

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BEING HUNGRY IN EUROPE:

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOOD INSECURITY EXPERIENCED
BY REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS, MIGRANTS AND
UNDOCUMENTED PEOPLE IN GREECE**



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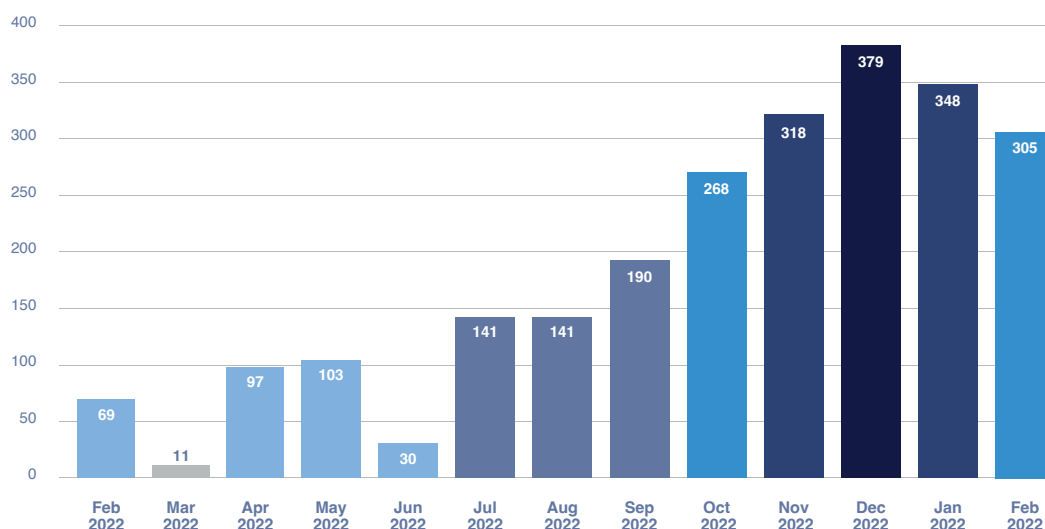
“BEING HUNGRY IN EUROPE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOOD INSECURITY EXPERIENCED BY REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS, MIGRANTS, AND UNDOCUMENTED PEOPLE IN GREECE”

“Being Hungry in Europe: An Analysis of the Food Insecurity Experienced by Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants, and Undocumented People in Greece” is a report that reflects the results and challenges of the current food insecurity situation experienced by refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and undocumented people, in Greece identified during the implementation of the Food for All project of INTERSOS HELLAS and the Greek Forum of Migrants (GFM) supported by Stichting Vluchteling - SV (Netherlands Refugee Foundation). Furthermore, with the contribution of HIAS and the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), an in-depth facts-based analysis of the political and legislative barriers in place in Greek legislation is presented.

In addition to providing a qualitative and a quantitative perspective, the report aims to advocate for policy reforms to meet basic needs and, ultimately, the pursuit of effective integration. To this end, the briefing presents the position on the main provisions and policies adopted at global and European levels in terms of the social welfare system, as well as a few indicative Best Practices implemented by other EU member states, which serve the purpose of indicate and compare policy designing and outcomes. Both are congenial to present a sound framework within which policymakers can formulate the amendment of public policies.

Taking distance from any political instrumentalization, the document aims to describe the food insecurity phenomenon’s extent and outline the profiles of those who, due to their extreme vulnerability, find themselves in a situation of extreme material deprivation. The above is especially alarming considering recent high inflation rates, the negative impact of which is even greater on the poorer sections of the population, as reported by the World Bank. Designed to cover the needs of the most exposed segments of the population, it was clear from early on that the distributions were not able to cover the requests received.

Monthly On Hold



Key Findings

One figure that would help to grasp the severity of the problem is the steady growth in the number of on-hold requests, which has quadrupled from the initial number during the first year of implementation. Through an estimate based on the average household size assisted by the FFA project, approximately 2.366 people, including 1.233 minors, are currently on the waiting list while struggling to be able to meet their basic food needs and exposing themselves to severe risks, both physical and psychological. Though reasons may vary, it is worth noticing that this increase in application requests seems to coincide with the gradual eviction of those residing in the ESTIA accommodation programme, whose ending was decided by the Greek government by the termination of 2022.

