Greece Report

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1. Introduction

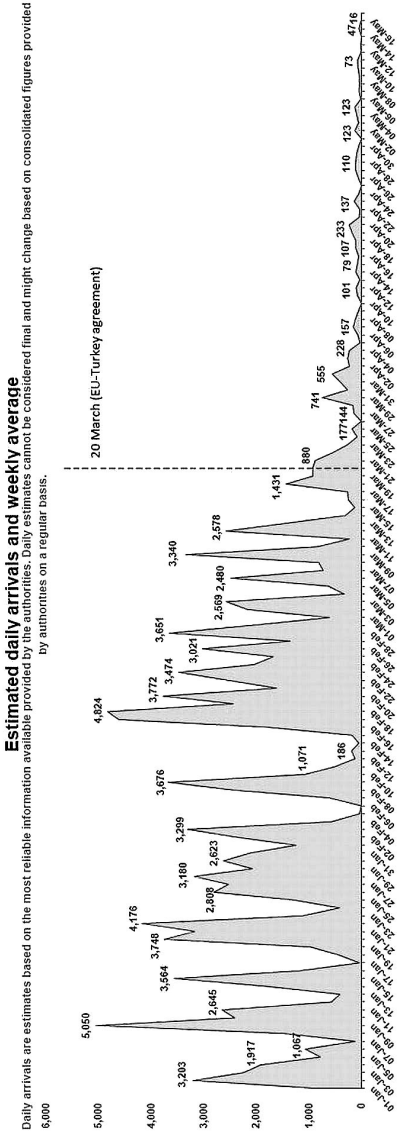
Being situated so close to the recent uprisings and war zones in the Middle East, Greece has become the main gate to Europe for more than a million asylum seekers (Kalpouzos and Mann 2015: 3; UNHCR 2015: 1). Meanwhile, the country itself, which covers an area of 131,957 km^2 and has a population of 11,5 million, continues to suffer from its 2008 financial crisis and the ensuing economic recession (Statista 2016a; Statista 2016b). Population density in Greece was last measured at 84 people per km^2 in 2014, according to the World Bank (The World Bank 2016).

From 2008 to July 2016, the unemployment rate rose from 7.8 % to 23.5 % (OECD 2016: 1; Statista 2016c), while this rate for Greece's youth from 2008 to 2015 more than doubled, from 21 % to 50 % (European Parliament 2015: 2). The Gross Domestic Product per capita in Greece was last recorded at 18,064 US dollars in 2015 (Statista 2016d). Since 2010, if not earlier, when the economic crisis in southern Europe was becoming particularly severe, Greece has been considered the weakest link in terms of managing European refugees (Triandafyllidou 2014: 410). Initially, the media spotlight was focused on Italy and Spain with regard to asylum politics in Europe, but public interest in Greece grew apace, and once again, Greece was regarded as a problem area, with migrants from the Middle East attempting to enter Europe uncontrolled and in unlimited numbers (Cabot 2014: 29).

The year 2015 witnessed the largest flow of people seeking protection in Greece, mostly via the Aegean Sea to the Greek islands closest to Turkey. In total, 862,138 persons attempted to enter Greece, 856,723 arriving by boat, and an unknown number of people died during the crossing (Rygiel 2016: 546). During 2015, the asylum situation changed several times. In the summer months, many people seeking protection decided to disembark from Turkey to cross the relatively quiet sea to Greece. Because Greece has several islands near the Turkish border and is a member of the European Union (EU) since 1981, it is a popular choice for people

seeking protection. However, Greece is not generally seen as their final destination, because it lacks an asylum system and thus the living conditions for asylum seekers and refugees are less than ideal. Instead, Greece tends to serve as a country of transit for those who wish to apply for asylum in other EU states such as Germany or Sweden (Banulescu-Bogdan and Fratzke 2015: 1).

Figure 1: Daily arrivals in Greece between January and early June 2016



Source: UNHCR (2016: 1).

By the end of 2015, many European countries had closed their borders to refugees, thus ruling out the so-called Balkan route as an option for people

seeking asylum in the EU. An estimated 50,000 people were thus left stranded in Greece, where huge detention camps emerged in Piraeus (the port of Athens) or on a grassland plain in Idomeni, near the border of Macedonia (Amnesty International 2016: 1).

In March 2016, the EU and Turkey signed an agreement stating that all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands should be sent back to Turkey, and for every Syrian who returned to Turkey from these islands, another Syrian would be resettled in the EU (European Commission 2016: 1). This led to a considerable decrease in the number of daily arrivals in Greece (Figure 1). By October 2016, a total of 169,495 arrivals had already been registered. Their main countries of origin were Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (UNHCR 2016: 1; Eurostat 2016a). In the first half of 2016 17,205 people have applied for asylum in Greece, which is 148 asylum seekers per 1,000 of population (Eurostat 2016b; Eurostat 2016c).

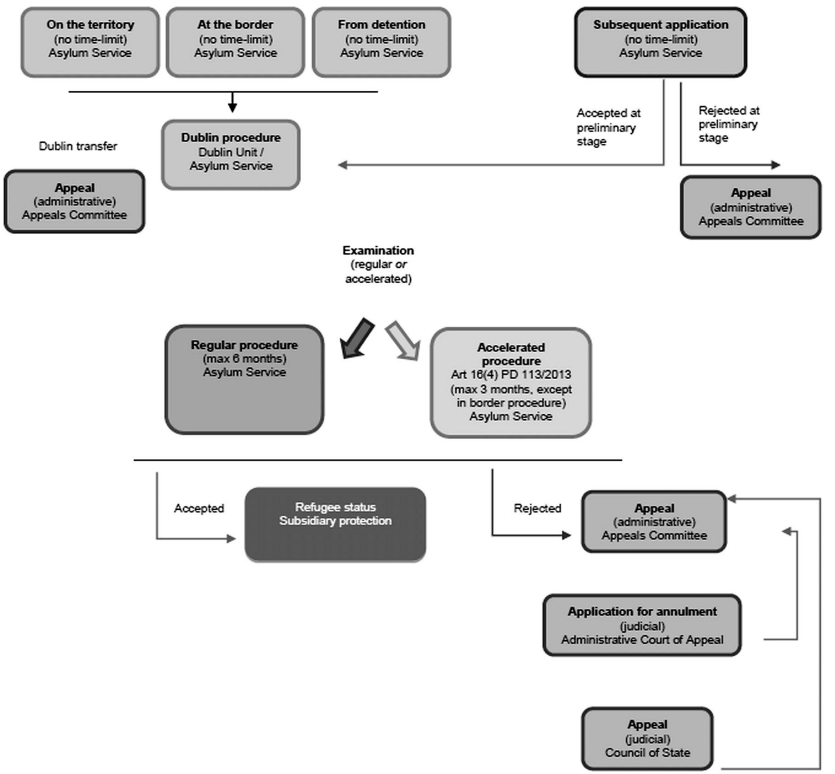
Given the recent conflicts in this region, asylum applications are expected to increase in number, and Greece's immigration policy is likely to play an important role in the future. Since 2004, Greece has had one of the largest numbers of asylum seekers in Europe but also one of the lowest recognition rates (Cabot 2014: 4). In addition to its precarious economic situation, the deplorable state of its asylum system and its low acceptance rates, Greece has been excluded as a desirable country of destination, leading many undocumented asylum seekers to flee to other EU countries. The large number of rejections is problematic, but an even bigger problem is the large number of pending requests for asylum due to the country's "incapacity to document, register and process" the applications (Cabot 2014: 4). The crisis in Greece is having a deleterious effect on these procedures and on the social integration of refugees (Cabot 2014: 10). For example, there have been reports that both Greek officials and the European border control officers from Frontex have perpetrated human rights violations against asylum seekers and refugees in detention camps (Human Rights Watch 2011: 1).

