department of migration is located. Here they discover that a mere 20 asylum seekers a day are seen. Queues on the street outside the office begin to form around 11pm the previous night. They therefore left Katixaki disappointed but returned at night to sleep on the street and wait to enter the building next day. Once in the building, the process of gaining asylum in Greece began. Preliminary questions evaluate their situation and a phone number is recorded for contact. The next stage is a call for interview. Once interviewed, their fingerprints are taken and they are told to return in two weeks. With hundreds of refugees being processed every week and understaffed offices, the Syrians of Asyrmatos were quick to realise that the 15 day processing they were promised was not to be. With much difficulty, they attempted to communicate with staff that more often than not did not speak much English let alone Arabic. Once again the lack of interpreters was a hindrance to processing.

Figure 12 Refugees Queuing at Katixaki Asylum Centre

During this frustrating period of waiting, flows of food donations began to slow as attention turned to elections. With a change in government at the end of January, the hope offered by Syriza galvanised many. Yet, with their difficult experiences in Syria in mind, most quickly became jaded to the empty words of politicians. After their interviews they returned on many occasions to Katixaki, each time waiting in line overnight, only to be told "perimene" or "wait" in Greek. After being told this, one refugee described his confusion as he had waited 2 hours before returning to the desk only to be told to come back in 2 weeks. At this point, he understood the indefinite nature of the word "wait". Waiting becomes the refugees main state of mind. With little money most spend all day and night in Asyrmatos. With only one small room for women and children, the main space within the community centre was busy, loud and made sleeping impossible until the early hours of the morning. Sleeping from around 5 to 11 AM, the rest of their time was spent playing cards and in endless discussion about their options, the future, Syria and stories of successful asylum in northern EU Member States.

Out of the 40 refugees in Asyrmatos, only one had found a job in a clothing factory with the help of connections from Syria. As an asylum seeker, he does not have the right to work, and therefore worked informally. The group was majority

male, yet women and children also shared this space. Children played with toys donated to the centre and stayed awake throughout the night with the adults. Most had not been to school since they left Syria.

With backgrounds across the entire country and social classes, this mixed group became a small community. Yet tensions were rife. Coming from different towns, cities and villages, their experience of the war differed widely. Most were anti the Assad regime, yet some were pro-regime. Some had fought with the army, others not. Depending on where they were located some had witnessed atrocities committed by both government and opposition. Some had suffered injuries in the war, including a young woman with two children who had been hit by shrapnel and had the lower half of her leg amputated. Arguments broke out, and tensions over food supplies increased over time. Yet despite these difficulties, with little social and psychological support from outside, the group became close and dependent on each other.

As the Syrians of Asyrmatos continued their wait for refugee status and ID cards to prove it, Greece witnessed an historic change in government. With the new Syriza government in office, Greece began a long and continuing series of negotiations with European and international institutions surrounding its economic bailout, austerity programme and the humanitarian crisis faced by millions of Greeks as well as migrants. The stark reality of this situation can be illustrated in the following conversation recorded in this researcher's field diary, which took place with two participants from Asyrmatos:

> *"Entering the metro station in Daphne, direction Syntagma, we jumped on the metro, tickets in hand. As the metro departed, a young man followed and began a speech in Greek of which the public transport users of Athens no longer pay attention to. "Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, I am homeless and have not eaten today. I am unemployed and have nowhere to go and no money for food. If you could kindly buy a lighter from me I would be very grateful." As he walked through the train, ignored by most, the*

Syrians wondered what he had to say. After briefly translating, the man stopped in front of us. One of the refugees said, I am Syrian and I also don't have a job, house or money. The man looked and him and slowly moved on." (Excerpt from Field Diary 25/02/2015)

