

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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List of Acronyms

CSOs: Civil Society Organisations

EPSR: European Pillar of Social Rights

ESF+: European Social Fund Plus

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

FFA: Food for All project

FEAD: Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived

GFM: Greek Forum of Migrants

GMI: Guaranteed Minimum Income

IASC: Inter-Agency Standing Committee

ILO: International Labour Organisation

MS: Member State

MIPEX: Migrant Integration Policy Index

MoMA: Ministry of Migration and Asylum

NISTR: New National Integration Strategy (2022)

PoC: Population of Concern

RSA: Refugee Support Aegean

SDG2: Sustainable Development Goal number two

SSI: Social Solidarity Income

UAM: Unaccompanied Minor

UN: United Nations

WFP: World Food Program

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations has identified 17 goals (SDGs), divided into 169 ‘targets’ to be achieved by 2030 to pursue inclusive growth based on a sustainable development model for the planet. At the top of the global priorities, the achievement of **SDG number two (SDG2)**, more specifically, aims at eliminating hunger to ensure that *“all those suffering from hunger and malnutrition have access to nutritious food”*¹. This goal is, therefore, clearly linked to an idea of a more sustainable and prosperous society, both from socioeconomic and environmental perspectives. **Fighting hunger is indeed understood as a priority to undertake to make the eradication of poverty** effective without leaving anyone behind.

The eradication of poverty includes fulfillment of the right to housing and positive measures aimed at facilitating the integration of refugees and migrants in host societies. In the case of Greece, UNHCR tried to address these difficulties through the implementation of an accommodation scheme dedicated to relocation candidates (“Accommodation for Relocation”), which later (2017) was transformed into the ESTIA (I.II) program. Under this, Asylum applicants were entitled to accommodation and cash assistance. In July 2020, the programme was reaffirmed by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA), during the ceremonial tripartite agreement between the European Commission, UNHCR, and the Ministry, for the gradual handover of the renewed ESTIA II programme to the Greek state².

Throughout the programme, via the various implemented policies, it was modified multiple times, which led to different consequences for the affected population.

In early February 2019, the Greek Ministry of Migration Policy announced the gradual termination of accommodation to international protection beneficiaries living in mainland Greece’s refugee camps. The first group of beneficiaries of international protection required to leave their accommodation was those recognized before the end of July 2017, and the deadline given for their exit was 31 March 2019³.

The said decision led to the first wave of homelessness⁴. The population before the exit notification used to reside at reception and accommodation centers (and the ones who entered the country via the islands faced geographical restrictions). Often the population was transferred from the first reception center to another one on the mainland or to an apartment provided by the ESTIA programme. It was observed that a percentage of the population that had changed at least two accommodation premises (two different locations in Greece) decided to become self-accommodated and moved to an urban center to identify employment opportunities and start the integration process for their household. Notably, the self-accommodated population was entitled to receive the total amount (non-catered) of cash assistance once transferred to the selected self-accommodated premises.

Following the announcement of the first exits/evictions from the sites or apartments and Greece’s inefficient integration plans, Persons of Concern (PoCs) experienced linguistic barriers, therefore, restricted access to employment. Thus, the likelihood of effective integration was low.

¹ United Nations, [Food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture | Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#)

² ECRE report on Greece, Update May 2022, [Types of accommodation - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles](#), pp. 167

³ ProAsyl News, Get out! In Greece recognized refugees have to leave their accommodation, 18 April 2019, available at <https://www.proasyl.de/en/news/get-out-in-greece-recognized-refugees-have-to-leave-their-accommodation>

⁴ Medecins sans Frontieres, [ESTIA Eviction Statement | msf.gr](#)

The introduction of [L. 4636/19](#) in November 2019 provided that beneficiaries of international protection would be required to immediately exit Greece's reception system within six months of the law's publication (article 114). This was later (March 2020) amended through [L. 4674/20](#), which provided the exit would take place within 30 days of the notification of the positive asylum decision (article 111) while specifying an exception for unaccompanied minors, for whom the deadline would commence at the time of reaching adulthood. An April 2020 Joint Ministerial Decisions (JMD) also provided for very few additional exceptions⁵.

As a result, the first wave of homeless people started, and the population resided at sites either as unregistered or were identifying other temporary accommodations solutions such as squats, etc. In conjunction with the termination of the cash assistance, those decisions sat at stake the population's survival, based on testimonials by PoCs and Community leaders. Thus, the modification of the programme produced an irregular exit strategy that caused tremendous consequences with long-term effects. Part of the population, indicatively single mothers or members of nuclear households resorted to the survival sex in an attempt to avoid malnutrition and food insecurity for themselves and their children. Other parts of the population were led to non-formal employment where the level of exploitation was high. And the majority of the exited population, which resided in precarious conditions, was exposed to protection incidents due to unsafe housing. Hence, the PoCs faced pauperism, while the indicators of life quality were significantly low.

In the meantime, on the 26th of February 2020, the first lockdown in Greece took place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As reported by the literature, *"the pandemic has disproportionately impacted refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants that live in vulnerable conditions"*⁶. **The declining financial incomes due to the lockdown and the loss of jobs** appear to have had a more severe impact on this group of people, mostly employed in illegal work and thus not entitled to financial allowances. The closure of schools due to the pandemic meant that families also had to make up for the meals children received in the school canteen. In addition, several studies have shown that the *"documentation status (...) had impaired access to health services [and] to government food assistance"* inevitably effecting the food insecurity situation for these households, which *"was experienced to a greater extent [by them] even before the pandemic"*⁷.

In continuation all of above events, in June 2021, the Greek Government announced the termination of the cash assistance program under UNHCR. Particularly, for the self-accommodated population, an exercise was conducted and provided the opportunity to submit an application to be re-accommodated under an official/governmental facility to meet the new eligibility criteria and continue receiving cash assistance. However, part of the population could not be relocated for the third or fourth time, as they had started the integration process in large urban settings and consequently this population was excluded from the cash assistance program. This resulted in a higher number of underprivileged and marginalized people. While the UNHCR handover to the Greek Government was finalized on the 30th of September 2021⁸.

From the moment the Greek government undertook the cash assistance project (October 2021), the new setup ended up being finalized at the beginning of 2022, while the retroactive payments were completed in March 2022. In the meantime, the population experienced starvation, and the Greek civil society had to document the food insecurity that the vulnerable population was facing.

⁵ Namely adding: a) families with a member whose "very serious" health condition "makes it absolutely necessary" to not change their environment "due to life threatening risk", b) beneficiaries "in advanced or threatened (επικειλούμενη) pregnancy and in a state of puerperium (λοχεία)", for whom reception conditions were extended for a period of 2 months, and c) beneficiaries who upon turning 18 reside in accommodation centers for unaccompanied minors or in temporary accommodation for unaccompanied minors and due having specific vulnerability or in order to be able to continue their education, could be referred to ESTIA accommodation for an additional period of 3 months. Article 6 of [JMD 13348/2020](#), ΦΕΚ 1199/Β/7-4-2020 on Conditions for providing material reception conditions under the "ESTIA II" program for housing applicants for international protection.

⁶ Ahmed, D.; Benavente, P.; Diaz, E. *Food Insecurity among International Migrants during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Scoping Review*. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health 2023, 20, 5273. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20075273>

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ [UNHCR hands over the management of the cash assistance programme for asylum seekers in Greece to the Greek Government](#)

In continuation to that, in February, 2022 the Ukrainian war began. The war triggered a massive shock to the global economy, mainly hindering energy and food markets, squeezing supply, and pushing prices up to unprecedented levels. Compared with other economic regions, the euro area has been particularly vulnerable to the economic consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine⁹.

All of those facts led the more vulnerable social stratifications to a dead end, as the population couldn't afford the price increase and hence was unable to ensure food and housing for their households.

In December 2022 the ESTIA programme was officially terminated. As a result, there is a new wave of homeless people that are struggling to survive and meet their essential needs.

Currently (April 2023), the situation remains the same. While in the meantime, NGOs designed programs to support and address the Food insecurity challenges faced by the population. One of those projects was the Food For All project, funded by INTERSOS HELLAS and implemented by the Greek Forum of Migrants. The project was initiated in December 2021 and is still taking place. The present report aims to analyze the reasons and factors leading the population to a food insecurity status. Additionally, the document aims to examine the accessibility and adequacy indicators regarding the social allowances provided by the Greek state to constructively support the population's needs and challenges.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

WORLD FOOD SUMMIT, 1996

Lastly, the vulnerable population is at risk of social exclusion. With reference to "Risk of poverty or social exclusion", three indicators are taken into account: **income deprivation** (the risk of poverty), **access to 7 basic goods from a list of 13 goods and services** (SMD - Severe Material Deprivation) and **the labor intensity of the household**. In this respect, EUROSTAT and the Hellenic Statistical Authority - ELSTAT use the composite **index AROPE (Persons Living At Risk Of Poverty or Social Exclusion)**, which is more complex and records higher poverty risk rates because it takes into account all three factors. The AROPE indicator was used for the evaluation of the Europe 2020 programme, which in 2013 set the target "to reduce by 20 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2020". The newest version of this indicator will be used to assess the Europe 2030 programme, i.e. the reduction in the number of poor people by 2030. This indicator ("Europe 2030") measures the economic inability to access at least 7 basic material goods from a list of 13. More specifically, it investigates whether the following opportunities exist: 1) to pay fixed rents, electricity, water, gas bills and loan or purchase installments; 2) to take a holiday for at least one week a year; 3) to eat meat, chicken, fish or vegetables of equal nutritional value every other day; 4) to manage emergency needs of about 410 euros, 5) availability of a private car, 6) access to adequate heating in winter and cooling in summer, 7) replacement of worn-out furniture, 8) access to the Internet, 9) purchase of new clothes, 10) use of two pairs of shoes, 11) personal expenses, 12) social activities, and 13) participation in paid leisure activities. The lack of access 7 out of these 13 goods and services indicates that the person is living in material deprivation¹⁰. The population supported by FFA project has no regular access to those 3 essential indicators of the AROPE index. The said fact creates multiple issues and challenges for vulnerable people.

⁹ See Arce, O., Koester, G. and Pierluigi, B. (2022), Challenges for global monetary policy in an environment of high inflation: the case of the euro area, ICE: Revista De Economía, No 929, pp. 115-130, available also at https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/blog/date/2023/html/ecb_blog.230330~00e522ecb5.en.html

¹⁰ Poverty Watch Greece, 2022, available at <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/eapn-PW-2022-Greece-5542.pdf>

METHODOLOGY

The current report provides an overview of the existing Greek and EU policy framework related to social welfare as well as the data and accounts collected from INTERSOS HELLAS, HIAS, and GCR projects' PoCs. The presented data are analyzed in the following sections through **the lens of adequacy and accessibility** to the Greek social welfare provision. Ultimately, the report highlights specific best practices and recommendations addressed to relevant stakeholders. Representing a first step toward opening a fruitful dialogue with the political counterpart. Indeed, the present report is meant to provide a doorway for cooperation between the organizations of civil society and the Government.