In 2013, a new asylum procedure was instituted that enhanced the transparency and efficiency of the process in the first instance and transferred responsibilities to an independent council (Figure 2). The Asylum Service, or First Reception Service, accelerated the asylum procedure, and an Appeals Committee was created. Before this, the police had been responsible for the asylum process (AIDA 2015: 19). Figure 3 shows the increase of positive first-instance decisions since this change in the asylum procedure.

Still, by 2015, the recognition rate was still low (36% of 13,205 asylum applications) when compared with the rates in other European states, such as Germany (over 55%), Denmark (about 62%) and Bulgaria (76%) (Eurostat 2016d: 1).

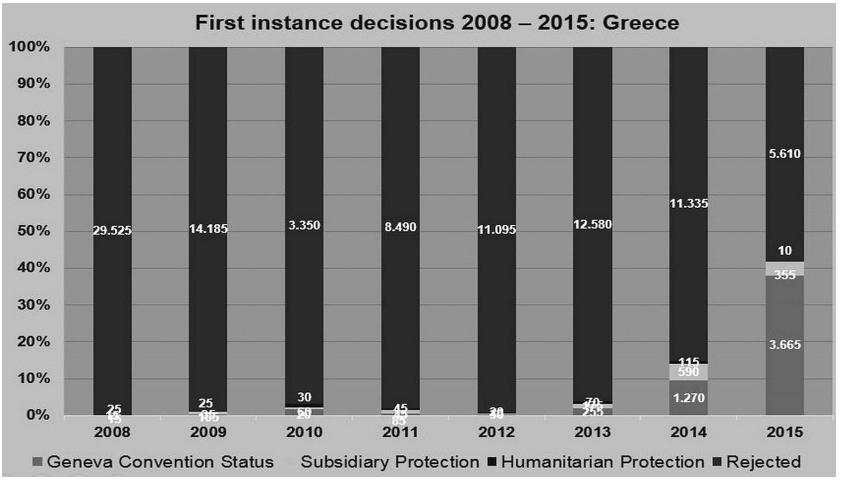
In the first half of 2016 only 21 % of applications were recognised (Eurostat 2016d; Eurostat 2016e). In the same period of time, subsidiary protection was given to 3 % of applicants (Eurostat 2016d; Eurostat 2016e). In the first half of 2016 4,520 asylum decisions were recorded in Greece in total, the absolute majority (3,555) of them were rejected ones (Eurostat 2016d; Eurostat 2016e). The refugee rate in Greece amounted to 18 % in the first half of 2016 (Eurostat 2016d; Eurostat 2016e).

Figure 2: New procedure of the Greek asylum system, begun in 2013



Source: AIDA (2015: 18).

Figure 3: First-instance decisions between 2008 and 2015 in the Greek asylum system



Source: Adapted from Eurostat (2016).

In January 2015, Greek voters elected a new government under the leadership of the left-wing party Syriza. In one of its first announcements, on 17 February 2015, Syriza declared their intention to improve the asylum system, especially the situation concerning the detention of asylum seekers. According to its plan, detention in general should be limited to six months and alternatives to detention should be established with the aim of closing the detention camps entirely. In addition, the new Ministry of Migration created a new policy. However, owing to financial restrictions, the Greek government continues to lack resources and is therefore incapable of providing better conditions for asylum seekers and refugees (AIDA 2015b: 1). This change in the government greatly influenced the migration situation in Greece, as did the enormous increase in the number of asylum seekers (UNHCR 2016b: 1) and the dynamic asylum-related conditions overall (e.g. the EU–Turkey deal and the closing of the Balkan route).

Events and conditions such as these raise the following questions: how is the constantly changing asylum situation in Greece being handled, and how are the networks and the work of refugee-related NGOs developing? These two questions are the main focus of this chapter. We begin with an overview of the current state of the research regarding the asylum situation

in Greece, which is followed by an examination of the relevant hypotheses and a discussion of the results of the MAREM project.[1]

2. Current State of Research

Asylum seekers in Greece face many challenges, such as difficulties in finding accommodations and social support, as well as the many obstacles posed by the application process (Cabot 2014: 23). The lack of bureaucratic capacities combined with the effects of the global financial crisis and the position of Greece as a border state have exacerbated the social and legal situation of asylum seekers. In addition, the problematic conditions in Greece overall have led to the marginalisation and impoverishment of certain population groups, which has had an effect on the social and ethical dynamics involved in their coexistence with asylum seekers and refugees (Cabot 2014: 6).

Another consequence of the crisis has been the emergence of many nationalist and racist ideologies, especially in Athens, which in turn have strongly influenced Greece's social life, political climate and asylum procedures (Cabot 2014: 18). Mogiani (2016) views these overall societal tendencies in relation to the more expeditious processing of Syrian asylum seekers: *"Since December 2014, Syrians have been able to benefit from a fast-track examination procedure that lets them have an answer within the same day. Unsurprisingly, this generates resentment among those seeking asylum"* (Mogiani 2016: 51).

Innes (2016) has also reported on the dramatic living conditions of asylum seekers with respect to the asylum system and the changing political climate: *"In Athens the signs of international migration are visible. Migrant bodies along with homelessness and drug use are evident on the streets. Gang violence towards migrants and police brutality towards migrants, particularly black Africans, have been well documented by the Greek and the international media"* (Innes 2016: 2).

Political decisions made at the European level in 2016 regarding the complex of asylum issues have trapped more than 50,000 people who are seeking protection in Greece. Most of these people are women and children who are not allowed to move until their asylum applications have

1 For a general description of the MAREM project, see the first chapter of this book.

been approved by the Greek Asylum Service. Upon their arrival, asylum applicants must prove that they either were or would be persecuted in their country of origin. In this context, Turkey, which the EU considers to be a "safe third country", becomes a collection point for people with rejected asylum applications (Magaronis 2016: 24).

The conditions in the 'hotspots', which are the first reception centres for managing the exceptional migratory flow with the help of the EU, have become increasingly unstable, and the accommodations have turned into detention camps for people seeking protection. The military is unable to provide enough food for the inhabitants, and the camps have reached their full capacity and lack sanitary facilities. Moreover, the behaviour of the inhabitants is becoming more aggressive and violent (Magaronis 2016: 25).

Generally speaking, the influence of the EU on the national asylum systems in Europe is growing because of the so-called refugee crisis.[2] This becomes especially evident when one considers the recent events in Greece. Currently, there is no research-based evaluation to determine the influence of asylum-related organisations and their networks on the asylum system in Greece. In addition, changes in the Greek government, in politics and in the seasons influence whether people seeking protection will cross the Mediterranean and the Aegean Seas. The research questions to be explored in the part of the MAREM project concentrating on Greece are designed to close this research gap by focusing on the role that networks of asylum- and refugee-related organisations play in the Greek asylum system. These questions are as follows:

- *What role do these networks play in processes of reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees?*
- *To what extent is the mutual cooperation of the asylum-related organisations important to their formal structure and their work?*
- *What role do these cooperation networks play for the national and European asylum systems?*

Taking into account the rising number of asylum seekers and refugees and the recent governmental changes, does cooperation among the NGOs

2 In our perspective, the term 'refugee crisis' is problematic because it focuses on the people seeking protection as the source of the on-going humanitarian crisis instead of including the European asylum system that is denying them legal access to the EU.

themselves and between the NGOs and the government have an influence on the refugees' situation?

3. Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical background of neo-institutionalism[3] (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), several assumptions can be made that will be examined later in the Results section. For our study, we formulated the following four hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 1*: NGOs with similar aims and similar financial sources follow a certain discourse to survive.

Based on the theoretical considerations in this study, the NGOs should exhibit a certain degree of *coercive* isomorphism (for further information on this term, please see the first chapter of this book). Because these organisations depend on donors to fund their projects and their work, they may be compelled to meet their donors' expectations. This pressure could influence the formal structures of the asylum-related organisations.

> *Hypothesis 2*: The changing political situation in Greece and the growing number of people seeking protection there lead to a discursive and institutional change that creates new cooperation networks and reflects isomorphic processes.

Focusing on the governmental change in Greece, one would expect a change of paradigms through Syriza. This may influence the structure of organisations should the Greek state intervene in the legal realm of the organisational networks and be unable to provide appropriate funding owing mainly to the country's financial problems.

> *Hypothesis 3*: When new NGOs emerge, they tend to orientate themselves towards the practices of established organisations.

More international NGOs are expected to work in Greece in response to the political change, the rising number of asylum seekers and refugees, and the recent changes in intergovernmental relations (e.g. the EU–Turkey deal and closing of the Balkan route). In addition, new NGOs will emerge that hope to receive funding and therefore aim to become more established

3 Neo-institutionalism is the theoretical basis of the research project presented here and is explained in the first chapter of this book.

and adjust to the new political party's paradigms. Therefore, *mimetic isomorphism* (for further information on this term, please see the first chapter of this book) may be observable.

> *Hypothesis 4*: There is a gap between talk and action owing to the paradigmatic changes in the longstanding organisations.

Regarding the highly dynamic situation in Greece and the resulting networks and interdependencies, the organisations in the field must adapt and respond to all these changes. NGOs that were already established prior to the refugee crisis and governmental change may adhere to their usual practices but may change their formal structure and their official way of presenting themselves. Therefore, a gap between talk and action may be identifiable.

4. Data

The main emphasis of the questionnaire for this study was on revealing the dynamics of the organisational networks and to make a connection between these networks and the theory of neo-institutionalism and the concept of isomorphism. We also wanted to identify changes in the cooperation networks and isomorphic processes over the past few years. To show their development, we interviewed some organisations more than once during the three MAREM rounds (2014–2016).

The seven NGOs interviewed in 2016 were Aitima, Amnesty International Greece, Antigone, Caritas Athens, Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, MSF), the Greek Forum of Refugees and PRAKSIS. The two scientific organisations interviewed were research institutes situated in Athens: the National Centre for Social Research (EKKE) and the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP). The political party interviewed was Syriza, the left-wing governmental party, which in 2015 formed a coalition with the right-wing party Independent Greeks (Smith 2015: 1). The NGOs Aitima and Amnesty International were examined three times, while the NGOs Antigone and MSF were interviewed twice.

The interviewed organisations work mainly on the national level, and most of them maintain offices in Athens and Thessaloniki (the second largest city in Greece). Since the beginning of the refugee crisis, many NGOs also operate on the Aegean islands and in the border regions, be-

cause these are the main routes travelled to reach Europe and are close to the (now closed) borders of the Balkan states. Two of the NGOs, PRAKSIS and Caritas Athens, are active at the local level in Athens and in the Attica region (PRAKSIS also in Thessaloniki). Caritas Athens is part of and works closely with the global Caritas umbrella organisation on the national, European and international levels. Two of the larger and more well-established NGOs – Amnesty International and MSF – work internationally.

The funding sources of the organisations vary. The three main sources include private donations; financial support provided by larger, more established NGOs through projects; and funding by the state or the EU.

Table 1: Interviewed organisations and their main characteristics

Name	Spatial reach	Type	Driving norms	Main issues
AITIMA	Local	NGO	Human Rights	Asylum seekers and Refugees
MSF	International	NGO	Human Rights	Emergency supply
Praksis	National	NGO	Human Rights	Asylum seekers and Refugees, Children, HIV awareness etc.
Amnesty International	International	NGO	Human Rights	International Law, Campaigns
AntiGone	National	NGO	Human Rights	Reports
EKKE	National	Scientific Organisation	Objectivity	Social research, Expertise, Reports
Greek Forum for Refugees	National	NGO	Human Rights	Asylum seekers and Refugees
Caritas Athens	Local	NGO	Religious	Refugees, Migrants
SYRIZA	National	Political Party	Social justice, Political	Administration, Legislation
ELIAMEP	National	Scientific Organisation	Objectivity	Research, Expertise

Source: Adapted from expert interviews and website analyses as part of the MAREM project 2016.

The main driving norms and values of the NGOs are the human rights and humanitarianism. The predominant value for the two research institutes (EKKE and ELIAMEP) is objectivity, and Syriza aims for social justice. The main target groups of NGOs that work in the field are migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as Greeks who are in a weak socioeconomic position. Most of the organisations cover a wide range of issues (see PRAKSIS), or they specialise in providing help to asylum seekers and

refugees (see Aitima). Table 1 summarises the main characteristics of the interviewed organisations.

The MAREM research trip to Athens in March 2016 lasted two weeks. During the first week some time was spent in the field visiting selected places and observing the asylum situation in relevant locations, such as the integration of refugees and the number of asylum seekers. The research group visited the refugee camp in Piraeus, located near the port of Athens, where asylum seekers and refugees coming from the Aegean islands are housed in tents or warehouses from the moment they arrive on the Greek mainland. We also visited a soup kitchen managed by Caritas and a squatter building in the university district of Exarcheia, where local citizens independently created a place for asylum seekers and refugees to sleep and eat. These short field studies provided insights into the reality and everyday life of the asylum seekers and refugees and into the work of the volunteers who were helping them. This in turn helped us obtain a firm basis for interpreting the surrounding social environment. By being in direct contact with volunteers and organisational members and meeting them in their field of work, we were better able to analyse the data collected from the interviews and documents. Still, critical reflection on experiences in the field is necessary (Mattissek et al. 2013: 149), and the researchers must be as objective as possible.

In the following section, we present the main results of the research carried out in Greece in 2016, as well as the findings of the network analysis.

5. Results

5.1 Networks

Since the beginning of the refugee crisis in 2015, various aspects of the cooperation network of Greek asylum-related organisations have changed significantly. A small network of organisations supporting asylum seekers and refugees had already existed before the crisis, and as stated by Aitima, these organisations relied mostly on an exchange of information at the local level in Athens (Aitima 2016). People who work in these organisations know one another personally, as illustrated by this quote from Amnesty International: *"Before this crisis [there] were not so many people working on these things. Everybody knew each other. We were in kind of the same*

village" (Amnesty International 2016). Generally speaking, the network continues to grow and become more international.