Asylum seekers and refugees in Athens are vying for the same unavailable state resources as Greek citizens. The Asylum Centre has faced funding and staff cuts under the austerity measures. Housing for asylum seekers is almost non-existent. With a lack of social services, NGOs and activist groups have attempted to fill the gap. Many organisations including Praksis, the Greek Council for Refugees, Médecin Sans Frontière and the Solidarity Network are doing vital work to address this humanitarian crisis. The programme director of Praksis and MSF, described difficult work circumstances, under funding and staffing as well as an unprecedented number of people in need of help, particularly in detention facilities. MSF have great difficulty in accessing detention centres to provide medical care, which is for the most part lacking. Yet with increasing flows of refugees since the start of 2015, pressure on these civil society organisations has reached breaking point. Praksis declared that they would soon run out of funding for 2015, and would be unable to give their services particularly in the housing of undocumented minors. These organisations also stated that despite friendly relations with the new government, it was reluctant to push forward pro-migration policies due to the fear of a backlash from the Greek population. Refugees have also become caught in the politics surrounding austerity and European financial support to Greece. In March 2015, as the negotiations reached a head, refugees became a political pawn as the media widely reported a Greek minister threatening to send all refugees to Germany.

While the Greek economic crisis continued to occupy European political attention, the majority of refugees from Asyrmatos continued to wait for their ID. At the start of March, a dozen of them received their ID. As holders of refugee IDs they have residency in Greece, the right to work and travel for 3 months at a time. Yet after the emotional and psychological rollercoaster they had experienced, the meaning of this ID was purely as a travel document as it does

not offer access to services. Despite giving them the right to work, the opportunities for the migrant population to find employment are limited. The unemployment rate of migrants is almost double the already very high rate of the Greek population. So they immediately booked flights to Hamburg, Germany. Combined with their Syrian passport, they were assured by authorities that they could fly. Yet until these first few had managed to fly out of Greece, the group could still not believe that they would be able to leave. Combined with a minimum 3 months of waiting for asylum on the fast track programme, the uncertainty and confusion surrounding EU asylum procedures exacerbated their volatile emotional states.

Using their Asyrmatos network, the group concluded that with the ID they could fly to Germany where they would destroy the card before going to a refugee camp and reapplying for asylum. For the next months, they stayed in constant contact with each other so as to discover whether they would be picked up in the records of the common asylum system and sent back to Greece under the terms of the Dublin Regulation. For those who did not have a Syrian passport, the wait was even longer as they would have to apply for a refugee passport after receiving their ID.

By the end of March, 37 members of the group from Asyrmatos had managed to leave Greece in this way. During the prolonged waiting period, their chosen country of destination changed multiple times, some saying Sweden, some Norway, others The Netherlands, Denmark and Germany. Depending on laws, policies, and second hand experiences of other migrants, their planned destination would continuously change over the entire journey. Yet once the first group had successfully gained asylum in Hamburg, Germany, many of the rest chose to follow. Since then, most have gained asylum in Germany and have begun new lives. Despite the success of 37 members of Asyrmatos in leaving the memory of their Greek ordeal behind, three remained. Over the space of 4 months, the conditions in the community centre of Asyrmatos had severely deteriorated. The local community decided to take back the building and asked the remaining Syrians to leave, their fate is unknown to this researcher.

Reaching Asylum

There are 1.6 million refugees in the EU, which represents 13% of global refugees. This research has described at length one trajectory among many undertaken by Syrians to enter the EU and claim asylum. Both in Greece and in Germany, Syrians are receiving priority treatment and given refugee status in much shorter periods of time, whilst other refugees are not so fortunate. The entire journey from Syria to a safe haven, where their basic needs are met but also where they feel they have opportunities for the future, can take months or years.

Germany has accepted and given refugee status to over 30,000 Syrians since the start of the civil war. With a comprehensive system of reception and processing of refugees, Germany gives considerable aid to asylum seekers as well as to other recognized refugees. For many finally arriving in a temporary refugee camp in Germany is a respite after a long and arduous journey, having used up all their resources. For the time being, until they gain refugee status, they no longer have to worry about food and a bed for the night.