The initial overview is based on **desk research** conducted by INTERSOS HELLAS, HIAS, and GCR between September 2022 and February 2023. Moreover, the report refers to data primarily collected from the FFA project run by INTERSOS HELLAS and GFM, complemented by **field accounts** shared by HIAS and GCR, under different projects implemented in 2022. HIAS collected the testimonials through the needs assessment regularly conducted by HIAS caseworkers who inquire about access to basic needs and the living conditions of the clients¹¹. GCR's contribution is based on interviews with representatives of its Social Unit on 20 and 26 January 2023 and needs identified through the provision of services by the Unit throughout 2022, as well as research previously conducted under the Do the human right thing - Raising our Voice for Refugee Rights joint project, implemented between November 2021 and April 2022¹².

The **“Food for All” project**, implemented in Athens since February 2022, aims to support **people facing food insecurity** by providing them with meal vouchers or food bags once a month¹³. It is key to note that the official national statistics seem to present a gap when it comes to analyzing the population in its entirety: in fact, subjects who fall into the most vulnerable groups are underrepresented, since, for example, people without a residence permit, such as rejected asylum seekers and undocumented third-country nationals are not included. Moreover, the sample excludes people living in camps, shelters, and refugee centers. The natural consequence of this choice with respect to the reference sample is that the information provided is incomplete and not comprehensive. The distribution is based on the following predefined eligibility criteria in order to prioritize assistance to those most exposed. The first criterion relates to the availability of accommodation, making homeless people and those at imminent risk of homelessness (e.g., with eviction notices) the project priority. The prioritization lies in the fact that if people do not have the possibility to live in a safe place, then they most likely do not have an adequate financial income to pursue healthy food. The second relates to legal status. The third concerns a combination of other factors that may indicate an increased vulnerability, such as family status (e.g., single parents, pregnant or lactating women, families with small children) and belonging to a particular social group (e.g., elderly, UAMs, LGBTQI+ community). The quantitative data of the FFA project were derived from the registration survey¹⁴ that the project PoC filled out with the support of interpreters¹⁵. The survey aims to collect basic socio-demographic information and identify the level of their access to food and other essential services while attending to their reported social gaps and further needs.

¹¹ Clients were informed about the use of their quotes in this specific report.

¹² [GCR - Do the human right thing - Raising our Voice for Refugee Rights](#)

¹³ Press Release for “Food For All” initiative | INTERSOS HELLAS, 28 February 2022, available at <https://www.intersos.gr/en/press-release-for-food-for-all-initiative/>

¹⁴ All the data were recollected in full respect of the EU policy on data protection, according to the European Regulations n. 679/2016 (GDPR).

¹⁵ The interpreters were needed for the following languages: Arabic, Farsi, French, Pakistani, Urdu, and Punjabi.

THE GREEK CONTEXT

The recently issued **New National Integration Strategy (NISTR)** explicitly mentions among its strategic priorities ensuring human rights protection for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection through “support to independent living, social housing, employability, and social welfare” in order to avoid “*the creation of parallel social systems that lead to ghettos and increased social marginalization, poverty, radicalization, and crime*”¹⁶.

Nonetheless, accordingly to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), which is considered by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission particularly adequate in terms of coverage, Greece ranks 46/100, below the international average (49/100). The Greek integration approach is described as “*Equality on Paper*”, which means that fundamental rights and long-term protection for immigrants are half-guaranteed, while “*support for equal opportunities is weak*”¹⁷. Although some advancements have been achieved in recent years, specifically concerning the grant of citizenship to children based on education grounds indeed, “*non-EU citizens still face more obstacles than opportunities for integration*”¹⁸.

Food For All: An Analysis of the Data

This section presents the analysis of the data collected through the FFA project, showing the unmet needs related to food security witnessed in Athens over the course of one year, particularly as identified for recognized refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented persons.

A total of 22 distributions, 9 of which consisted of food vouchers spendable for a warm meal and 13 food bags, were carried out under the FFA project in Athens between February 2022 and February 2023.

An important consideration that should be examined before delving into the analysis concerns the growth in the number of pending requests that could not be fulfilled. Since the first distribution, it became increasingly clear that food needs were higher than the project could address and only have been growing during implementation. As FIG. 1 shows, not only did the available resources from the very beginning turn out to be insufficient to meet demand, but also, the on-hold requests for the newly registered target population of the project increased exponentially, quadrupling by the end of the first year of implementation, after reaching a peak in December 2022. According to a statistical estimation based on the average size of the beneficiary households, approximately 2.366 people on the waiting list, including 1.233 minors¹⁹, would be exposed to critical food constraints while facing severe physical and psychological risks.

¹⁶ National Strategy for the Integration, January 2022, available at <https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/%CE%95%CE%B8%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE-%CE%A3%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE-%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%84%CE%B7-%CE%BD-%CE%88%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%BE%CE%B7-%CE%99%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%AC%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%82-2022.pdf>

¹⁷ Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020, Solano, Giacomo and Huddleston, Thomas (2020) ISBN: 978-84-92511-83-9 // Barcelona/Brussels: CIDOB and MPG | www.mipex.eu. Along with Greece, the following countries are also included in the category “Equality on paper - Slightly unfavorable”: Albania (43), Croatia (39), Latvia (37), Lithuania (37), Poland (40). This category is the second to last, followed only by the “Immigration without integration - Most unfavorable” group, which includes countries such as Jordan (21) and Saudi Arabia (10).

¹⁸ [Greece | MIPEX 2020](#)

¹⁹ Considering the population of distributions and the average number of minors and adults, we estimate using statistical inference that the number of adults is between (1114 - 1151) and the number of children between (1214 - 1251) with a probability of 95%.

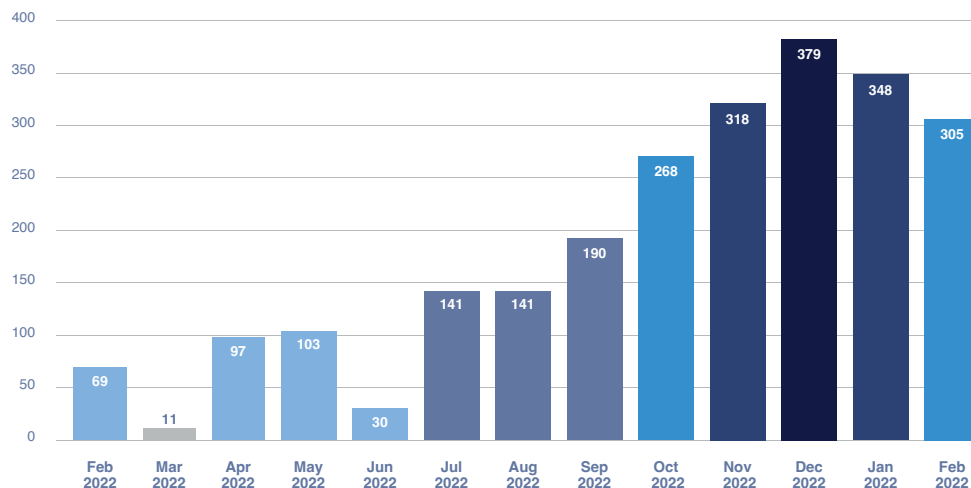


FIG. 1. Total number of on-hold requests for the FFA project (February 2022 - February 2023)

Though reasons may vary, this increase in application requests seems to coincide with the gradual eviction of those residing in the ESTIA accommodation programme following the Greek government's decision to terminate the programme by the end of 2022²⁰. For instance, between June and November 2022, more than 6,700 people were forced to leave ESTIA²¹, a significant number of whom were not eligible to receive accommodation under the Reception system, either due to being granted international protection status or second-instance negative asylum decisions²². In the latter two cases, the ongoing lack of a comprehensive policy on integration that could provide for a smooth transition to independent living for beneficiaries of international protection (BIPs), coupled with the limbo in which those rejected on the basis of Türkiye's ongoing designation as a "third safe country" by the Greek state are stuck, make it very likely for at least some part of this population to have ended up in a situation of even complete inability to cover basic needs, such as food and housing²³.

Accordingly to these circumstances, as has been flagged for months²⁴, the Greek government's decision to terminate ESTIA, thus transforming the national Reception system into one unilaterally modeled on camp-based accommodation, has forced many of those still eligible to receive Reception conditions to "opt-out" of the system - amongst others due to fear and/or past traumatic experiences, in order to preserve their sense of dignity, to not lose scarce job opportunities or to not interrupt their children's education - and to pursue alternatives on their own, even though this can increase risks of being exposed to homelessness, violence, and exploitation. In addition to guaranteeing an adequate housing solution and a series of support services for AS families, the programme also addressed the food needs of adults and minors in some specific cases²⁵.

For beneficiaries of international protection, there are no provisions. They cannot [even] access a camp. So, these people remain without cash [support], accommodation, or even food access".

**GCR SOCIAL WORKER
THESSALONIKI, 20/01/2023**

²⁰ [Ολοκληρώνεται το πρόγραμμα στέγασης "ESTIA II" το 2022 | Υπουργείο Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου](#)

²¹ [Fact Sheet Προγράμματος ESTIA 2021 | Υπουργείο Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου](#)

²² E.g. By the end of August 2022, out of the 6,585 residents of ESTIA, 2,450 were recognised refugees. Ministry of Migration & Asylum, ESTIA 2022 Factsheet: June/July/August, available (Greek) at <https://bit.ly/3ng70NH>. No relevant data on ESTIA residents whose asylum applications were rejected are available.

²³ For more, inter alia see ECRE [Country Report: Greece](#), May 2022 update, pp. 138-141;

GCR et al., [Greece deems Turkey "safe", but refugees are not: The substantive examination of asylum applications is the only safe solution for refugees](#), 14 June 2021.

²⁴ Indicatively see, [GCR - Εξώσεις, αστεγία και πωγήρισμα στην ένταξη](#), 30 November 2022 and RSA, [A Step Backwards for Protection and Integration: On the termination of the ESTIA II housing programme for asylum applicants](#), 22 December 2022, available at <https://rsaegean.org/en/termination-of-the-estia-ii-for-asylum-applicants>

²⁵ According to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, meals are provided in the following cases: a) in buildings where there are at least 20 occupants, b) in accommodation positions for vulnerable individuals with at least 20 beneficiaries in the building, c) to those who reside in apartments and buildings that do not have kitchen or meal preparation facilities. Project ESTIA, available at <https://migration.gov.gr/en/ris2/filoxenia-aitoynton-asilo>

An additional relevant insight concerns the circumstance that many project applications are “lost” within months as some of the people who had previously applied to be included in the programme eventually seem to have departed from Greece. This finding seems to further confirm the tendency to “onwards movement”²⁶, particularly for those granted international protection in Greece, on account of the ongoing risk to being exposed to conditions of inhumane and degrading treatment ²⁷ to a significant extent due to ongoing systematic barriers to integration, including **discriminatory policy in terms of access to social support measures**. The delicate condition of increased vulnerability in which these people find themselves raises their likelihood of resorting to **smuggling networks** to irregularly reach other European destinations, exposing themselves to enormous risks, including human trafficking, since they are left with few alternatives. Without adequate support and surviving below the appropriate standard of living, facing significant risks to both their physical and mental health, these people become more vulnerable and exposed to exploitation.