Currently, the organisations' main activities continue to be in Athens and in the Attica region, but these sites now also include the Aegean islands and regions on the mainland, such as the border with the Republic of Macedonia, where many people seeking protection are stranded. With circumstantial changes in 2015/16, borders were closed and the EU–Turkey agreement took effect, obstructing the so-called Aegean route into Europe. The humanitarian crisis is now evident throughout Greece, and the organisations' response is to seek support on a national and international level. In addition, the organisations are attempting to collaborate with partners that work on different levels (see Figure 5).

In response to the drastic increase in the number of asylum seekers who arrived in Greece during the summer of 2015, a majority of NGOs are becoming established there to provide basic services: *"At the beginning [there] were only three, four. It's a huge rise – I mean, many, many people came to work, many organisations came to Greece [and] are now based in Greece, big organisations"* (Amnesty International 2016). Amnesty International stresses the positive impact of these newly settled NGOs on the Greek economy: *"There are many people who actually found work through these organisations. Accommodations in the islands were taken by people who live there now permanently to work on the ground"* (Amnesty International 2016). Just recently, the large NGO Oxfam International opened a base in Greece, and there are now many more actors within this particular organisational field.

In addition, new NGOs were created to assume special responsibilities, such as providing legal aid, and to fill in the gaps as other organisations become more specialised. Caritas Athens (2016) mentions this emergence: *"You know, with this humanitarian crisis, a lot of NGOs have appeared out of nowhere."* Because of limited resources due to the financial crisis, the NGOs tend to concentrate on their own specific tasks and responsibilities, such as providing information, food, accommodations, language courses and medical or legal aid, and they direct asylum seekers and refugees to their cooperation partners for help depending on their particular needs. Thus, *"all serious NGOs network because you cannot cope with everything"* (Caritas Athens 2016). Moreover, the NGOs share a variety of resources, including knowledge, experience, staff and specialists. According to an interviewee from Amnesty International, *"[the NGOs] could use and do use all the financial support from big international organisati-*

ons who came here. That's why many partnerships are on-going these [many] months. That's great because one organisation has the knowledge of what's going on, the know-how about what's going on in Greece and how things are implemented and functioning, and the others have an international view of things; they can quickly mobilise things and recruit people and distribution and everything. So I believe that these two [groups] can click very well and have global solutions" (Amnesty International 2016).

Cooperation is regarded as essential for supporting asylum seekers and refugees because it gives them a stronger voice. Many organisations are able to address their problems and needs and to draw attention to asylum-related issues such as living conditions. According to PRAKSIS, *"It strengthens our work, I would say, and it gives a stronger voice to the people we are supporting, for sure, when you talk about joint positions and stating the needs, the critique, the gaps"* (PRAKSIS 2016).

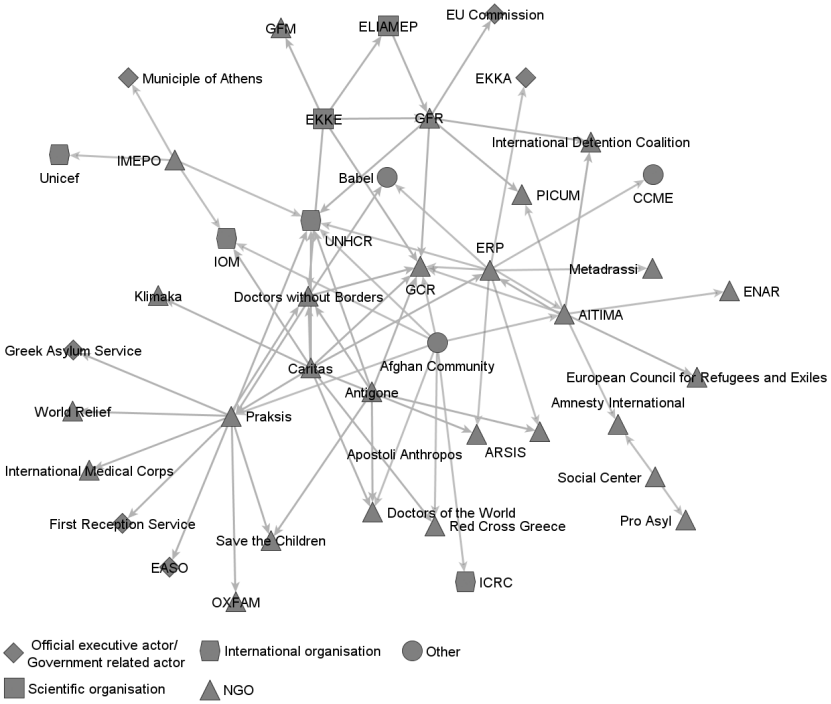
For the purpose of research or publishing information and reports, collaboration with a variety of actors is crucial, as EKKE (2016) points out: *"because different actors have different views, [it is vital] to have the whole picture of the situation"*. However, there are hardly any 'official' cooperation contracts. Only a few networks that consist of NGOs exist, such as the Racist Violence Recording Network, which works directly in the field (e.g. in refugee camps). The Greek Forum of Refugees and Antigone sum it up in the following two statements respectively:

"Everyone has some problems, but the others don't know. There is no cooperation. So when I speak about these networks, they are on specific issues which concern every organisation, for example, recording racist violence" (Greek Forum of Refugees 2016).

"I think there is a small degree of cooperation. I don't think that there is, let's say, a round table of contact persons between the NGOs that coordinate officially. But in the field, there is de facto cooperation, let's say in a camp or in the reception centre or in a place that refugees come to. But there is no official cooperation" (Antigone 2016).

Amnesty International also emphasises this aspect of the relationship: "We are having working groups. We are talking with each other for exchange of information, but it is not something official" (Amnesty International 2016).

Figure 4: Asylum-related organisations, their actor types and cooperation partners



Source: Adapted from expert interviews and website analyses as part of the MAREM project 2014–16.

As described previously, the organisational field that is being examined in the MAREM project has recently been growing. According to the organisations interviewed between 2014 and 2016, the visualisation of the egocentric networks[4], which are connected, includes a total of 43 organisations.

Intergovernmental organisations were identified as important actors, especially the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is one of the four intergovernmental bodies involved in the networks. The UNHCR plays an institutional key role as the coordinator for a large number of NGOs and serves as a bridge between the state and the

4 The term 'egocentric network' is explained in the first chapter of this book.

NGOs (see Figure 4): *"UNHCR is not really an NGO, it is [part of the] United Nations, so [it has] an institutional role to play in the whole system. So there's institutional cooperation between the state and UNHCR, but according to other NGOs, [the UNHCR has] supported much of the whole process of reception and other basic needs of refugees and migrants"* (Antigone 2016).

The network visualisations of the types of organisations show that the dominant type of actor is the NGO, thus most of the organisations (28 out of a total of 43) are NGOs (see Figure 4). Some are important, nationally and internationally well-connected NGOs (see Figure 4), namely the Greek Forum of Refugees (GFR), the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), the Ecumenical Refugee Program (ERP), Caritas and PRAKSIS. All these NGOs were already working and actively networking prior to 2015 and can therefore benefit from an existing and established network. Only these important and well-established NGOs have a large number of cooperation partners, including the UNHCR, and also cooperate with executive or governmental organisations. PRAKSIS is the only one of the interviewed actors in Greece that reportedly has a partnership with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) (see Figure 4). More information about EASO as a key actor in asylum-related work can be found in the chapter devoted to this particular subject.