Having arrived in Germany, five participants were able to maintain contact via Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype or e-mail. While they exchange stories amongst each other and with people of other nationalities, the five participants found that the route they had taken had been less perilous than others in their network. All had flown to Germany. Their situation as asylum claimers is also relatively certain in Germany. They see that those who entered via the north-eastern land route had experienced trauma and extreme uncertainty. The uncertainty of their claim for asylum was also a great fear. Nour described meeting Syrians who had been captured, finger printed and been placed in refugee camps in Hungary. They had managed to escape the camp and make it to Germany, only to be in fear of deportation to Hungary under the Dublin Regulation. This constant fear of deportation remains up to and until they gain refugee status. But these five young Syrian men also know that their journey is not over. Claiming asylum in Germany can take up to 3 months. During this time they continue waiting for

interviews, paperwork, being moved to a new camp, finding housing, beginning German classes, in essence starting a new life in a new country.

Whilst a new phase of their journey begins, offering a chance at a new start, the war in Syria continues. Friends and family continue to face extreme insecurity and many will also attempt the journey to Europe. Two of the five Syrians in Germany had begun a new lengthy bureaucratic process, that of family reunification. A date has been set for Mohammed's family to go to the German embassy in Istanbul and be given visas so as to travel directly to Germany. This date is for 1st March 2016. The waiting thus continues. Many friends, family and acquaintances contact them for information on their journey, to find out which traffickers can be trusted, what methods they used and how much money this will cost.

Despite these participants successfully leaving Greece, a large number of refugees never make it. With each country along the route blaming the previous country for letting them pass, refugees are continuously sent back to a previous country of transit. Some arrive in a destination and fail in their asylum claim. Falling out of the system they may attempt applications elsewhere or be deported. After such a long journey of trials, tribulations, successes, errors, luck, tragedy, being sent back to a country of transit is nearly impossible to cope with psychologically. Similarly those who manage to start a new life cannot help but be profoundly changed once they receive asylum. This journey will have a lasting impact on their lives and they say that they will never forget the places, people and cultures they have seen. Some said that once able to, they would return to Greece as tourists as they missed the culture and the environment of the Mediterranean. Most miss home tremendously. They miss their family, their friends, their homes, and their beds. They miss the food, but most of all, they miss being in a place where they belong.

Syrians in Europe maintain contact with those left behind, they hear of what is happening in their hometowns, the new deaths and disappearances. Now in Europe, they are frustrated with much of the international media's portrayal of

the war and it's relentless focus on ISIS. They hope for the war to end soon, and the Bashar al Assad regime to fall. Yet they feel that Europe no longer cares. As they discuss the future of Syria, if and when the regime ends, they fear for the state of the country after such long and relentless destruction. There is hope that they will one day return, but the uncertainty is so great that they must keep this hope on hold. They say that one day they will return whether it is to rediscover their home or to settle there again. But in the meantime they must create a new home, a new place to belong.

The end of the line?

The dangers faced by refugees along their entire journey including after entering EU territory are alarming. The human tragedy and breaches of their rights begin from leaving Syria and do not end until they secure asylum. The majority of new arrivals on the EU's south eastern shores this year will most likely be facing innumerable dangers attempting to leave Greece via Macedonia. The barriers to asylum seeking in EU countries that are not the first point of entry in effect force refugees into a route fraught with risks of human rights breaches by authorities, detention, *refoulement* as well as violence at the hands of anti-migrant gangs. Despite the urgency of leaving the war behind and beginning a new life, waiting along the entire process is endless. Turning a blind eye to the realities faced by Syrian and other refugees means that the majority do not find refuge whilst those that do are trafficked illegally, rather than provided a legal route to the refuge the 1951 UN Refugee Convention seeks to guarantee.