Over the course of one year, **the project benefited 1.979 families and a total of 5.932 individuals, the majority of which were minors (54%)**. More precisely, out of 2.932 children, **close to 1 in 3 are below the age of 4**.

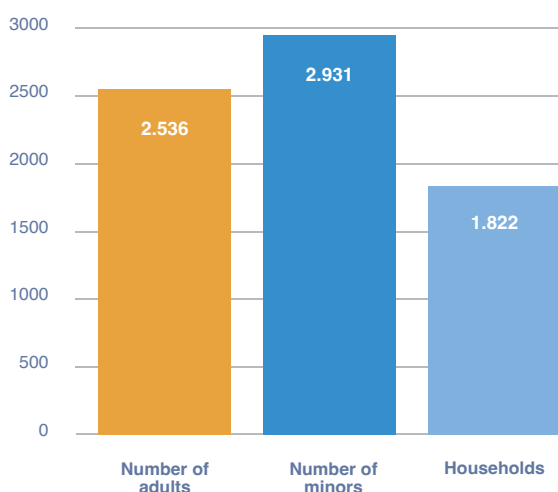


FIG. 2. FFA PoCs, February 2022 - February 2023

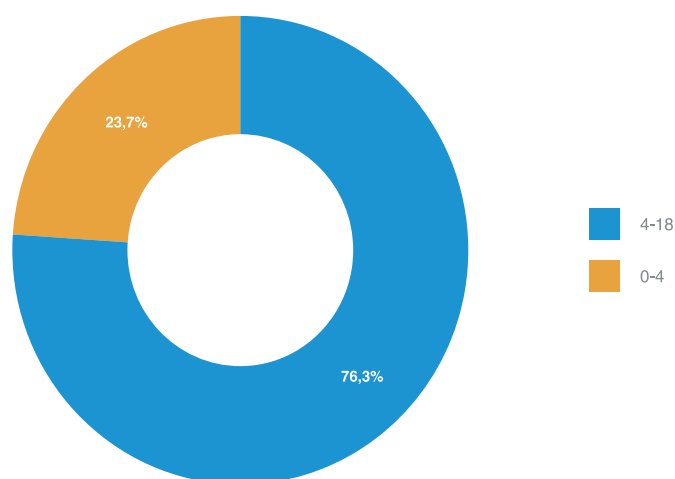


FIG 3. FFA Children PoCs by age

This figure is particularly concerning, in light of the ongoing food price inflation, given the fact that it highlights intensified food needs impinging on an age group, for which malnutrition can cause severe consequences. For instance, as has been consistently demonstrated, *“food inflation during pregnancy and in the first years of a child’s life is associated with greater risk of child wasting in the short run and stunting in the long run”*²⁸. Overall, there have been several studies that have suggested food insecurity has adverse effects on children’s health, *“including increased rates of iron-deficiency anemia, acute infection, chronic illness, and developmental and mental health problems”*²⁹.

²⁶ That have been inter alia flagged in a letter by 6 member states to the EU Commission back in 2021. [Whip Greece into shape so we can resume migrant removals, northern Schengen states demand](#)

²⁷ Which is also why Courts in other member states have in recent years blocked the return of beneficiaries of international protection back to Greece. See EUAA, [Jurisprudence on Secondary Movements by Beneficiaries of International Protection: Analysis of Case Law from 2019-2022](#), June 2022, pp.19-20. For more, see also RSA (i) [Deported to destitution - R.S.A.](#), 6 October 2022, and (ii) [Recognised refugee returned to Greece, destitute, forgotten and undocumented - R.S.A.](#), 4 March 2022.

²⁸ The World Bank, Food Security Update, 12 January 2023, available at <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/40ebbf38f5a6b68bfc11e5273e1405d4-0090012022/related/Food-Security-Update-LXXVI-January-12-2023.pdf>, pp 1. See also pp. 8-9.

²⁹ Seligman HK, Laraia BA, Kushel MB. *Food insecurity is associated with chronic disease among low-income NHANES participants*. J Nutr. 2010 Feb;140(2):304-10. doi: 10.3945/jn.109.112573. Epub 2009 Dec 23. Erratum in: J Nutr. 2011 Mar;141(3):542. PMID: 20032485; PMCID: PMC2806885. See also, Schmeer KK, Piperata BA. Household food insecurity and child health. Matern Child Nutr. 2017 Apr;13(2):e12301. doi: 10.1111/mcn.12301. Epub 2016 Apr 29. PMID: 27126348; PMCID: PMC6865872.

The effects of shortcomings in the assumption of proper nutritional intake can indeed severely hamper child growth. For example, studies suggest that iron deficiency in the earliest stages of life could cause “*irreversible neurophysiological changes including (...) to dopamine metabolism, and hippocampal structure and functions*”³⁰. Moreover, such deficiencies may also cause severe **long-term consequences** even **if occurring during the prenatal phase**, when they are associated with “*poor performance on language comprehension tests, (...) delays in socioemotional, cognitive, motor and neurophysiological development*”^{31 32}. Between February 22 and February 23, as many as 14 pregnant women benefited from the support provided by the FFA project.

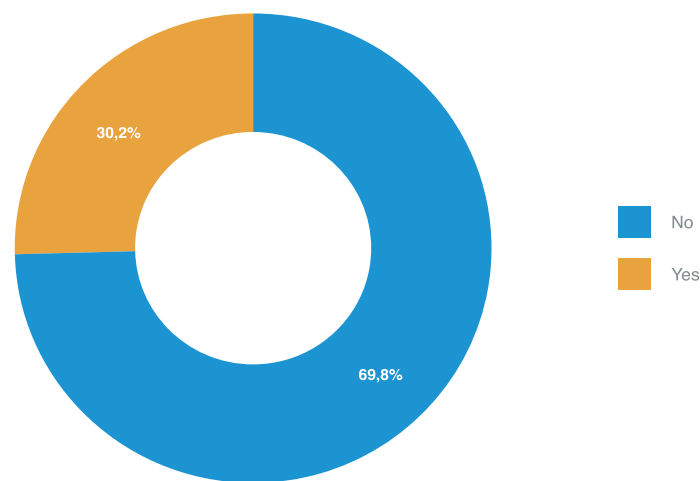


FIG. 4. Access to food by FFA PoCs

At the same time, even once the critical stage of infancy has concluded, the effects of experiencing forms of food insecurity continue to affect children. Indeed, it has been observed that “*during school years, nutritional deficiencies directly undermine student’s cognitive capacities*”. The diets followed by insecure households, in fact, consist mainly of cheaper foods with a high sugar and low iron content, “*which can have behavioral consequences, including hyperkinesia, inattention, and poor memory*”³³. Finally, other studies indicate that during late adolescence and young adulthood, children exposed to food insecurity are more prone to experience depression, suicidal ideation, behavior, and substance abuse disorder^{34 35}.

³⁰ Janice Ke, MSc, Elizabeth Lee Ford-Jones, MD, Food insecurity and hunger: A review of the effects on children’s health and behaviour, Paediatrics & Child Health, Volume 20, Issue 2, March 2015, Pages 89–91, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/20.2.89>

³¹ Black MM. Integrated strategies needed to prevent iron deficiency and to promote early child development. J Trace Elem Med Biol. 2012 Jun;26(2-3):120-3. doi: 10.1016/j.jtemb.2012.04.020. Epub 2012 Jun 2. PMID: 22664336; PMCID: PMC3726940.

³² Ibid. No 30

³³ Melchior M, Chastang J-F, Falissard B, Galéra C, Tremblay RE, Côté SM, et al. (2012) Food Insecurity and Children’s Mental Health: A Prospective Birth Cohort Study. PLoS ONE 7(12): e52615. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0052615>

³⁴ McIntyre L, Williams JV, Lavorato DH, Patten S. Depression and suicide ideation in late adolescence and early adulthood are an outcome of child hunger. J Affect Disord. 2013 Aug 15;150(1):123-9. doi: 10.1016/j.jad.2012.11.029. Epub 2012 Dec 29. PMID: 23276702.

³⁵ McLaughlin KA, Green JG, Alegria M, Jane Costello E, Gruber MJ, Sampson NA, Kessler RC. Food insecurity and mental disorders in a national sample of U.S. adolescents. J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry. 2012 Dec;51(12):1293-303. doi: 10.1016/j.jaac.2012.09.009. Epub 2012 Nov 6. PMID: 23200286; PMCID: PMC3632292.

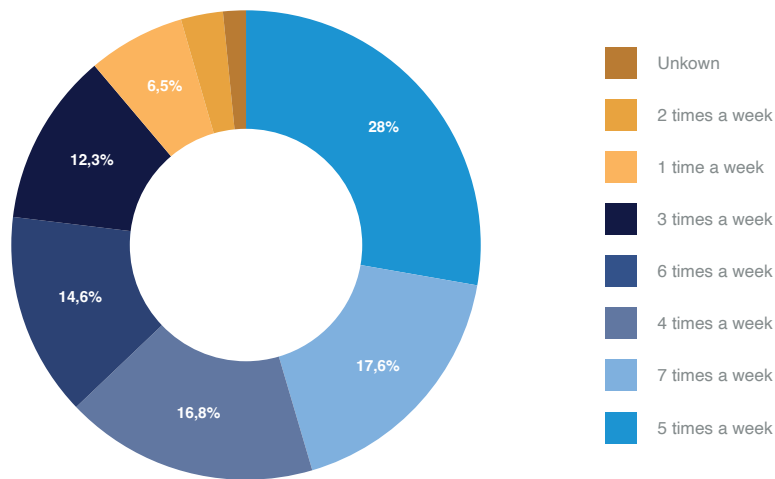


FIG. 5. Weekly frequency of inability to find food

Most of the PoCs (69,8%) reported that they were not able to access food regularly, denoting a rather widespread situation of food insecurity. Delving deeper, it emerges that **17.6% declared that they do not have access to food to any extent**. Yet the reported frequency of lack of access to food is cause for even greater concern, given that the vast majority reported not having access to food for multiple days during the week. **As many as 59.4% of the PoCs manage to access food only one to three times a week**. According to the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)³⁶ adopted by the FAO to measure the severity of food insecurity, this population lies in the category of those suffering from **severe food insecurity** since, based on their accounts, they lacked access to food for at least one day. Moreover, it is opportune and worrying to note that even those who claimed to have more regular access to food during the week are not always able to secure **quality and nutritious food** and therefore fall into the category of people with moderate food insecurity. Those in the category of **moderate food insecurity** are likely to skip meals or consume foods with inadequate nutritional values, as the limited purchasing power does not allow a more appropriate food choice in terms of quality. This situation of limited access to inappropriate food entails the widespread phenomenon of malnutrition among the said population, resulting in high rates of undernutrition and obesity³⁷. The above is especially alarming in light of recent high inflation rates, the negative impact of which is even greater on the poorer sections of the population, as reported by the World Bank³⁸.