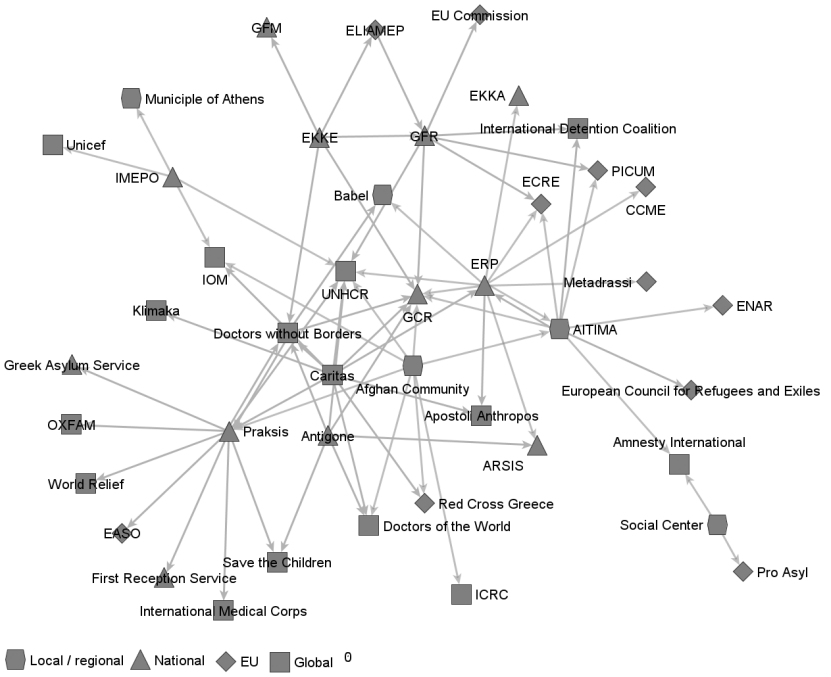
In general, the number of executive organisations and political or government-related actors involved in the Greek network of asylum-related organisations, as reconstructed by our research team, is limited (see Figure 4). Since the change of government in 2015, the state has been more receptive to the idea of cooperation. Two of the organisations confirm this view: *"The government itself was more open to work with not Greek sectors but with private sectors or NGOs and improve things this way"* (Amnesty International 2016). *"This is very important, because this is a real change in the government's attitude. This is a real change, because it is an attitude which is a humanitarian attitude and a positive approach – and not a scapegoating negative approach [as] before"* (Aitima 2016).

Also rare in the networks of the organisations we interviewed are scientific organisations (see Figure 4), because they only monitor the situation and do not actively work with asylum seekers and refugees. The only scientific bodies identified from the examined networks are EKKE and ELIAMEP. Their cooperation is mainly limited to the exchange of information (EKKE 2016). Three of the organisations cannot be clearly classified as one of the actor types (see Figure 4).

The number of cooperation partners differs from organisation to organisation. The range of cooperation partners shown in the visualisation includes IMEPO with its four ties and PRAKSIS with its ten cooperation partners named from the perspective of the organisation (see Figure 4).

A closer look at the actor types in the networks of Greek asylum-related organisations reveals a relatively homogeneous pattern. The visualisation of the organisations we interviewed and of their cooperation partners consists almost entirely of NGOs, with only a small number of executive actors and scientific organisations involved. Examination of the egocentric networks of these NGOs shows that they clearly tend to name other NGOs as partners, whereas organisations such as IMEPO, EKKE and the Afghan community show no such tendency to cooperate with actors similar to them.

Figure 5: Visualisation of asylum-related organisations, their spatial reach and cooperation



Source: Adapted from expert interviews and website analyses as part of the MAREM project 2014–16.

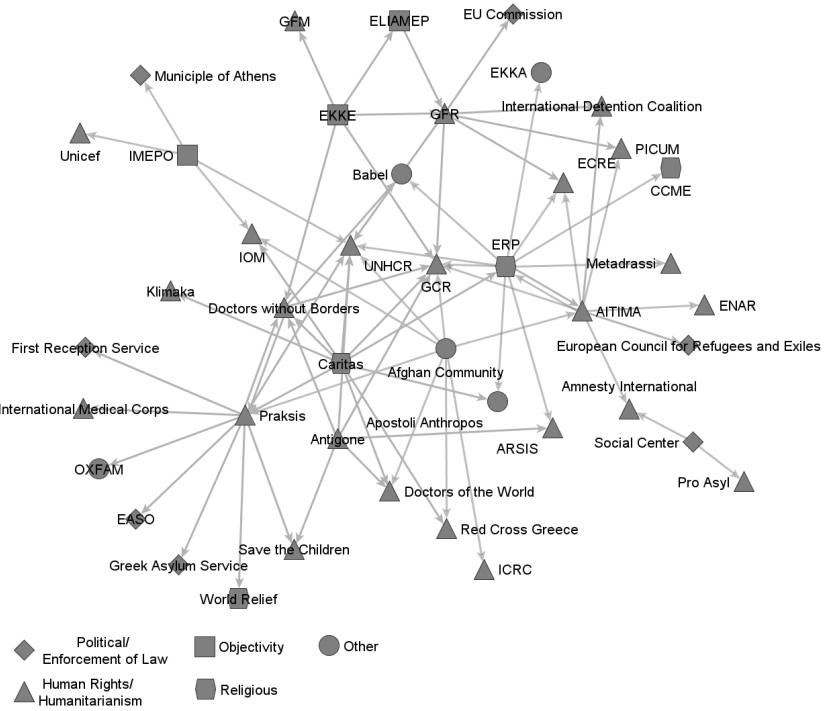
The networks of Greek asylum-related organisations are heterogeneous with respect to their spatial reach and the driving norms and values of the actors. The organisations that were interviewed rely primarily on cooperation with organisations working on both a national and an international level (see Figure 5). Established NGOs such as PRAKSIS and ERP tend to have cooperation partners that work on different levels (see Figure 5). The important actor UNHCR also tries to collaborate with organisations working at various levels, mostly local or regional and national (see Figure 5), perhaps owing to its coordinating role in the country.

Remarkably, only a small number of national executive actors are involved, such as the Greek Asylum Service and the First Reception Service (see Figure 5), which were first created at the launch of the new asylum procedure in 2013. Also, European political actors are rare and not well connected to other organisations. EASO and the European Commission each have only one cooperation partner who named them during our interviews (see Figure 5).

With regard to the driving norms and values, we found that the cooperation partners share most of the basic and non-negotiable values: *"The ones we cooperate with share more or less [our] values"* (Aitima 2016). The most prevalent value is humanitarianism, and about half the organisations in the reconstructed part of the Greek asylum-related network[5] share this value (see Figure 6). But common correlations can also be seen between actor types and the dominant norms and values – the NGOs' dominant norms and values are the enforcement of human rights or humanitarianism (see Figure 6). There are also a few NGOs that represent religious values, such as Caritas, an organisation related to the Catholic Church. Objectivity is the main norm of the two research institutes, EKKE and ELIAMEP; the executive actors share political values (see Figure 6).

5 We refer here to the entire asylum-related network in Greece. The term is explained in the first chapter of this book.

Figure 6: Visualisation of asylum-related organisations, their driving norms and values and cooperation partners



Source: Adapted from expert interviews and website analyses as part of the MAREM project, 2014–16.