Following the recent tragedies in the Mediterranean, a focus has been put on traffickers particularly in transit countries outside the European area. The agency of migrants themselves is often overlooked, including by humanitarian agencies. There is still a recurring narrative in the media of the migrant who did not know the dangers he/she would face along the way. Yet the journeys described in this research are taken on with full knowledge of the laws, policies and, crucially, the realities of a very risky journey learnt through various refugee networks . The routes taken are well known in each country. Despite not

speaking much English all those who arrived in Greece would say 'Dublin' and understood that as soon as their fingerprints were taken, they would be in the European common asylum system. The entire journey has the purpose of gaining asylum and thus legality in a country where they have social and economic opportunity. Whilst the journey is long and may fail, a participant from the research in Istanbul who planned to undertake the journey stated what many young Syrians feel; "I will not forgive myself if I do not at least try".

Some who arrived in Greece had also attempted formal routes before choosing to get on a boat. One participant from Iraq, had spent the last 9 years travelling after fleeing his country. Having waited over a year for relocation with the UNHCR in Istanbul, with his last money he paid for irregular passage through Greece to Finland. The only legal routes into Europe to gain asylum can take years and have no certainty. Most cannot wait this long for financial, political as well as personal reasons. Once they have left their country of origin, refugees have both immediate as well as long-term goals. By choosing to get on the now infamous boats to Greece, they feel like they are taking control of their lives. They are trying to reach their goals, yet before they can reach these goals they must apply for asylum. During this asylum process, those in Germany described having to play down their role in their own migration. They did this by saying that traffickers forced them to destroy documents. Crucially they also had to play down their ambitions so as not to sound like they had come to Europe for economic benefits.

The journey in itself is a battle between immediate needs and long-term reflections and hopes. Throughout the journey, there is a clear purpose. Yet once they gain legality, their future is unknown. Of those who had finally gained refugee status, the shock of finally achieving what they hoped for leaves a period of wonder as to what comes next. Having experienced mobility, discovered cities, countries and cultures, many do not know if this new destination is where they will stay. As they reflect on their new identity as refugees in their respective countries of asylum, they wonder when and if they will ever find a new home. Many spoke of long-term projects of gaining citizenship in Europe, allowing them

to travel and discover the world in search of new and interesting opportunities. Some also maintain hope that one-day they will be able to return to Syria with first-hand knowledge, comparison points and appreciation of the country they call home. This initial mobility can thus be a catalyst for increased mobility. MPI (Migration Policy Institute) President Emeritus Demetrios G. Papademetriou states that policymakers "need to consider refugees not just as victims in need of shelter, but social and economic actors with a need for individual fulfilment and opportunities, and the potential to contribute to their host communities through their skills, international networks, access to unique streams of aid and resources, and purchase of local goods and services."

Syrians and asylum in the EU

Looking at the case of Syrian refugees in Greece, it is clear that transit is an intangible concept. Transit as defined in this research is a period of immobility within a migratory trajectory where there are aspirations of continued mobility. According to this definition, Syrians do indeed transit through Greece using the three methods documented in this research. Yet this period of transit is complex, in particular due to their status as asylum seekers. As a Member State of the European Union, Greece is signatory to the 1951 UN Human Rights Convention on Refugees. Since the start of 2015, Syrians have lodged 476 applications for asylum in Greece (see appendix). The research followed this process for 40 Syrian asylum seekers. Out of these 40, 37 were fast tracked through this process due to their role in a widely published protest in Syntagma in December 2014. Yet none wanted asylum in Greece. The meaning of getting the status of refugee in Greece was to use the refugee ID as a travel document for onward movement. Not only is Greece's asylum process failing under the pressures of staff shortages and funding cuts, but Syrians themselves do not assign the same meaning to the status of refugee in Greece as they do to such status in Germany. Whilst some Syrians are applying for asylum in Greece, the highest number of applications in 2015 in the European Union as a whole has been in Germany. With 13,783 asylum applications lodged by Syrians in Germany between January and March 2015, Germany also hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees, over 30,000

(UNHCR.org). Yet many other Member States are lagging behind in meeting the challenge posed by the exodus from Syria. The UK for example has granted asylum to fewer than 4000 Syrians since the start of the war.