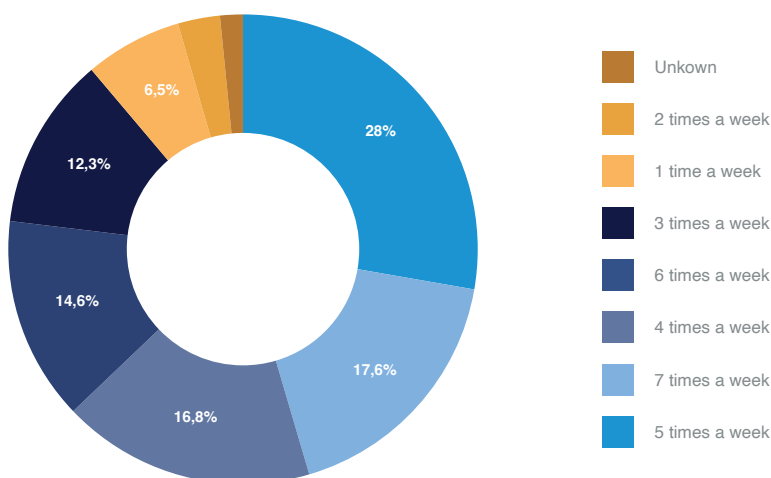
From what emerges from the implementation of the program, severe to moderate food insecurity appears to be quite widespread among the people the project aims to assist.

In fact, as many as 59.4 percent of people manage to access food only one to three times a week, falling into the category of those experiencing a form of severe food insecurity, according to the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)¹.

Moreover, even those who claimed to have more regular access to food during the week cannot always secure quality and nutritious food, which is more expensive, resulting in high rates of undernutrition and obesity.

From February 2022 to February 2023, the project supported 1.979 families and a total of 5.932 individuals, the majority of which were minors (54%), highlighting intensified food needs impinging on an age group for which malnutrition can cause severe long-term consequences. This finding is of particular concern in light of the evidence that food insecurity can affect children's cognitive abilities, de facto perpetuating forms of inequality². More precisely, out of 2.932 children, close to 1 in 3 are below the age of 4. As many studies point out, shortcomings in the assumption of proper nutritional intake in the earliest stages of life can severely hamper child growth. Moreover, such deficiencies may also cause severe long-term consequences even if occurring in the prenatal phase, when they are associated with *"poor performance on language comprehension tests, (...) delays in socioemotional, cognitive, motor and neurophysiological development"*.

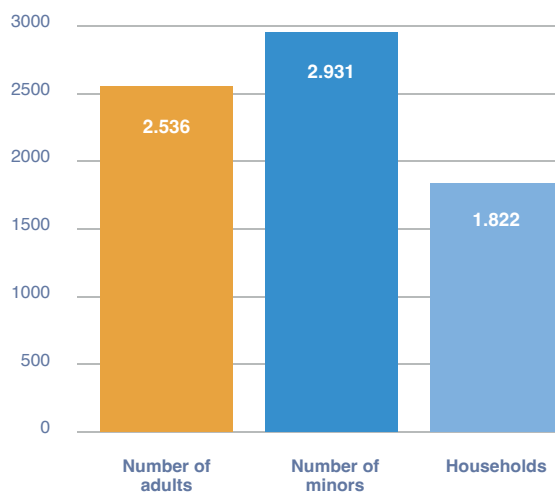
Inability to Find Food



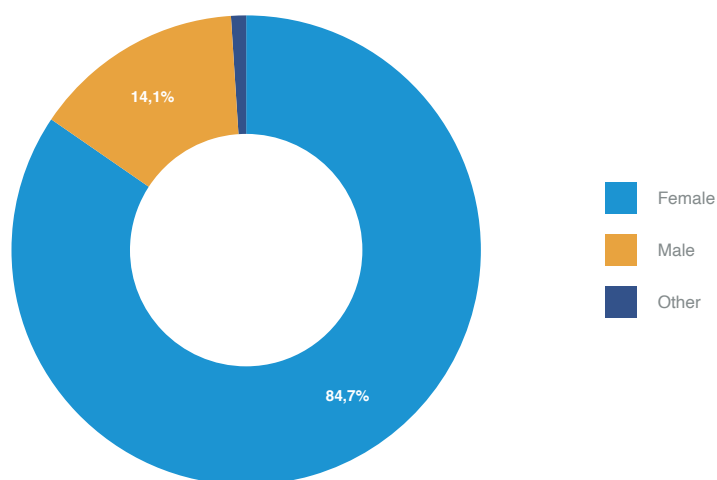
¹ FAO, *Hunger* | FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and Bringing experience-based food insecurity measurement to the global level

² See footnotes number 33, 34 and 35 of the report

Total Beneficiaries and Households



Gender



The demographic analysis of the data collected through the interviews on site also shows that the clear majority of the people who are supported by the project (84,7%) are women and girls. The risk for these individuals to resort to survival sex is very high, as testified by them.