All in all, the number of ties in the networks of Greek asylum-related organisations has grown in the recent past because many more actors are at work on these issues. In addition, there is a tendency to cooperate more with the organisations that work on the European and international levels instead of relying on partners that work on the local or national level. During the interviews, both the research institutes and the NGOs (e.g. MSF, Antigone) stated that the refugee issue is a supranational problem and must be addressed collectively on a European level.

5.2. The Role of NGOs in the Field of Asylum

The primary role of the NGOs is to work directly in the field to provide aid to asylum seekers and refugees on a first-needs basis, which includes food, toiletries, clothes and accommodation, medical and legal aid (e.g. Caritas 2016; Aitima 2016; PRAKSIS 2016). The representative of ELIAMEP stated that, *"the role of the NGOs is going to be the same as it was in the past – to try to support the asylum seekers in all possible ways in Greece because asylum seekers in Greece are not supported by the state. So, what the NGOs were doing in the past and are still going to do is to substitute the state, basically"* (ELIAMEP 2016). Nevertheless, there are some serious problems with these gaps. It is difficult to provide shelter, access to application procedures and financial aid to those who are recognised as refugees. Based on the interviews, the NGOs are filling the gaps because of the state's passivity: "*We are only covering the gaps which the government leaves"* (MSF 2016). *"The state is overwhelmed by the situation and they are not coping very well, but we have the people in our door and we have to cope"* (Caritas Athens 2016).

Specifically, Antigone (2016) refers to the gap left by the state in Idomeni: "there is an absence of government initiative in this area, except for the food, which is given by the Greek army every day. For all the rest, it is the NGOs that give the humanitarian assistance and without them the situation would be much worse."

Some NGOs, such as Amnesty International and Antigone, publish reports and carry out monitoring in hopes of providing information about the asylum situation to civil society and for scientific research.

5.3 Isomorphism

With regard to the theoretical context of this study, our analysis of the interviews provides evidence of three different types of isomorphism: mimetic, normative and coercive isomorphism. In the following, we will refer to each of them.

Mimetic Isomorphism

One striking phenomenon of the developing refugee crisis is the substantial increase in the number of local and international NGOs, which has been leading to the emergence and growth of new networks and certain dynamics within these networks. For example, some forms of mimetic isomorphism were identified in the statements of representatives from the NGOs. The distinction between emerging and established NGOs in the organisational field of Greece is significant. In reference to the new NGOs, clear tendencies towards mimetic isomorphism become evident when they begin to adopt the practices of organisations that have more extensive experience in asylum-related work in Greece. For example, PRAKSIS states that they *"do have meetings with other organisations to see if there is a good practice that everyone could follow. Of course, there's an exchange of lessons learned. It depends on the specific issue and question*" (PRAKSIS 2016). This practice corresponds to results of previous research on small NGOs. Tiina Kontinen (2005) notes that small NGOs are more likely to orientate towards organisations that are perceived to be experienced and well established.

Often the process of mimetic isomorphism will result from informal cooperation ties within the field, but it also occurs through (informal) networking among local working organisations – a process in which even the more established organisations try to learn new practices. In addition, these groups tend to recommend these best practices to other organisations, as Aitima explains: *"when we also find something that is good or successful, we communicate it to other organisations and we recommend it"* (Aitima 2016).

In contrast to the mimetic processes of the newer and rather small NGOs, organisations that are well established and are more specialised are more likely to rely on their own practices. For example, MSF and Amnesty International do not refer to any instances of official cooperation and emphasise their own manner of working: *"No, we only do Amnesty stuff here"* (Amnesty International 2016). Whether it is their high degree of specialisation, their long-standing practices or their size that causes these organisations to resist mimetic isomorphism is difficult to determine.

Normative Isomorphism

Focusing on normative isomorphism, one sees a predominantly homogeneous organisational field when examining the educational backgrounds of staff who work in asylum-related organisations: *"Most people are human rights–based; my colleagues are human rights–based, myself included. And either from law studies or political sciences, these are the two main sectors that people are working in here. I don't speak about health aid organisations because they certainly have more colleagues with the [same] experience, doctors and staff"* (Amnesty International 2016). Other organisations provide similar descriptions; organisations such as PRAKSIS and Aitima stress the similarity in the educational backgrounds of both their staffs and the co-workers with whom they cooperate.

The situation of the organisations' driving norms and values is more diverse. As MSF states, most of the cooperating organisations share the same values: *"We always chose the best cooperation partners. And also […] their principles have to be close to ours"* (MSF 2016). Aitima (2016) states that the cooperating organisations mostly share basic values (e.g. the consideration of human rights), but that they also have to make compromises to ensure safe and successful collaboration: *"Of course, there are differences, sometimes big differences, but generally, we can say that there are some basic standards that are common."*

To conclude, our findings with regard to shared values were more diverse than those concerning the educational backgrounds of the cooperating partners, although in both aspects the interviewed organisations and their cooperation partners appear to be more similar than different.

Coercive Isomorphism

Our analysis of the process of coercive isomorphism shows the most interesting dynamics in Greece. Many organisations report feeling highly dependent on funders for their financial resources. When accepting funding, these groups are in constant fear of having to stick to certain practices and discourses in order to survive financially. The representative from the self-organisational Greek Forum of Refugees particularly stresses this: *"[Funding] is through some projects. It is very tricky also and risky also [knowing] how to participate in these projects. 'Project' means you are taking some money. Taking some money means you are dependent on somebody"*

(Greek Forum of Refugees 2016). On the other hand, organisations such as MSF, which are funded entirely by private donations, report a sense of organisational and ideological independence.

Like other interviewed organisations, MSF stresses the importance of being independent from government and governmental organisations because it enables them to criticise the Greek government and the EU, which are generally perceived as being responsible for the refugee crisis: *"Of course, as we are supporting all projects with only private funding donations, we have no state support (no European support). That allows us to be more flexible in our capacity"* (MSF 2016).

Other organisations have different experiences with regard to their dependence on funding, such as Aitima, which does not promote its work and therefore was almost forced to close in 2015. Aitima stresses the importance of publicising an organisation's activities in order to receive funding: *"If you do not communicate about your work, you get no financial support. The refugees themselves say, 'Aitima is a very good organisation, they help, they are not bureaucratic; when we come, we have support.' But the refugees cannot support you financially"* (Aitima 2016).

5.4 Asylum System and the Situation in Greece

The overall asylum situation in Greece is constitutive for the work of the refugee-related organisations and their networks. At the time of the interviews (March 2016), there was no legal way to enter Greece for people seeking protection. Most of them are dependent on smugglers who offer transportation from Turkey to the Aegean islands, which are located only a few kilometres from the Turkish mainland. Many people die while crossing the Aegean Sea because the boats are unstable and in poor condition: *"If you imagine you are an asylum seeker and you want to get to Europe, the only way to enter is through the Aegean Sea, and this involves being dependent on smugglers to help you, to move you to the coast, with all the risks […]. There are no legal routes for asylum seekers or refugees"* (EKKE 2016).

After these people seeking protection reach Greece, their situation and living conditions do not seem to improve at all. Detention centres at the 'hotspots' such as Lesbos or Athens are particularly overcrowded. Many NGOs criticise the lack of hygienic and medical provisions. According to MSF, workers often could not provide even minimal standards of care in

the camps: *"It is like an African setting here. The number of organisations and the situation here is worse than in Africa, because in Africa we can [meet the] minimum criteria: one toilet for 20 people, soap, five litres of water per day. […] For example, 80 per cent of the medical issues that we are treating are created by the living conditions. People have to live outside, with no access to water, food, toilets, and at the same time they get sick. Challenges are with the policies that [do] not car[e] about the people"* (MSF 2016).