EU Common Asylum Procedures, known as the Dublin Regulation, have moved towards a shared database of asylum applications so as to assess which Member State is responsible for an individual refugee. This Common Regulation is based on the assumption that asylum procedures are equal across all member states. Under the Dublin Regulation, the country of first entry is deemed responsible. This puts the burden on EU countries, which border on the main transit routes for refugees, such as Greece. Yet since the 2011 and the *M.S.S. v Greece and Belgium* judgment, the return of refugees to Greece has been suspended. This landmark judgment reflected the inhumane conditions faced by refugees in Greece. It also clearly points to the fact that the human rights of refugees were being breached within EU borders. Whilst it is well known that conditions in Greece are inadequate for refugees, EU Member States continue to fortify their internal borders. What is described as the securitization of EU borders is in fact hindering safe passage of asylum seekers out of Greece. According to the majority of those interviewed for this research, Syrians are purposefully avoiding authorities to limit the chances of being returned to Greece under the Dublin Regulation. Well-informed on EU migration policy as well as the current socio-economic situation of Greece, these migrants are consistently avoiding registration in Greece so as to move onward. For those who failed to leave Greece, gaining refugee status was thus only a way of leaving Greece and reapplying elsewhere, thus creating double asylum applications within the EU. By considering the functioning of the EU system based on the Dublin Regulation thought the perspective of refugees as agents taking conscious decisions about how to reach their goal of more secure future, this research has shown that the system has s fundamental flaws.

This clash between policy makers and the reality on the ground shows how the European Union is failing in upholding standards of protection of refugees. To gain asylum in the European Union, the 3 million Syrians in Turkey have to either wait for a place in the resettlement lottery, or illegally navigate across the

Mediterranean into the EU. This research has shown that because traffickers are able to offer a faster route to gaining asylum, refugees will continue to employ them rather than go to embassies. During the course of this research, the tragic death of over 800 migrants in one capsized boat in the Mediterranean sparked emergency action by the European Council. However the decisions taken to tackle the humanitarian and other dimensions of the flow of migrants and refugees towards the EU offered only 20,000 places for resettlement by other member states, leaving Italy and Greece as the main points of entry to cope on their own. Not only does the idea of a formal resettlement go against the freedom of choice of refugees in their mobility, but it also fails to adequately share the burden placed on these countries. An underlying weakness in the approach is that it ignores the reality that refugees' point of entry into the EU is usually not a chosen destination. As this research has shown, the assumption that refugees have chosen a final destination when they flee their country of origin is not a solid basis for policy and ignores the reality of onward movement through several possible transit countries, which may or may not become places of more permanent settlement.

VII - Conclusions

This thesis has sought to shed light on the question of the role of Greece as a host country for Syrians attempting to gain asylum in the EU. It has shown that Greece's role as a host country is ambiguous. Within the EU, Greece has the dual responsibility of enforcing control on its external border, whilst maintaining standards of reception for refugees. Greece is struggling on both counts. Against the backdrop of the socio-economic crisis faced by Greek citizens and the cuts to social spending in the past 5 years, the large influx of refugees in 2015 has pushed Greece to its limits. Greece's role is thus restricted to that of a transit country as it fails to uphold adequate standards of care towards refugees who are obliged to move on to a more secure country. As this research has found in seeking to understand the way refugee trajectories develop through transit countries, the agency of refugees is the main determinant of patterns of onward movement. Syrians do not wish to stay in Greece and do not feel that Greece can give them the opportunities they seek in their aim of gaining asylum. This finding demonstrates the blurred lines between forced and voluntary migration of refugees. Throughout their trajectory, Syrian refugees have the potential to settle. Whilst the situation worsens in Syria, EU countries continue to fail to respond with adequate quotas for resettlement. The contrast between the 2 million Syrians officially in Turkey and the 250,000 in the entire European Union illustrates the imbalance in the international response to the shared challenge posed by desperate people fleeing a brutal conflict. The first half of 2015 has shown that limits to legal pathways towards asylum mean that Syrians have taken their trajectory into their own hands.