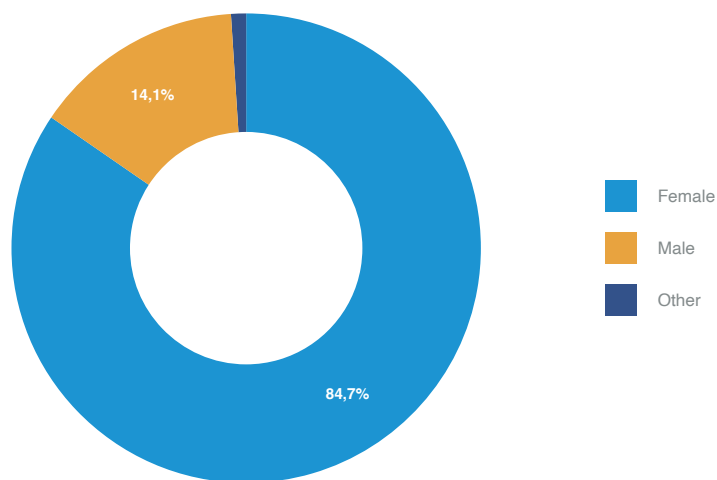


FIG. 6. Gender breakdown of FFA beneficiaries

³⁶ FAO, [Hunger | FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](#) and [Bringing experience-based food insecurity measurement to the global level](#)
³⁷ Gowda C, Hadley C, Aiello AE. The association between food insecurity and inflammation in the US adult population. *Am J Public Health*. 2012 Aug;102(8):1579-86. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2011.300551. Epub 2012 Jun 14. PMID: 22698057; PMCID: PMC3464824.
³⁸ [World Development Report 2022: FINANCE for an Equitable Recovery](#)

The demographic analysis of the data collected through the interviews also shows that the clear majority of the project PoCs (84,7%) are women and girls. Since **women** appear to play the role of household caregivers and, in some cases, also of food providers, they face high pressure to find food, which **exposes both themselves and their children to significant levels of stress and considerable risks**. Overall approximately 3% of families are headed by a single parent who is a woman in nearly all cases. In order to satisfy what is a natural subsistence need, namely to obtain food to feed themselves and their children, women often resort to extreme solutions such as **survival sex** to meet their personal and their families' alimentation needs³⁹. This risk was also shared as a concern by FFA program PoCs who reported extreme difficulties with food security and mentioned considering exchanging sex for scarce money.

In what concerns their **legal status**, the majority (34.7%) are beneficiaries of international protection, followed by people holding residence permits issued under the Greek Migration Code (28%)⁴⁰, people lacking legal documents (21.2%), and asylum seekers (14.9%).

Only a minimal percentage (0.1%) are Greek nationals, which under conditions could be an indication of accessibility to broader safety nets (e.g., family, friends, local community) that may be able to compensate for food insecurity, but the sample makes it impossible to draw meaningful conclusions.

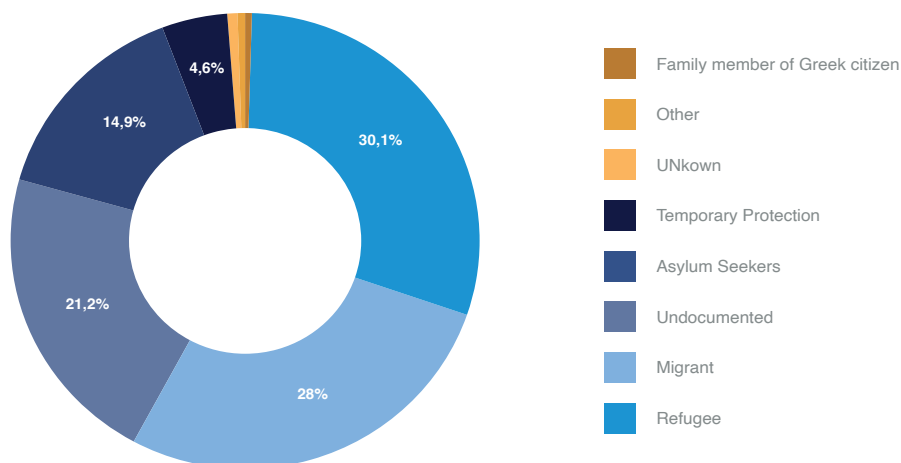


FIG. 7. Legal status breakdown of FFA beneficiaries.

**“Other” includes: Greek citizens, recognized refugees in other EU countries and people in transfer

“There are many examples, but my most recent case: a single mother, victim of gender-based violence, with a minor child and with a second instance negative asylum decision. She stays in a basement and there are significant indications that [she engages in survival sex] to be able to stay there”.

**ADAMANTIA KOTSOGLANIDI, GCR SOCIAL WORKER, FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
ATHENS, 26 /01/2023**

“I’ve had many similar cases. Particularly in the lockdowns, where there were too many people on the street at one stage, I had several women come up and say ‘I was in the square and someone came and said ‘I’ll give you something to eat and she went to eat a sandwich because she thought maybe this was a display of human kindness from the other person. And of course, she was raped, and many other women have been raped like that”.

**MARIA SKIADA, GCR SOCIAL WORKER,
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
ATHENS, 26 /01/2023**

³⁹ UNHCR Greece, [Inter-agency participatory assessment in Greece - 2021](#)

⁴⁰ [L. 4251/2014](#), as amended. The exact category of residence permit under the Code was outside the scope of the research.

More specifically, it is important to emphasize that most of the people assisted by the project (30.1%) hold recognized refugee status, while a part of them (11.5%) is particularly vulnerable and in a condition of uncertainty as their residence permit is about to expire/has expired. Only a very small part of the PoCs (4.6%) holds a temporary protection permit (i.e., refugees from Ukraine).

The second category that most frequently accessed the services provided by the FFA project is that of migrants with active, close to expiration, or expired residence permits. While the analysis of the specific policy conditions of migrants is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that people with a legal migrant status are particularly exposed to the problem of food insecurity, too. It seems very likely that even this category necessarily finds itself facing the same type of barriers (linguistic, administrative, social) that refugees and asylum seekers also have to face. Even if challenges may be similar, the means and the relative obstacles to addressing food insecurity are significantly different for each of the three categories (see the section “Social Assistance in Greece: Accessibility and Adequacy”).

The third place (21% of the total number of people assisted) regards the category of undocumented persons, which includes both individuals who have not started the registration process in the country or whose application has been rejected.

In addition to the above-mentioned developmental complications for children, it is appropriate to also recognize the **psychological challenges arising from being in a situation of food insecurity**, whether characterized as severe or moderate. Research has shown that food insecurity, which also seems prevalent amongst people with a refugee/migrant background worldwide, is associated with poorer well-being⁴¹, and even mental health and food insecurity problems can reinforce each other⁴². It can inter alia **impact on stress levels**, behavioral patterns (e.g., lack of trust,

These situations lead to [a type of] confinement. Being in a state of desperation, without something to eat or having to [exchange sex] to be able to remain somewhere [relatively] safe with your child and having to continuously ask for something. There is no need to go too far. It suffices to place ourselves in this type of situation. Even if you don't have depression, you develop it, you become desensitized, and you just surrender to despair.

ADAMANTIA KOTSOGLANIDI, DEPUTY COORDINATOR OF GCR'S SOCIAL UNIT

The impact on mental health can be due to a lot of underlying reasons, but food insecurity plays a huge role with respect to stress levels. [If you are a parent], how will you feed your child? What I see during appointments with our beneficiaries, is that from the moment they are caught up in how to cover food or shelter for their children or just themselves (...) They cannot talk about the next step; they cannot move forward with integration. They are only focused on one thing: survival. And how could they not be?

**DIMITRA SOURSOU, GCR SOCIAL WORKER,
JOINT INTERVIEW
ATHENS, 26/01/2023**

risk-taking, including survival sex), and a **broader deterioration of emotional health, with a variety of potential negative consequences**, depending also on factors such as age and vulnerability. For instance, in the case of adolescents, it has been linked with increased risks of developing mental health disorders, while in the case of mothers, it can negatively impact not only the child's development and behavior but also the “mother's ability to see beyond the immediate need, plan ahead and ultimately, in the case of refugees, move forward towards integration and inclusion”⁴³.

⁴¹ [Food Insecurity and Mental Well-Being in Immigrants: A Global Analysis - ScienceDirect](#)

⁴² Myers CA. Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: a Review of the Recent Literature. *Curr Nutr Rep.* 2020 Jun;9(2):107-118. doi: 10.1007/s13668-020-00309-1. PMID: 32240534; PMCID: PMC7282962.

⁴³ See for example, [Nutrition and food security | UNHCR](#); and [Migrants on the Move and Food \(In\)security: A Call for Research | SpringerLink](#)

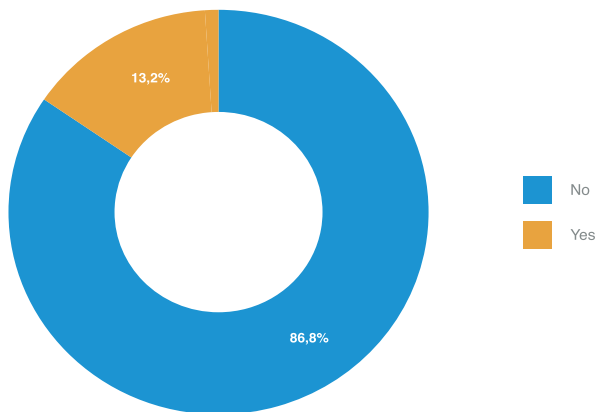


FIG.8. Knowledge of Greek by FFA beneficiaries

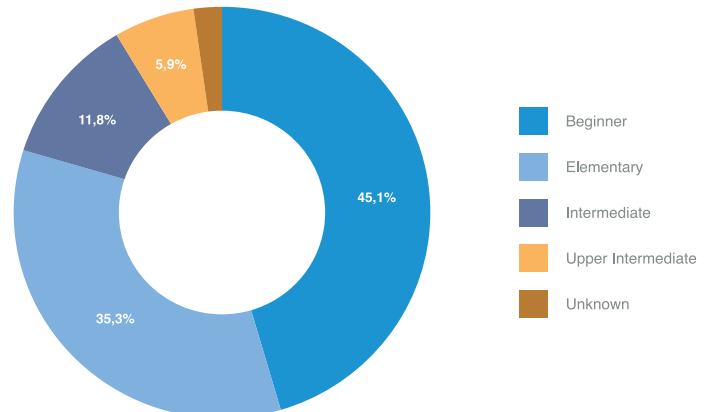


FIG.9. Level of Greek knowledge among FFA beneficiaries

Most (73.4%) of the FFA PoCs eligible for social allowance insurance did not apply for social assistance benefits. Among the ones that applied, **about 40% hold international protection status.** This finding is particularly interesting, as it indicates that there is a part of the population that, despite needing access to social support measures provided by the state, does not resort to them. The reasons are varied, ranging from a lack of awareness and knowledge of the existence of such opportunities to the renunciation motivated by considerations concerning the effort required to access such social services, such as difficulties arising from the lack of interpretation services or those related to the inability to navigate the complex Greek bureaucratic system. In relation to the latter issue, it is noticeable that there are important systemic impediments that prevent refugees and migrants residing in Greece from accessing social allowances (see the section “Social Assistance in Greece: Accessibility and Adequacy”). Furthermore, another contributing explanation for this phenomenon lies in the existence of language barriers. Indeed, only a small minority of the people assisted (less than 6%) are fluent in Greek, which made it necessary, as mentioned above, to resort to the assistance of interpreters. Clear and comprehensible communication is therefore essential for a successful and effective integration policy (see “Municipalities as protagonists for integration: the Dutch model”, in the Best Practices section).