In considering the inadequate asylum system in Greece, NGOs point to many human rights violations and criticise the overall living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees in these hotspots: *"It is a problem of the system itself. If you arrive in Athens, you get a paper. 'In 30 days you need to leave the country', it says. You cannot stay in Athens and you cannot go to the borders. If the police catch you after the 30 days, you go to prison as an illegal migrant. The only choice you have is to apply for asylum via Skype. You don't know how to read and write, don't know what Skype is about and have no internet access. Even when you cross all these barriers and you can make an appointment via Skype, you get an appointment in two months' time. If you get caught by the police, then you are already in jail. This is a caricature of an asylum system that is not constructed to serve the people"* (MSF 2016).

Difficulties in obtaining access to this system also represent overwhelming barriers for the asylum seekers and lead to the marginalisation of migrants: *"60 per cent have no work in Greece [for] the young people. If then people on the move are working on the move, it creates labour trafficking and also sex trafficking. Sex for two euros and five euros. Greece is in a crisis itself. It is difficult to find work in general"* (MSF 2016). The Greek asylum system used to be controlled by the national authorities and, as noted earlier, the Greek police were in charge of certain asylum-related decisions. To create a more autonomous asylum system, the procedure was revised in 2013, and with the change in the government in 2015, a new ministry was established to deal with the complex situation of migration to Greece. As efforts were made to improve the quality of the asylum procedure, the recognition rate increased. Nevertheless, there was a backlog because of the lack of resources for accommodating the growing number of people seeking protection (ELIAMEP 2016).

Insufficient access to the asylum application system also created a considerable backlog and failed to take pressure off the detention centres: *"This is not a refugee crisis, this is just a reception and management*

crisis" (MSF 2016). In the view of Amnesty International, *"things were very difficult because if international organisations hadn't intervened during the summer, the problem would certainly be bigger because the Greek state not only didn't have what was needed at that time but also didn't have the personnel to do it; they had a very bureaucratic system, so all the funds were delayed. So not only lack of funding, but lack of people, lack of knowledge – it was a puzzle of things that stopped things from functioning and being well prepared"* (Amnesty International 2016).

After the governmental change in 2015, the Greek state decided to make some legal changes concerning the rights of asylum seekers. However, the implementation of these new laws was inadequate and ultimately failed owing to the government's lack of resources. According to the Greek Forum of Refugees, *"we had some legal changes also; for example, asylum seekers didn't have the right to work. They still don't have the right to work, but they changed the law – as I told you, changing the law is one thing here and implementing it is another – it still is not implemented here"* (Greek Forum of Refugees 2016).

5.5 The Common European Asylum System (CEAS)

As for the implementation of CEAS, most of the interviewees do not consider the sharing of responsibility among all member states to be successful. For example, the European states seem to interpret the legal framework of CEAS in different ways: *"Even though it tries to harmonise the policies, the asylum policy as such still remains in [the] state. This is a big problem; so, if something has to change, then there should be a CEAS in the sense that decisions are made on the European level, so no countries have their own interpretation, adaptation, regulations of the CEAS. It should be treated equally on the European level"* (EKKE 2016).

The Dublin II Regulation was suspended because of human rights violations in the EU entry countries. For example, Germany stopped the relocation of asylum seekers who were initially registered in Greece. The Greek Forum of Refugees weighs in: *"In which points was there good cooperation? For example, [the Dublin II Directive] stated that every asylum seeker who is entering Europe should ask for it at the entry point and if they go to other countries they should send them back. In 2010, other European countries (at first Germany) announced that they will not*

apply this directive because Greece is a country that can't afford all this asylum, because it is the entry point" (Greek Forum of Refugees 2016).

Gradually, this procedure was abandoned with the closing of the Balkan route. The CEAS guidelines could not be implemented by the Greek state on its own. The result was an outsourcing of responsibilities, which took the form of the EU–Turkey agreement. ELIAMEP explains: *"[CEAS] is non-existent. Because you need a country to do the dirty job in order for other countries to do what has to be done, in order for[… for example] Norway or Germany and Sweden to have a proper and fair asylum system. Greece has to develop an unfair and non-operational asylum system like it used to be in the past. Otherwise, it does not work. […] This was always part of CEAS. It needed states to fail [at] CEAS in order to have a CEAS. Failure is integrated into the system, in order for the system to exist"* (ELIAMEP 2016).

5.6 The European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

Many of the interviewees had little to say about the work of EASO, perhaps because this office has been in operation a relatively short time, since 2011 (EASO homepage 2016). In addition, most of the interviewees are active on a local or regional level, whereas EASO presumably cooperates to a greater extent with governmental and intergovernmental actors working on an international level. When asked about EASO, the Greek Forum of Refugees had the following comments: *"They are the authorities; they are working on the high level. They are cooperating with Frontex, they are cooperating with member states, with governments – we don't know exactly what is going on. And we see the discussion between these authorities and others, on the high level they are making decisions […] we [never had] any cooperation or discussion with it"* (Greek Forum of Refugees 2016).

As for the Greek asylum system, EASO is regarded as supporting the newly created Ministry of Migration and is expected to supply the asylum system with needed resources, especially for the relocation of asylum seekers. With the anticipated increase in asylum applications as a result of the EU–Turkey agreement, Antigone predicts the following: *"EASO cooperates closely with the Ministry and will cooperate more closely after the agreement. But we have to wait, to see how close and [on what terms the] cooperation [will be]"* (Antigone 2016).

The only interviewed NGO that cooperates with EASO is PRAKSIS. In this case, EASO supports the relocation process and delegates tasks in a one-way relationship to benefit from the experience of this NGO: *"So, PRAKSIS staff does cooperate with EASO to process their requests of relocation applicants. Mainly our role is on the accommodation side. So we work with EASO to get referrals for those who have joined the relocation process to come for accommodation"* (PRAKSIS 2016).

To sum up the relationship between Greek organisations and EASO, one could say that there is cooperation with the support office to various degrees but that EASO is not really permeable. Therefore, both intergovernmental and governmental organisations operate mostly on a national or international level and rarely cooperate with organisations working at the local level.

5.7 Criticism and Suggestions

When asked to state their wishes and suggestions with regard to asylum-related issues, most of the interviewees offered similar suggestions. One major demand was that the Greek state be put in a position to coordinate the work of the asylum process and to fulfil its governmental responsibility, replacing the UNHCR as an accountable key actor. In Caritas Athens' view, *"The state is doing very little. Basically if the state was doing their job better, we wouldn't have people here in need. If the state was really working well and prioritised this thing over other things, we wouldn't have this problem"* (Caritas Athens 2016).