For Syrian refugees, Europe is perceived as a safe haven and a chance at a new start after fleeing their homes. Although EU citizens have free movement in the Schengen area, asylum seekers have highly restricted mobility. Some of the richest countries in the world are in effect relying on increased border controls and human rights breaches along the entire refugee trajectory to limit the number of applications for asylum in their country. But rather than solve the question of where refugees can stay, it forces the flow into illegal channels.

This research by focusing on how refugees navigate the routes to an eventual place of asylum leads to a questioning of the assumption that gaining asylum in a particular country is the end goal for refugees. The paradox is clear between the right to asylum in the EU of Syrians fleeing the conflict and the fact that the routes into an EU country where asylum can be claimed are illegal. Refugees' choices about how to deal with this paradox have an important perhaps determining influence on patterns of refugee flight. The humanitarian crisis faced on Greek islands is brought about by restrictive EU asylum policies founded on the idea that asylum seekers must be on the soil of a country to begin the application process. These same restrictive border control policies are facilitating the flourishing of trafficking and corruption in transit countries such as Greece.

As the conflict in Syria persists and the numbers of refugees increases, the challenge facing the EU is set to increase. The uncertain situation in Greece is continuously evolving and exacerbating the suffering of refugees. Whilst this research has focused on the case of Syrians, it is important to note that they have comparative advantage in their asylum claims compared to other nationalities such as Iraqis, Afghans and Eritreans. As the second largest number of arrivals in Greece, these refugees face even more insecurity and long periods of uncertainty whilst they wait on asylum claims. This highlights the EU's failure to respond adequately to the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War.

Policy implications: moving forward

This research has highlighted a major weakness in the underlying principles, which shape the Dublin Regulation. Basing the registration of refugees on their country of entry which may not be the refugees' choice of potential settlement creates a paradox in which a supposedly common migration policy is in fact national. Asylum seekers must therefore be extremely careful in deciding where to register as this will officially be their country of residence in the foreseeable future. One consequence of this is that countries like Greece become places of

transit where moving on to a preferred destination obliges refugees to enter a risky world of illegality and corruption. The logical solution to this dysfunctional system is further integration of asylum procedures such as a EU-wide Refugee Status.

The EU needs to offer multiple methods of processing to reflect the complexities of the situations faced by refugee. This should begin with increasing the number of resettlements from outside the EU through processing and relocation in refugee camps. It should also allow for the processing of refugees in EU member state embassies in countries of refugee origin or transit.

Prior to such major reform, this research offers some more immediate solutions. For example, Greece must speed up the process of asylum seeking but given the limitations of Greece's economic situation it needs help from the EU. Other EU countries should also allow asylum seekers to apply within their embassies in Greece, as well as allow safe passage out of Greece for those identified as asylum seekers such as holders of Syrian passports (particularly for those who are trying to reach family members).

In addition to an improved common asylum policy, refugees who hold an EU MS refugee identification must be allowed residency anywhere in the Schengen area and be given the same rights as refugees holding country documentation. Holding a Greek refugee ID should give the same rights as the holders of German refugee ID once in Germany. The humanitarian crisis on Greece's islands deserves a major international support effort, but the root cause of boat arrivals must also be addressed by opening legal channels into the EU.

Finally, the EU needs to address the root cause in Syria of this humanitarian crisis and the abuse of human rights. Syrian refugees must have the opportunity to return voluntarily to a country at peace where their rights are respected by a democratic Syrian State.

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Appendix

UNHCR (2015) New asylum application lodged in selected countries in Europe America, Oceania and Asia, Origin Syrian Arab Republic

Table 3. New asylum applications lodged in selected countries in Europe, North America, Oceania and Asia, 2015

Origin: SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

All data is provisional and subject to change. **Table established: 27 April 2015**

Grey cells indicate that data is not yet available.