Indeed, finding themselves marginalized and with access to objectively restricted livelihood networks to meet their personal and their families' alimentation needs, considerations regarding the possibility of exchanging sex for scarce money often arise. The same considerations also apply to finding a suitable and safe place to live with their own family.

Key barriers preventing access to welfare

By examining the existing barriers that prevent the population under consideration from being able to benefit from social welfare measures, it is evident that there are grave legally discriminating criteria.

More precisely, for beneficiaries of international protection (BPI) as well as for people holding residence permits issued under the Greek Migration Code, the condition of 5 or more years of legal and interrupted presence in the country acts as a decisive parameter for the entitlement of access rights.

In this regard, the European Commission opened infringement proceedings against Greece in January 2023 for failing to comply with its obligations under EU law.

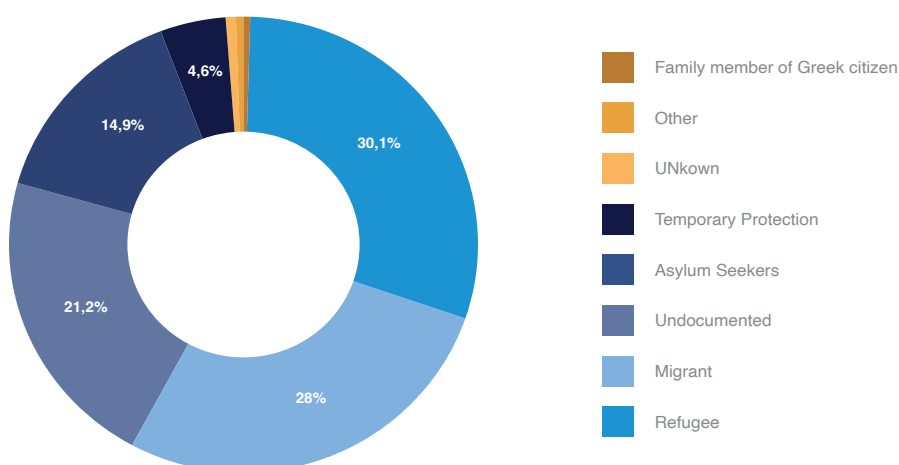
In parallel to the legal barrier, there is also the administrative one: the length and complexity of the bureaucratic procedures discourage from accessing social support measures many of those who would, in principle, be entitled to them, as observed from data collected through FFA.

Of particular concern is the legal gap during the time it takes to renew residence permits, which can frequently take more than 6 months. During this time, beneficiaries' access not only to social welfare but also to healthcare and to the labor market is disrupted, leading to a vicious cycle of repetitive exclusion from their rights. Furthermore, shortcomings in the public sector with respect to interpretation services also indicate the presence of a linguistic barrier.

For what concerns the Asylum applicants, in addition to delays in the administrative system which often leaves them exposed for several months, they also experience severe forms of deprivation due to inadequate reception conditions in the camps, which would raise serious questions about whether satisfactory living standards are being met.

Finally, undocumented persons, such as unregistered or rejected asylum seekers, are not eligible for any kind of social benefits. Moreover, since the Greek government decided to interrupt the provision of food to those still in the reception system, after having fallen outside of the asylum procedure, the only alternative to receive food is through soup kitchens or other solidarity initiatives. All this results in greater exposure for the most vulnerable segments of the population, which raises serious doubts about the effectiveness of the integration strategy implemented by Greece.

Legal Status Percentage



Key recommendations

The report recommends a series of policy actions for a more inclusive and resilient society where growth is pursued while leaving no one behind. We call on policy-makers:

- To consider ensuring access to welfare in a non-discriminatory manner by removing legal impediments that hinder the satisfaction of basic needs.
- To enhance the appropriateness of income support measures, periodically adjusting their amount to the variation of economic cycles.
- To consider developing indexes to track the extent of food insecurity in Greece, including the population covered by the report, which is omitted from official national statistics.
- To acknowledge the interconnection between food insecurity, poverty, and social marginalization and, therefore, to develop cumulative, integrated, and complementary policies to cover essential needs.
- To give voice to migrant communities and other civil society actors, involving them in the identification of the gaps that prevent access to social assistance.
- To extend the deadline for the existing reception system for beneficiaries of international protection, in order to give them time to be able to reach a level of awareness about the Greek administrative, labor, and socioeconomic system and permit the attainment of a greater level of autonomy and integration.





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