There is also a need to improve the overloaded Greek asylum system in light of its low recognition rates when compared with those of other European countries, as well as a call for attention to the inhumane living conditions currently in evidence in detention centres: *"The Asylum system is in crisis; they don't have enough people, it is a catastrophe. They are not dealing with it well at all" (Caritas Athens 2016).*

In addition, the interviewees mentioned the lack of financial resources and properly trained staff many times. In their estimation, this problem compounds the handling of the current refugee situation and leads to structural deficits. Antigone puts it this way: *"The first thing is that the system needs more resources, financial resources and people. It's imperative. It's conditio sine qua non, let's say; if it doesn't happen, the system will not work efficiently"* (Antigone 2016). And Aitima recommends, *"What we*

need are resources and to be able to have the necessary staff to deal with the influx of the people. The system is not working, you have no good access to the asylum system, you have many problems because of the lack of staff. So you have structural problems" (Aitima 2016). The interviewee from ELIAMEP makes a similar statement, focusing more on the responsibility of the EU: *"Yes, definitely more staff is needed. And also support from the EU is needed. The staff is simply not enough"* (ELIAMEP 2016).

Some criticism is directed at the EU and the current politics of its member states. For most actors, the need for a common European asylum policy, with a fair distribution of asylum applicants among the European states, is obvious. Greece, as an entry country to the EU, should not be left to fend for itself, considering the vast number of refugee arrivals. The representative from ELIAMEP had this to say: *"In my point of view, asylum applications should be examined across EU member states, so we should develop an earlier way of responsibility sharing, because this is what it really is. It is the responsibility of the EU to assess asylum applications, and when we are talking about these kinds of numbers, it is impossible for a single state to cope with them. So either you need a Common European Asylum Service, which assesses the applications, or you need these asylum applications to be distributed equally among all the EU member states in order to have a fair assessment"* (ELIAMEP 2016). Amnesty International also calls for greater participation from those in power in the European countries: *"The European leaders should implement a sustainable and big program for resettlement from other countries that already host a great number of refugees. (...)The relocation system should be more flexible than it is at the moment because we don't see the numbers rise through the months of implementation, and also the existing legislation [needs] to be more flexible and effective, like family reunification and liberalisation of visas for people who are here for education or work and all this stuff"* (Amnesty International 2016).

Greek Forum of Refugees criticises the way in which Europe encapsulates itself as a 'fortress' from its neighbouring countries is criticised by: *" [At the] European level of course we are saying that making walls is not the solution and there should be a responsibility sharing. You can't stop refugees; it is impossible [to] stop the people [from] wanting this. They will find a way"* (Greek Forum of Refugees 2016).

The legal basis of the EU agreement with Turkey and its function with regard to refugee resettlement are questioned by almost every actor we interviewed, as illustrated by these comments from the ELIAMEP repre-

sentative: *"My proposal would be the thing I proposed before – a proper responsibility-sharing mechanism. And also a resettlement mechanism, also from Turkey to the EU, but without connecting the resettlement of the people to deportation of other people, because this is what happens in reality right now"* (ELIAMEP 2016).

To summarise the actors' views, many urgent improvements are needed, which include more effective policy-making and practical support on both the national and the European level. This is regarded as possible only through the creation of an appropriate responsibility-sharing mechanism and an EU asylum policy based on solidarity.

6. Conclusion

Greece, because of its geographical location, is one of the main entry points to the EU for people seeking protection. It is also used as a transition country for those intending to reach EU countries other than Greece, such as Germany or Sweden. The current state of research in the field of asylum-related issues focuses on the marginalisation of asylum seekers and the obstacles they face during the application process. One can point specifically to the fluid situation regarding the change in the Greek government and the closing of the Balkan route, which were shaped mainly by political decisions made on the European level.

People seeking protection risk their lives trying to reach Greece and must often depend on smugglers. There is no legal way of migrating for people on the move. They suffer from the lack of hygienic and proper medical care in the detention centres where they are treated like criminals and must often remain for long periods of time. They also become marginalised because the asylum system fails to provide legal residence permits and financial aid. Crucial to the narratives of most of the actors interviewed in this study are the inadequate and inefficient asylum system (despite its being improved after the change in the Greek government) and the fact that NGOs must make up for the gaps in governmental services.

As for the networks of the organisations we examined, cooperation appears to be important for successful work in the organisational field of asylum-related issues. The most important aspects of the cooperation networks are the sharing of resources and expertise in times of scarce funding, and specialisation and (thematic) networking in order to raise awareness among the public and to put pressure on the politicians on a different

scale. For the most part, there is no official cooperation between the organisations, but rather a less formal ad hoc cooperation that is focused on the immediate needs of those working in the field. As the recent refugee crisis has been developing, these informal networks have grown and many new NGOs have emerged in the organisational field in Greece. In order to provide sufficient aid to people seeking protection, the networks tend to be somewhat heterogeneous, allowing the organisations to share resources and distribute tasks among the various organisations. Taking into account the educational backgrounds and driving norms of the actors, a tendency towards homogeneous networks is observed.

With regard to the asylum situation and how it has changed over time, it is difficult to say what role the government would have played had the financial situation been better and in the absence of other political and decisive developments, such as the EU–Turkey agreement and the closure of the Balkan routes. According to most of the interviewees, the governing party is showing good will when it comes to improving the asylum-related situation, but it is definitely overburdened by the large influx of refugees and a growing number of asylum applications. There also are structural deficiencies in the system resulting from the long-standing lack of strategies in Greek politics concerning migration and asylum.

If we consider the theoretical complex of neo-institutionalism, different tendencies of isomorphism can be identified. In the case of Greece, one of the most important processes appears to be the deliberate dissociation from the Greek government of many interviewed NGOs in the field. They feel the state should bear some responsibility for the refugee crisis, yet it does not provide enough services for the asylum seekers. The Greek government participates in the EU politics of isolation and its questionable actions in keeping these migrants from entering the EU. In terms of their financial needs, the interviewed organisations do not want to be regarded as part of the problem by accepting government funding and thus losing their credibility. In this regard, the paradigm shift and the support of different organisations as a result of the governmental change are not evident, perhaps because the fluid situation in Greece overshadows other discursive changes that could evolve and thus alter the hegemonic discourses. It is also possible that the government's financial resources are not sufficient to support other organisations as a way to change the field and initiate certain kinds of isomorphism.

In the case of mimetic isomorphism, the newly emerging (informal) networks generally tend to copy best practices. With the on-going refugee

crisis, this behaviour can be differentiated from that of the more established NGOs that have been working in the field for at least several years. Therefore, the new NGOs often align themselves with the practices of these veteran organisations. In contrast, the well-established organisations rely on their own practices, masking any paradigmatic changes that may ensue from the governmental change and the refugee crisis. Therefore, the gaps between talk and action referred to in Hypothesis 4 are not observed in the more established organisations, which explicitly refer to an attachment to their established paradigms but are also open to learning about other best practices.

If we consider evidence of normative isomorphism, most of those in the organisational field are lawyers, social scientists and social workers, so one could acknowledge a certain degree of homogeneity as regards the educational background of the staff. With respect to shared values, the organisations report that they do share basic values, such as humanitarianism and antiracism, but they also admit that to ensure proper cooperation, they must make certain compromises.

In following the EU–Turkey agreement, the Greek asylum system and the Greek organisations must constantly face new challenges. Rising numbers of asylum applications are expected for 2016, and Greece is now turning from a country of transit into a country of destination, so issues of migration and integration policy will become more important. The agreement itself appears to be fragile owing to the current political circumstances in Turkey. Further research will be needed concerning the highly dynamic and constantly evolving situation of asylum seekers and refugees in Greece.

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Antigone
Caritas Athens
EKKE
ELIAMEP
Greek Forum of Refugees
MSF
PRAKSIS
Syriza