There is an additional set of considerations to be taken into account regarding accommodation and employment statistics, which undoubtedly helps to improve the understanding of both the causes of food insecurity and the underlying reasons that exacerbate the state of vulnerability and consequent marginalization these people are currently experiencing. Looking at the statistics concerning accommodation, it emerges that a significant percentage of the people assisted live in unsafe/endangered accommodation (15.2%), are in the process of being evicted (6.4%), are homeless (2.3%), or do not have a stable home (3%).

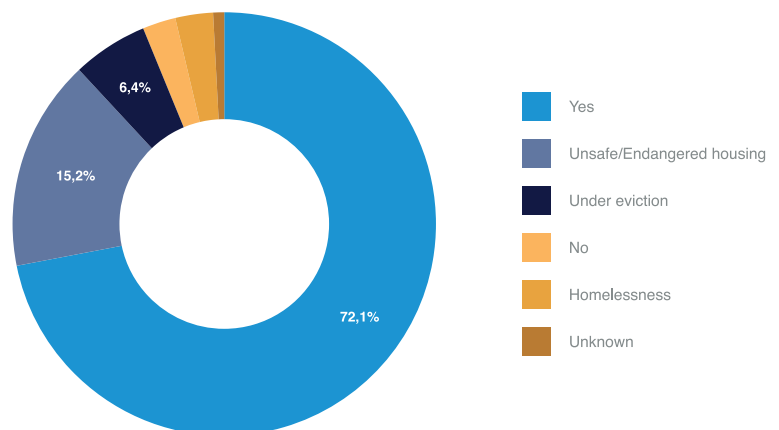


FIG.10. Accommodation situation over the total FFA beneficiary households

As a marker of material deprivation, food insecurity is inter alia directly linked with housing instability, which can be a significant factor that further hinders a household's ability to secure adequate food. For instance, studies have shown that food insecurity can be multiple times more prevalent amongst people renting a home (e.g., 28,5%), compared to those residing in a house they own (e.g., 4.3%), even when burdened by a mortgage (e.g., 11.6%)⁴⁴. And though this undeniably has to do to a large extent with differences in the financial statuses of the households concerned, homeownership in itself can provide a cushion against food insecurity.

This can be easily understood considering the added financial pressure that rent exercises on lower-income households and those struggling with financial instability or even homelessness. Though the relation is more complex, it can be generally argued that the higher the proportion of income allocated to housing, the more exposed low-income households are to the risk of food insecurity⁴⁵. As inter alia noted, “[o]ften times people have to choose between rent and food, which can diminish the quality of nutrition consumed in a household”⁴⁶. Interestingly, the inability to cover rent costs has been flagged as the main accommodation-related concern by refugees in Greece, as highlighted in the findings of UNHCR’s Inter-Agency Protection Monitoring of Refugees in Greece⁴⁷.

Other expenses, either directly or indirectly related to housing, such as utility bills, but also transportation costs arising due to distance from necessary goods and services have been associated with food insecurity⁴⁸. For instance, it has been observed that distances from supermarkets or grocery stores, coupled with limited access to transportation options, including lack of access to public transportation, can also hinder access to healthy food, particularly for vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, chronic health conditions and “racial/ethnicity” groups residing in lower-income neighborhoods⁴⁹. This also recalls the need to consider housing under the rubric of the right to adequate housing, which amongst others necessitates that a given accommodation is in a location that allows access to necessary services, including transportation⁵⁰. In this context, the Greek government’s decision to transform the reception system into one exclusively based on isolated camps, where transportation is not always available or accessible due to the limited resources asylum applicants have, needs to be checked for its impact also on the ability of camp residents to secure sufficient and nutritious food, particularly given that complaints over the quality of the food provided in both mainland and island camps have continued being expressed by their residents.

That being said, expectedly, the relation between housing instability and food insecurity is even more accentuated for homeless people, who are at a disproportionately greater risk of food insecurity, irrespective of whether they have a temporary place to sleep during the night or not⁵¹. Ultimately, particularly amidst periods of crisis (sanitary, energy, food-inflation, etc.), homeless people are the foremost vulnerable segments of the population, facing threats related both to “their long-term isolation and exclusion from society, but also threats with respect to their health, nutrition and security”⁵².

They even go to soup kitchens. But they can't find food to cook (...). We receive such complaints from people with documents as well, because they do not have enough money or if they don't stay in camps, they don't get financial support. There are others who are working but are losing wages, [as] they don't have a steady job. They report it too. But in what concerns the people without legal documents, from those we currently see there is none that does not experience food insecurity.

**DIMITRA SOURSOU, GCR SOCIAL WORKER
INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP
26/01/2023, ATHENS**

⁴⁴ Fafard St-Germain, AA., Tarasuk, V. Homeownership status and risk of food insecurity: examining the role of housing debt, housing expenditure and housing asset using a cross-sectional population-based survey of Canadian households. *Int J Equity Health* 19, 5 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-019-1114-z>.

⁴⁵ [Housing Circumstances are Associated with Household Food Access among Low-Income Urban Families](#), p.288

⁴⁶ [Impact of Housing Instability and Social Risk Factors on Food Insecurity Among Vulnerable Residents in San Diego County - PMC](#)

⁴⁷ The key findings of the Inter-agency Protection Monitoring of Refugees in Greece for 2022 can be accessed [here](#)

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ [Food Insecurity - Healthy People 2030 | health.gov](#). See also [Impact of Housing Instability and Social Risk Factors on Food Insecurity Among Vulnerable Residents in San Diego County - PMC](#)

⁵⁰ Amongst others, see [Fact Sheet No. 21 \(Rev. 1\): The Human Right to Adequate Housing | OHCHR](#)

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² ΓΓ Κοινωνικής Αλληλεγγύης & Καταπολέμησης της Φτώχειας, Πόρισμα Ομάδας Εργασίας: Ευρήματα, καλές πρακτικές και προτάσεις για την αντιμετώπιση του φαινομένου της αστεγίας, Ιανουάριος 2022, σελ. 45

Worryingly, a joint research conducted by GCR, Center Diotima and International Rescue Committee (IRC) under the “*Do the human right thing*” joint project, found that, out of 64 households granted international protection in Greece that were interviewed between November 2021-April 2022, 28% were as per their accounts living in conditions of homelessness or without a stable roof over their head, while another 22% were at risk of imminent homelessness due to becoming ineligible to remain in Greece’s reception system⁵³.

That being said, the interrelation between housing instability and food insecurity, both of which ultimately fall under the umbrella of inadequate (or even lack of) income, has prompted many to argue that attempting to address these challenges separately, for instance exclusively through cash-based interventions (e.g., benefits), though helpful, can be insufficient⁵⁴. Rather, effectively mitigating the risk of food insecurity would require parallel measures aimed at enhancing both the economic resilience of vulnerable households (i.e., in-cash support) and housing policies aimed at enhancing homeownership, such as through developing affordable housing⁵⁵, and “*particularly public housing*”⁵⁶.

Though in a different context, several of the policies implemented in Greece, with respect to refugees and asylum applicants can be seen as working towards the exact opposite direction.

The occupational status of the PoCs is another crucial factor to consider: a remarkable 86% reported being unemployed. Of those who declared to have a job, the vast majority (86.4%) do not have a stable income as they are occupied in an occasional form of employment. Furthermore, it is very rare to find that at least one household member has a fixed income, as only 4.5% of the people assisted reported that there is a family member in their household who is somehow employed. In general, job search assistance or referral for employment is one of the most frequently expressed demands.

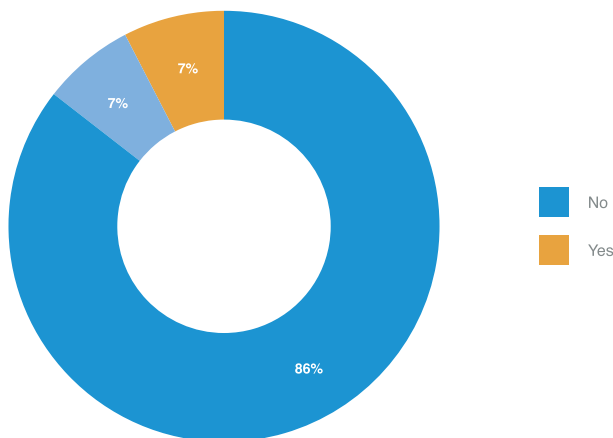


FIG.11 - Occupational profile of FFA households

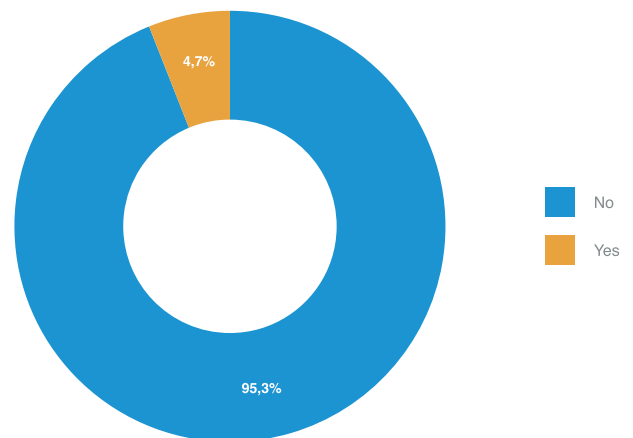


FIG.12 - Availability of other sources of labor income within the family unit

⁵³ For more on the relevant data see Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Verslag feitenonderzoek naar statushouders in Griekenland, June 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/43OPuAJ>, p.34

⁵⁴ For instance, because cash-based support can be insufficient to cover both housing and food (or other) needs, thus still leaving vulnerable households in a position where they must choose which needs to cover, based on available assistance. Amongst others, see Seo, B., & Park, G. (2021). *Food insecurity and housing affordability among low-income families: Does housing assistance reduce food insecurity?* *Public Health Nutrition*, 24(13), 4339-4345. doi:10.1017/S1368980021001002

⁵⁵ For instance, K. Burrowes, [How Stable, Affordable Housing Can Help Tackle Food Insecurity](#), 2 October 2019.

⁵⁶ Namely, as noted: “*housing assistance, particularly public housing and sufficient in-cash assistance, is conducive to alleviating food insecurity*”. Ibid, p. 43-44. See also, J. Sanchez, [Research shows bidirectional relationship between housing instability and food insecurity - UTHHealth News](#), 12 October 2020 and *Fafard St-Germain, AA., Tarasuk, V., op.cit. 44*

From the above analysis, it is evident that the overall Greek social welfare system has significant weaknesses in enabling people to meet their fundamental food needs. In addition to practical inefficiencies, limited coverage, and inadequacy, which will be analyzed further under the subsequent headings, it is crucial to note that the ongoing food insecurity situation just described, seriously affects well-being and meaningful **integration** in host communities.

Social Assistance in Greece: Accessibility and Adequacy

The present chapter discusses in brief the overall social welfare system in Greece, its basic provisions, its adequacy, as well as the barriers the target population faces when addressing the system.