Figures between 1 and 4 have been replaced with an asterisk.

Compiled by Field Information and Coordination Support Section/UNHCR Geneva (stats@unhcr.org)

Country of asylum	No. of applications												Jan-Mar 2015	Jan-Mar 2014	Total 2014**
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.			
Albania	-	-	-										-	-	92
Austria	903	654											1,557	800	7,730
Belgium	256	204	222										682	350	2,524
Bosnia and H.	-	*	-										*	*	*
Bulgaria	591												591	1,303	6,202
Croatia	6	7	*										14	16	54
Cyprus													-	210	984
Czech Rep.	6	7											13	22	107
Denmark	318	139											457	487	7,185
Estonia	-	-	*										*	-	7
Finland	17	13	10										40	43	146
France	163	298	223										684	770	3,129
Germany	5,340	4,023	4,420										13,783	5,177	39,332
Greece	237	239											476	161	791
Hungary	535	613											1,148	615	6,749
Iceland													-	-	5
Ireland	-												-	9	24
Italy	32												32	168	504
Latvia	-	-	-										-	*	34
Liechtenstein													-	-	*
Lithuania	-	-	-										-	-	8
Luxembourg	-	*	11										15	11	87
Malta	13	9	11										33	63	305
Montenegro	124	101	153										378	36	1,649
Netherlands	315	188	192										695	984	8,748
Norway	136	103	97										336	300	2,067
Poland	10	*	13										26	35	113
Portugal													-	*	18
Romania	59	29	75										163	200	614
Serbia and Kosovo: S	1,164	801	1,628										3,593	956	9,784
- of which Kosovo	*	*	*										9	9	83
Slovakia													-	22	34
Slovenia	*	-	-										*	12	88
Spain	416	301											717	230	1,666
Sweden	1,569	966	940										3,475	4,787	30,313
Switzerland	134	148	96										378	1,177	3,768
The former Yugoslav	123	40	75										238	86	746
Turkey	544	35											579	1,367	8,366
United Kingdom	258	167											425	456	2,404
Canada	47	32											79	131	556
USA (DHS)	118	56	79										253	381	1,564
USA (EOIR)													-	50	141
Australia	8	8	*										18	17	77
New Zealand	-	-	-										-	*	12
Japan	*												*	-	8
Rep. of Korea	26	9	14										49	50	204
EU-28	11,045	7,864	6,120										25,029	16,936	119,900
Europe (38)	13,270	9,093	8,169										30,532	20,859	146,382
Canada/USA	165	88	79										332	562	2,263
Japan/Rep. Korea	28	9	14										51	50	212
Australia/New Z.	8	8	*										18	19	89
Total (44)	13,471	9,198	8,264										30,933	21,490	148,946

Notes

**Total is based on monthly data. May differ from final annual figures published by States due to retroactive changes.

Australian figures are based on the number of applications lodged for protection visas.

Belgium: figures include accompanying children but exclude repeat claims.

Czech Rep. and Switzerland: excludes repeat applications.

France: includes applications lodged by minors.

Japan: UNHCR estimates.

Norway: Includes family members of beneficiaries of international protection or humanitarian status. Figures differ from asylum statistics published in Norway.

Turkey: UNHCR is the source of the data. Figures include asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR as well as asylum-seekers who have been pre-registered but who are pending official registration with UNHCR. As of late April 2015, there were some 1,758,000 registered Syrian refugees in Turkey covered by the Government's Temporary Protection Regime. The number of Syrian asylum-seekers included in this table covers only those who for specific reasons have been referred to UNHCR for further evaluation of their international protection needs.

USA (DHS): number of cases registered by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), multiplied by 1.393 to reflect the estimated number of persons.

USA (EOIR): new ("defensive") requests lodged with the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), based on the number of persons.

EU-total (28). All EU member States as at 1 July 2013.

Europe: All 38 European countries listed.

Total: All 44 countries listed.