The national welfare system is supervised by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, Welfare General Secretariat. The Greek law⁵⁷ provides that certain categories of third country nationals and stateless persons residing in Greece are entitled to access the national social welfare system and social subsidies, with eligibility criteria varying based mainly on the length of the legal stay in the country.

In the Greek state, we are invisible, we are treated as if we just arrived, even us who were born here by migrant parents. We start a family, raise our children, create businesses, culture, and communities, hire employees, consume, collaborate, care, and build, and we actively participate in society, but (...) migrants are not equal to Greek citizens. Migrants do not have equal rights in health, work, education, culture, life, or even death. All these people are treated as if they are living temporarily in Greece. Greek governments propose temporary residence and they are rejecting the essential integration - inclusion of migrant men and women in Greek society. And in harsh times these people are the ones who are more vulnerable because they are not included (...) We are not asking for philanthropy we are asking for inclusion.

**ADLA SHASHATI, GFM DIRECTOR, INTERVIEW
ATHENS, 01/02/2023**

The basic benefits to which citizens with minimum resources are entitled in Greece are the following:

- Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI⁵⁸) (and FEAD⁵⁹ as complementary non-cash assistance), a welfare programme that is addressed to households living in extreme poverty.
- Family allowance, according to income and household size, is provided to families that can demonstrate through the submission of tax declarations, 5 years of uninterrupted legal stay in Greece. As a result, most beneficiaries of international protection are excluded from this benefit⁶⁰.
- Single mother allowance: The allowance for single mothers is granted to those who can provide proof of their family situation, e.g., divorce, death certificate, or birth certificate. Since many mothers have no access to the authorities of their country, they are excluded because they cannot provide the necessary documents⁶¹.
- Birth allowance: The birth allowance is provided to any mother who is legally and permanently residing in Greece and amounts to €2,000 for every child born in Greece. For the births that will take place in 2020-2023, the allowance will be granted to any mother third-country national, who has been permanently residing in Greece since 2012, proved with the submission of tax declarations⁶².

⁵⁷ Art.29 of Law [4939/2022](#)

⁵⁸ GMI provides a) financial support (maximum of 200€ for the head of the family, plus 100€ for any additional adult, plus 50€ per child of the same family; the maximum monthly amount is 900€, regardless of the composition of the household, b) access to complementary social services, benefits and goods such as free medical care, inclusion in social care facilities and support and c) services that promote integration into the labour market, [Ελάχιστο Εγγυημένο Εισόδημα: Πληροφορίες](#)

⁵⁹ Complementary to the Social Solidarity Income is the Fund for the European Aid to the Most Deprived program (FEAD). The FEAD supports actions related to the collection, transportation, storage, distribution of food and basic material assistance. It also supports the implementation of accompanying measures and activities that contribute to the social integration of the PoCs. More specifically, the purpose of the program is to support the distribution of food and/or the provision of basic material assistance and to reduce the social exclusion of the deprived, in combination with accompanying measures. The scope of FEAD is specialized in Greece through the "Food and/or Basic Material Assistance" Operational Program, which was approved on the 15th of December 2014 and has been implemented nationally, [TEBA](#)

⁶⁰ ECRE [Country Report: Greece](#), May 2022 update, pp. 249-250

⁶¹ *ibid*

⁶² *ibid*

- Housing allowance, a rent benefit paid to uninsured and financially weak elderly people over 65 years of age.
- Housing benefit is a rental support programme aiming to help low-income households who live in rented primary residences to meet their housing costs, provided to persons that legally and permanently reside in Greece for a minimum of five years, excluding thus many beneficiaries of international protection.
- Free access of uninsured to the Public Health System, to uninsured persons, persons legally residing in Greece persons non-legally residing in Greece but need hospital and medical care because they belong to socially vulnerable groups (such as minors, pregnant women, invalid, etc.). However, administrative issues with the issuance of Social Security Number hinder timely access to it.
- Disability benefit, for persons with disability level above 67%. However, lengthy and complex bureaucratic procedures before the Disability Accreditation Centres render it difficult to access.
- Social solidarity allowance for uninsured elders, an allowance granted to persons aged 67 and over with low income who reside in Greece and do not receive or are not qualified to receive any pension from abroad or any social security or welfare benefit from Greece. It is available to persons who have had permanent residence in Greece for 15 years.
- For beneficiaries of international protection specifically, the HELIOS programme -which to this day remains the only nationwide integration programme- includes a housing component that can support people towards independent accommodation in apartments rented in their name through two initial installments aimed at contributing to the start of independent living (e.g., household equipment) and subsequent contributions to rental costs for up to a total of 12 months⁶³. Yet the requirements for accessing this component, to no small part due to gaps going as far back as the stage of reception make it difficult, if not impossible, for many to access this component. Particularly the requirement to first submit a lease agreement in order for the contributions to be released, which means already having the resources to pay at least 1-2 rents in advance, has been observed to be a deterring factor for those otherwise wishing to enroll⁶⁴. As noted by Marianna Archontidou, GCR social worker in Thessaloniki: “The feedback we receive from the people is that they lack the money to pay the initial rent that is required to be able to access the programme’s [rent] subsidy. This is always an inhibiting factor [they encounter] to be able to choose Helios”⁶⁵.

Drawing from the above, it is evident that although beneficiaries of international protection have the right by law to receive the necessary social assistance under the same conditions as Greek nationals, in practice, severe accessibility barriers, amounting to requirements particularly newly-recognized beneficiaries cannot possibly meet for most subsidies granted under Greece’s welfare system, makes these legal provisions void of meaning. GMI and FEAD appear to be relevantly more accessible than the other subsidies since the condition of a certain period of stay in Greece does not apply.

Apart from that, administrative issues with documentation hinder access to the above-mentioned benefits. Such delays create a coverage gap since asylum seekers stop receiving financial assistance as soon as they are recognized as beneficiaries of international protection and lose access to accommodation within a month of the recognition, with many remaining without legal documents for several months⁶⁶.

⁶³ OM, Prodedures for the provision of rental subsidies, available at https://greece.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1086/files/documents/rs-handout_first-and-monthly-disbursement_english.pdf; and IOM, HELIOS, Project Regulations Handbook, available at https://greece.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1086/files/documents/%5BENGLISH%5D_BIP_Project%20Regulations%20Handbook_FEB%202023.pdf

⁶⁴ See also GCR AND HOPELESS - Do the human right thing, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁵ 20 January 2023 interview.

⁶⁶ Report by Tramountanis A., A. Linardis, A. Mouriki, P. Gerakopoulou, D. Kondyli, O. Papaliou, C. Varouxi and S. Levine, [Humanitarian assistance and social protection responses to the forcibly displaced in Greece](#), April, 2022.

Of particular concern is the legal gap during the time it takes to renew residence permits, which can frequently take more than 6 months. As Eleni Kagiou, a GCR lawyer specialised in integration, put it: *“The problem is that during this time, beneficiaries receive a certification proving they have applied for the renewal of their residence permit, which does not comply with legal standards. As such, though it protects them from (arbitrary) administrative detention, it does not allow them access to the rest of their rights”*. As a result, every time residence permits are pending renewal, beneficiaries’ access not only to social welfare but also to healthcare and to the labour market is disrupted⁶⁷, leading to a vicious cycle of repetitive exclusion from their rights. As one refugee woman put it⁶⁸, as a refugee *“You don’t start from the bottom, you start from below zero”* and all over again.

Moreover, the structure of the social assistance system that is based on complex bureaucratic procedures does not allow for swift and easy access to the basic allowances.

It is worth noting that in **January 2023, the European Commission started an infringement procedure** (letters of formal notice⁶⁹) against Greece for failing to comply with its obligations under EU law, including, as reported⁷⁰, due to applying discriminatory criteria that de facto exclude beneficiaries of international protection from most social benefits in Greece, such as the condition of 5 or more years of legal and interrupted presence in the country.

Asylum applicants are, in principle, not entitled to the above-mentioned social subsidies since they fall under the social assistance described in the EU Directive⁷¹, which among others ensures that applicants have access to housing, food, clothing, health care, education for minors, and access to employment. However, reception conditions in the camps both in the mainland and Eastern Aegean islands have been reported as inadequate and substandard by various actors⁷².

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 residing - usually under a state of tolerance, due to the lack of alternatives - in the reception system after having fallen outside of the asylum procedure, the only alternative to receive food is through soup kitchens⁷³. Only undocumented persons in detention officially receive food.

This year, meaning from the end of 2022 and early 2023, I have a great many cases of beneficiaries of international protection, without a job and without benefits. Sometimes they receive the minimum guaranteed income, but this is not enough [to cover needs].

**MARIA SKIADA, GCR SOCIAL WORKER,
INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP
ATHENS, 26/01/2023**

On 7 December 2021, the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ms. Ylva Johansson, responded to a joint open letter by NGOs⁷⁴ working in Greece that was addressed to the European Commission and the Greek government. The letter called for immediate access to adequate food and water for all people residing in state-run or - managed facilities, irrespective of their legal status.

⁶⁷ Ibid No 64, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁸ [Το να είσαι πρόσφυγας: Ξεκινώντας μια καινούργια ζωή κάτω από το μηδέν](#)

⁶⁹ ECRE, Greece, Infringement Letters from the European Commission, NGOs Urge More Oversight on Greek Islands, Joint Civil Society Rule of Law Submission, Hundreds of Thousands ‘Prevented’ Entry, 3 February 2023, available at: <https://ecre.org/greece-infringement-letters-from-the-european-commission-ngos-urge-more-oversight-on-greek-islands-joint-civil-society-rule-of-law-submission-hundreds-of-thousands-prevented-entr/2>; January European Commission, Infringements package: key decisions, no. 3, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/DE/inf_23_142.

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Directive 2013/33/EU Of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast), available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=EN>

⁷² See for example ECRE [Country Report: Greece](#), May 2022 update, pp 173 and 177.

⁷³ Interview/focus group with members of GCR’s Social Unit in Athens on 26 January 2023.

⁷⁴ [GCR - Joint Press Release by 28 organisations](#), 15 December 2021

Irrespective of the aforementioned accessibility barriers, the adequacy of social assistance in Greece is also a matter of concern, not only for BIPs and undocumented people but also for Greek nationals. According to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Comment 19 (para 22), “Benefits, whether in cash or in kind, must be adequate in amount and duration in order that everyone may realize his or her rights to family protection and assistance, an adequate standard of living and adequate access to health care”⁷⁵. In Greece, this is not the case. The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) report titled “Poverty Watch 2022 Greece”⁷⁶ found that poverty rates in Greece are rising. The FFA project, as analysed in the above section, highlights the deficiencies and shortcomings, especially regarding the food insecurity third-country nationals face, but social policies in Greece need to be enhanced for all those in need.

There are days I eat very little because it is hard for me to eat some of the meals they give me. I am from Africa and there is some kind of food that I am not used to eat. I cannot buy my own food.

**CONGOLESE SINGLE MAN, 34 Y.O.
ATHENS**

Once per week they give milk to children, food in the yellow line [food provided by an NGO]. That was good in the beginning but it's no longer. I am putting my baby to sleep hungry. [...] Every week we must give our prints in an office, otherwise if you don't go [to be registered in the camp], they won't give you food.

**AFGHAN MOTHER OF 3 CHILDREN, 23 Y.O.
LESVOS**

⁷⁵ [CESCR-General-Comment-19.pdf](#)

⁷⁶ Poverty Watch Greece 2022, available at <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/eapn-PW-2022-Greece-5542.pdf>

THE EU CONTEXT

The present section outlines in the first part the main provisions and policies adopted at the global and European levels in terms of social welfare systems, and in the second part the examined cases/countries that may or may not constitute a **sound framework**. Furthermore, to this end, best practices from other European countries are illustrated. These provide some useful **insights for redefining access and adequacy of the social provisions in a more inclusive way**.

The international community recalled on various occasions the importance of recognizing **social protection** as a fundamental human right⁷⁷. As suggested by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in its Recommendation n. 202, national social protection systems should include some basic guarantees, among which “*access to a nationally defined set of goods and services, constituting essential health care (...) that meets the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality*”⁷⁸. The aforementioned holistic protection is intended as a **necessary provision to guarantee comprehensive development and inclusive growth**. The EU has also moved in the same direction, adopting the **European Pillar for Social Rights (EPSR)** in 2017, referred to by the president of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, as the new European “*social rulebook*”⁷⁹. The 20 pillars of the EPSR have found their concrete implementation in the related Action Plan adopted by the Member States (MS) that will guide Europe by 2030 towards a more socially equitable, more inclusive, and above all resilient future capable of responding to and absorbing any new and unforeseen challenges, such as those which arose from the pandemic.

Although social protection provisions can include different services, **minimum income protection represents a basic guarantee, which allows access to the utmost essential services**. To date, there is no binding EU framework defining MS policies on minimum income because, according to the logic of the subsidiarity principle, social protection policies are mainly the responsibility of individual Member States (MS). In the acknowledgment that it is essential to guarantee access to basic services to everyone without any restrictions of any kind, not even those based on legal status, in order to allow the conduct of a dignified life, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Recommendation addressing the Member States to introduce into the national legislation effective minimum income schemes⁸⁰ that appear to be consistent with the objective to, by 2030, **reduce the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion within the EU by at least 15 million**. In this regard, principle 14 of the EPSR serves as a foundation or institutional framework for this development, stating that “*Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services*”⁸¹.

Stemming from the awareness that improvements are needed to ensure modernization of the MS’ minimum income scheme and aimed at combating poverty and social exclusion, this proposal envisages the entitlement to non-discriminatory access to “*enabling services*”⁸² [to] *targeting specific needs of persons lacking sufficient resources to ensure that they are able to integrate into society*”.

⁷⁷ The first time was with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), specifically with Art. 22 “Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security (...)” and Art. 25 “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control (...)” [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

⁷⁸ ILO (2012) [R202 - Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 \(No. 202\)](#)

⁷⁹ Commission President von der Leyen (speech to the European Parliament, 20 January 2021), available at <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>

⁸⁰ [Minimum income: more effective support needed to fight poverty and promote employment - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission](#)

⁸¹ [The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles](#)

⁸² Specifically, the Proposal for Recommendation mention as example for “enabling services” the following: “social work, counseling, coaching, mentoring, psychological support, and rehabilitation and other general enabling services, including early childhood education and care, healthcare, long term care, education and training, and housing”. Ibid, letter f).

In order to make these measures effective and efficient, the Commission has indicated certain parameters towards which MS should direct their legislative efforts. These cover various aspects, and as far as the present analysis is concerned, the solicitations expressed regarding the attributes of adequacy, coverage, take-up rate, access and take-up rate will be outlined in detail below.

Adequacy - artt. 3-8

The adequacy of minimum income support measures is to be understood cumulatively, meaning that both monetary and in-kind support need to be considered when assessing it. A satisfactory level of adequacy is ensured if the support received by the PoC can guarantee them a dignified life, regardless of the variation caused by economic cycles or shock events. Therefore, MS are required to ensure that national legislation includes automatic adjustment mechanisms and/or a periodic review of the measures for minimum income support to, for example, give due consideration to the variations in inflation rates, purchasing power, etc.

Coverage - art. 9

The Commission invites MS to ensure that laws provide for “*transparent and non-discriminatory selection criteria*”. In fact, it has been emphasized that in some MS, there exists discrimination against third-country nationals, homeless and marginalized persons, as minimum income support measures are subject to restrictions regarding “the minimum duration of legal residence [and/or] obligations such as having a permanent address or bank account”. Among these, Greece, which, as already pointed out in the previous section, is currently subject to an infringement procedure opened by the Commission (see “Social Assistance in Greece - accessibility and adequacy”), also features. Flexibility and proportionality are two other indispensable attributes that must be adequately provided for in national legislation when it comes to the measures allocating the minimum income. According to the European Commission, minimum income support should extend (or reduce) depending on the state of the economic system. Moreover, the level of support should be tailored to the relative living standards of each MS.

Take-up - art. 10

MS are recommended to encourage full take-up of minimum income through adopting actions to reduce the impact of, and eventually eliminate, administrative, language, and other types of barriers. In this regard, MS should also actively support the dissemination of information to potential beneficiaries and regularly assess the non-take-up of minimum income in the interests of identifying and addressing gaps in the system.

Access to enabling services - art. 12

The Commission mentions that the continuity of access to essential services must be guaranteed by the MS. Furthermore, in order to “*ensure effective access*”⁸³ to these services, legal systems should envisage adequate measures to address financial and non-financial barriers that could hinder their access.

⁸³ Ibid

Best Practices

This section presents some public policies adopted by other European countries, which offer some concrete examples of how to tackle the problem of food security while ensuring inclusive access to the welfare system and effective integration.

“Social E-vouchers in the City of Brescia”: an Italian best practice to indiscriminately fight food insecurity

An exemplary policy that appears to be effective in guaranteeing access to food comprehensively to the whole population is the one put in place by the Municipality of Brescia (Italy) through the project “E-vouchers in the city of Brescia”, the implementation of which began in 2018 and it is still ongoing. This project was financed entirely by European funds, namely the FEAD and funds from the Municipality of Brescia. However, it is interesting to note that the FEAD provided for the allocation of funds only until 2020. Subsequently, **the funding was consolidated in the Municipal budget, becoming a stable and lasting project supporting the local population.**

The project aims at enabling people with limited economic possibilities to satisfy their needs for food and other essential services. In operational terms, after identifying a circuit of participating shops, the Municipality developed a **smartphone app** on which service providers are accredited. Subsequently, the Municipality proceeds with the monthly distribution of e-vouchers whose value depends on the household size⁸⁴.

The Vouchers can be spent electronically at the network of accredited shops. One of the major advantages of the E-voucher scheme is that the people assisted are independent in their purchasing choices, as it removes the stigmatization barrier and *“provid[e] dignity by enabling people to make their own choices”*⁸⁵. Moreover, thanks to this system, it is possible to accurately verify accountability and track real-time spending preferences.

Two criteria have to be satisfied to be identified as a project recipient: the first is a reference from social services (which can be both public/municipal or belonging to the local association network), and the second is the possession of a VAT number (tax number/codice fiscale). The latter identification document is issued both to long and short-term migrants residing in Italy, to beneficiaries of international protection, and to asylum seekers - who are assigned a temporary numerical VAT number, converted into a permanent alphanumeric tax code only in the event of determination of acceptance of the application for international protection. Although the undocumented are not entitled to VAT number, in the final analysis, it is possible to state that this project is particularly comprehensive in terms of coverage. Indeed, the Municipality also distributes vouchers to local associations and organizations, which do not condition the granting of the subsidy on the basis of legal status.

The total number of people that benefited from the social voucher scheme until December 2022 is 6.400, with a total of 906.599.20 euros paid. As underlined by the report published by the European Commission, this policy has allowed a fruitful collaboration between third-sector bodies such as social services and associations and the local public administration, which made possible a mutually advantageous sharing of knowledge based on regular meetings held between these parties.

⁸⁴ “EUR 100 for one person, EUR 168 for two people, EUR 235 for three people, and EUR 34 for each subsequent family member. Another EUR 100 is assigned for children up to the age of three”. [2021 FEAD Network Case Study Catalogue | European Social Fund Plus](#)

⁸⁵ Ibid

Municipalities as protagonists for integration: the Dutch model

The Dutch integration system is geared towards achieving full independence for foreign individuals who decide to move to live in the Netherlands. With the Civic Integration Act⁸⁶, which represents the last comprehensive reform in the field of migration in more than 25 years, the intention is to “*oblige*” individuals to follow the path of integration, putting a lot of emphasis on finding and committing to paid employment. Regarding the latter, much importance is placed on the acquisition of autonomy in navigating the Dutch financial system. In fact, in the Netherlands, as in other countries (for example, Germany), a sort of “*punitive system*” is in place, according to which the incurrance of financial penalties can seriously undermine the outcome of the decision on the issuance of a residence permit.

Before the Civic Integration Act (2021), which implementation started in 2022, the language requirement, the recognition of which is indispensable for the granting of Residence Status, was left to the responsibility of individuals. The Government was committed to issuing a loan to beneficiaries, but due to widespread fraudulent behavior on the part of language schools, the system underwent a radical change. To date the Municipalities are responsible for providing the courses to the beneficiaries.

Municipalities also play a leading role concerning social housing. In the first stage, the central government identifies the total number of available houses per Municipality, depending on the population size. Subsequently, the Municipalities themselves provide social housing to all those who have a residence permit, at a fixed rent. In addition, there is a prioritization mechanism for those with legal refugee status. In order to manage the social conflict between the Dutch and the immigrants in the face of a saturated housing market, Committees have been created at the municipal level to foster dialogue between the parties and avoid a potential conflict. In addition to benefiting from such measures in support of accommodation, refugees with low incomes receive income support and benefit from tax relief measures.

The municipality of Utrecht has innovatively developed an interesting approach to integration through the so-called **Einstein Plan**⁸⁷ financed by the “*Urban Innovative Action*” program of the European Commission. In collaboration with various civil society partners, namely NGOs, social enterprises, and educational institutions, the emphasis was placed on integration pursued throughout the neighborhood. Specifically, valuing diversity, an attempt was made to encourage social cohesion among residents, asylum seekers, and refugees and the integration of the latter within the social and economic fabric by creating open spaces and cultural centers. Here various free activities such as workshops, language classes, and activities aimed at developing entrepreneurship and work skills took place, having a positive impact on the creation of a sense of belonging to the community and the development of social networks and connections with a positive result on the mental health for the beneficiaries as well⁸⁸.

How to improve the take-up rate of minimum income: the Belgium experiment

Since food insecurity is a phenomenon related to a situation of poverty and exclusion, it is appropriate for public agencies to ensure that the planned social support measures are used by those for whom they were designed. In this regard, a decision implemented by the Belgian government to increase the take-up rate for those individuals who are eligible for certain social benefits represents an outstanding example to draw inspiration since its effectiveness has been scientifically demonstrated.

⁸⁶ [New Civic Integration Act 2021 | Integration in the Netherlands | Government.nl](#)

⁸⁷ The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad (U-RLP) is an urban experiment aimed at improving the asylum seekers' reception and integration from day one.

⁸⁸ [The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad: Final Evaluation Report - COMPAS](#)

With the Royal Decree of 15 January 2014, the government promoted the automatic data exchange and information sharing between the Health Insurance (supervised by the National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance and responsible almost exhaustively for the health coverage of the entire Belgian population) and the Federal Tax Administration to help identify potential recipients of a new health care subsidy who had not yet applied for it.

After communicating detailed information on the subvention to the entitled persons via email, it is estimated that the take-up rate increased from 17 to 22 points. More interestingly, it appears that the intervention mainly benefited those most in need since the average profile of those who, after being informed and encouraged, actually applied for the subsidy describes a person who is tendentially older and with a higher expenditure on medical care.

Despite some criticalities and possible improvements, finally, the intervention was successful. The experiment also clearly shows that filling the information gap and taking advantage of the opportunities deriving from digitalization can effectively open up “major new opportunities for improving access to social rights”, especially for most vulnerable households⁸⁹.

Ireland and the National Strategy for Integration

Thanks to the approval of the first National Strategy for the Integration of Migrants (2017) to promote their inclusion, Ireland has made significant changes in terms of “rights and opportunities”⁹⁰ particularly concerning health policies, political participation, access to nationalities, and the fight against discrimination, which has allowed it to re-enter the Top-Ten of Countries with an optimal integration policy according to the International Policies for the Integration of Migrants (MIPEX)⁹¹. “Ireland has developed a more comprehensive approach to integration by ensuring more fundamental rights and equal opportunities for foreign and Irish nationals (...) Immigrants have more opportunities to be informed and consulted, while, overall, the health and education system is improving its responses to the specific needs of migrant patients and pupils”.

More specifically, lots of emphasis has been placed on the amelioration of services, made more accessible on the one hand through interpretation support and, on the other, through training for the sector operators. In this regard, the objective “to achieve an employment rate of at least 1% of civil servants from minority communities”⁹² is exemplary.

Although several challenges remain, mainly because migrants are not yet fully considered as “full citizens [but rather] as neighbors and equals”⁹³, the Irish example provides newsworthy insights to rethink a more effective integration policy. Among the guiding principles already present within the Strategy of Integration and Management of Diversity (2008) are the following pillars:

- partnership approach between government and non-governmental organizations
- a strong link between integration policy and broader state measures of social inclusion
- attention to public policies which avoid the creation of parallel communities
- a commitment to creating effective delivery mechanisms at the local level that align services for immigrants with those for indigenous communities⁹⁴.

⁸⁹ Van Gestel, R., Goedemé, T., Janssens, J., Lefevre, E., & Lemkens, R. (2022). *Improving Take-Up by Reaching Out to Potential Beneficiaries. Insights from a Large-Scale Field Experiment in Belgium*. Journal of Social Policy, 1-21. doi:10.1017/S004727942100088X

⁹⁰ [Ireland I MIPEX 2020](#)

⁹¹ “Over the last ten years, immigrants in Ireland have seen greater improvements in Irish integration policies than immigrants in most countries MIPEX (...) in MIPEX 2020 scored 64 points out of 100, while the scoring average is 49 points” Ibid. See also [Irish Examiner picks up the news: Ireland among Top10 countries for immigrant integration I MIPEX 2020](#)

⁹² [Governance of migrant integration in Ireland](#)

⁹³ Ibid No 90

⁹⁴ Ibid No 92

Concerning the issue of the undocumented, Ireland appeared particularly avant-garde if compared with the rest of the member states. In addition to acknowledging the undocumented as eligible for support payments during the pandemic in 2022, as many as 17.000 undocumented people were regularized to give them access to the labor market.

The Housing First Approach: the adoption of civil society templates in Slovakia.

One innovative approach to homelessness was developed by DEDO Foundation, operating in Slovakia. The Kosice project applies the “*Housing First*”⁹⁵ approach, building an integral municipality system that effectively addresses essential needs. Moreover, an Integration Centre which specifically supports refugees with basic services and information is regularly functioning, with both legal and social assistance, and accompaniment. It is noteworthy that, based on the effectiveness of the program, the national government adopted the innovative approaches laid out by DEDO, funding them as part of the national legislation. Moreover, additional funding is obtained through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). This achievement highlights the potential that the sharing of best practices and cooperation between government and civil society yields⁹⁶.

⁹⁵ [Housing first EN - Košice](#)

⁹⁶ [Košice visit highlights ESF dedication to tackling homelessness | European Social Fund Plus \(europa.eu\)](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section outlines some policy actions that policymakers could adopt to significantly improve the existing food insecurity situation, as witnessed in the present report. The issues presented by the recommendations outlined below constitute cornerstones on which it is being proposed for policymakers to carry out a diligent policy reflection. They represent salient areas upon which to begin to rethink a reorganization of the Greek reception and integration system.

It should be remembered that, as the World Food Programme (WFP) has emphasized, food insecurity is determined by and linked to several other factors, and hence a holistic approach should be adopted. In fact, in order to address hunger sustainably, interventions need to move beyond emergency food aid as such, and food assistance needs to *“become part of a policy mix that addresses social well-being in general”*⁹⁷.

The recommendations are the following:

Developing adequate national indicators to monitor the spread and severity of food insecurity

In order to conduct regular food access assessments, the indicators need to refer to the totality of the population and thus include and adequately represent the population under consideration in this report. By doing so, it would be possible to assess the accurate extent of the phenomenon, especially considering the greater exposure to food insecurity problems of the population of concern.

In order to monitor the level of food insecurity experienced by children, it would be particularly well worth for national statistics to include a reference to this specific category when assessing the extent and depth of food insecurity. Such an approach has been adopted by the Government of Canada, which opted for a measurement method called Households Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) that includes 8/18 child-specific questions⁹⁸. In this way, the situation experienced by children is kept into account when assessing the phenomenon nationwide among households.

By adopting such an analytical approach, policymakers could more comprehensively assess the extent to which the phenomenon affects the most vulnerable segments of the population and elaborate protection strategies for those households living in economic and social privation.

Further develop vertical and horizontal governance for social safety nets.

The authorities, providers, and service enablers should cooperate and coordinate each other to ensure that the packages of measures in support of the most vulnerable sections of the population are cumulative, integrated, and complementary, effectively covering their essential needs. It is recommended to implement data sharing among the mentioned actors, exploiting the advantages derived from digitalization, to improve overall the PA performance (as the example of Belgium demonstrates).

Furthermore, the same subjects are invited to cooperate closely with local actors on the issue. A leading role should be played by the Municipalities, which represent the level of administrative division closest to the populations' needs. The latter are encouraged to collaborate with different stakeholders and civil society representatives, which can be of great help when analyzing systemic deficiencies, potential problems deriving from the implementation, and monitoring.

⁹⁷ [Food assistance: cash and in-kind | World Food Programme](#)

⁹⁸ [The Household Food Security Survey Module \(HFSSM\) - Canada.ca](#)

Enhance the participation of migrant and refugee communities in the dialogue and policy-making procedure regarding social assistance.

Active participation of the migrant and refugee communities when discussing social assistance at the local and central political level is a positive step towards the identification of the needs that arise, the barriers the communities and individuals face, and a way forward toward more permanent and durable solutions.

Consider expanding the deadline for exiting the reception system for beneficiaries of international protection

The 30-days timeframe provided to beneficiaries to exit the reception system, in conjunction with (inter alia) the lack of early integration measures, creates an untenable situation where beneficiaries are called to find a way to survive on their own, without having been given the opportunity to fulfill conditions that would allow them to do so (e.g. knowledge of the language).

Recognize the interconnections between food insecurity and other social challenges related to the environment, poverty levels, and stressogenic circumstances.

As has been amply demonstrated by research in the field^{99 100 101}, states of anxiety and depression, high levels of stress, and exposure to traumatic events are concomitant to the phenomenon of food insecurity. For this reason, it is appropriate to consider and address the problem holistically if a solution is to be sought.

Effectively enable access to the labour market for migrant and refugee communities.

This means lifting the administrative issues (such as the delays in the renewal of residence permits) that hinder smooth access to the labour market. Moreover, establish mechanisms that can link potential employers with migrants and refugee communities, such as regular Job Fairs organized not only by CSOs but also by the local administration.

Ensure the entitlement to welfare benefits in a non-discriminatory manner.

This means to change the restrictive eligibility criteria connected to the length of the presence in the country for beneficiaries of international protection and migrants, to access support measures in the same manner as Greek nationals, such as social allowances.

- **Assure clear and comprehensible information on income support measures in place**

To improve the take-up rate of existing measures, it is of the utmost importance to enhance the administrative support provided by KEM and Municipal Centres through more interpreters and well-informed employees, in order to provide necessary information on the documentation and bureaucratic procedures related to the access to social assistance. The assistance offered, indeed, must be comprehensible for the PoCs.

- **Periodic adjustment of the amount provided by minimum income support instruments according to the evolution of economic cycles**

As suggested by the European Commission, it is appropriate that the amount of the measures are periodically adjusted to macroeconomic variations and measured on the average living standards within the country.

⁹⁹ Gundersen C, Ziliak JP. Food Insecurity And Health Outcomes. Health Aff (Millwood). 2015 Nov;34(11):1830-9. doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0645. PMID: 26526240.

¹⁰⁰ Bronte-Tinkew J, Zaslow M, Capps R, Horowitz A, McNamara M. Food insecurity works through depression, parenting, and infant feeding to influence overweight and health in toddlers. J Nutr. 2007 Sep;137(9):2160-5. doi: 10.1093/jn/137.9.2160. PMID: 17709458.

¹⁰¹ Hurley KM, Black MM, Papas MA, Caulfield LE. Maternal symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety are related to nonresponsive feeding styles in a statewide sample of WIC participants. J Nutr. 2008 Apr;138(4):799-805. doi: 10.1093/jn/138.4.799. Erratum in: J Nutr. 2008 Oct;138(10):1982. Caulfield, Laura E [corrected to Caulfield, Laura E]. PMID: 18356338; PMCID: PMC3137941.

- **Remove the requirements linked to legal status for access to food aid**

It is imperative that all persons residing in Greece have access to food support, regardless of their legal status. The inclusion of undocumented persons, whether unregistered or rejected, in such provisions should be regulated and put in place immediately.

Pursue an effective Integration Strategy

Once anew, it is emphasized that effective access to quality enabling, and essential services is a prerequisite for achieving social inclusion and integration. A successful approach to integration succeeds in being authentically inclusive, guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities and a sense of security about the future. Following an inclusive Integration strategy when looking at the migration policies would make it possible to attain the purpose of a cohesive, and nonsectarian society, where migrants and refugees are considered equals from a social, economic, and legal perspective. In turn, the phenomenon of marginalization and discrimination is also averted¹⁰². In a similar vein, the decision to terminate the ESTIA II accommodation programme should be reconsidered.

Implementing a Food Education Strategy

Doctors, medical personnel, and those working in social services should be able to recognize and detect the signs of food insecurity early on. Indeed, they can educate the population experiencing this phenomenon and provide guidance and suggestions concerning appropriate food choices and a nutritious diet.

¹⁰² MAIN FINDINGS | MIPEX 2020





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