ENHANCING THE VOICES

OF THOSE AFFECTED BY THE EU'S POLICIES ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

GREEK COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the European Union's and EU member states' policies on migration and asylum seem to have increasingly shifted towards an approach that prioritises the curtailment of the movement of refugees and migrants both towards and within the EU ("onward movement"), at the expense of their rights.

An element of this shift is the increased emphasis on agreements with third countries, such as Libya and Türkiye, and more recently Albania, Egypt and Tunisia, for the purpose of halting the movement of refugees towards the EU. It also includes the numerous incidents of irregular forced returns (i.e. pushbacks) that have been reported at European borders, at times in blatant disregard even of interim measures granted by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR),[1] and an ongoing lack of intra-EU political will, when it comes to sharing the responsibility to protect refugees in a fair and proportionate manner, in accordance with the principle of solidarity underlying the very foundations of the EU.

The latest step in this approach is the recent agreement (December 2023) on the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, which despite the serious concerns it has raised since September 2020, when it was initially proposed by the European Commission, doubles down on shifting the responsibility to protect refugees to third countries outside the EU and on maintaining an imbalanced EU system that will continue to disproportionately affect member states at the union's external borders, not least through stricter rules aimed at halting the onward movement of asylum seekers and refugees within the EU.[2]

Notwithstanding the multiple issues arising out of this approach, which seem to be also accompanied by frequent representations of refugees and migrants as "bogus", threats and freeloaders purposely cherry-picking their country of destination (e.g., asylum shopping) in pursuit of benefits, on the one hand, yet helpless victims at the hands of smuggling rings and other states ("instrumentalisation"), on the other, a significant element that stands out is the ongoing absence, at least at the level of institutional discussions, of the "voice" of the very people affected by these policies.

In this context, the current project attempts to serve as a pilot for assessing this policy shift and relevant developments around the pact and the

1 For more, see GCR, "GCR's information note on interventions and on interim measures granted by the ECtHR in cases regarding pushbacks," 26 January 2024 (last update), https://tinyurl.com/3rx8szr8.

2 For more on the pact, see, among others, Joint Statement by civil society organisations, "The Pact on Migration and Asylum: To provide a fresh start and avoid past mistakes, risky elements need to be addressed and positive aspects need to be expanded," 13 October 2020, https://tinyurl.com/mr3k84ye; PICUM, *More detention, fewer safeguards: How the New EU Pact on Migration and Asylum Creates New Loopholes to Ignore Human Rights Obligations*, October 2020, https://tinyurl.com/fkwx8hz9; ECRE, "Editorial: Migration pact agreement point by point," 9 June 2023, https://tinyurl.com/4ewnkfw9; MSF, "MSF calls on EU Parliament and EU member states to prioritise safety of people seeking sanctuary," 12 December 2023, https://tinyurl.com/23y5fr9w; HRW, "EU's migration pact is a disaster for migrants and asylum seekers," 21 December 2023, https://tinyurl.com/4pmk6ujr.

(mis)conceptions underlying them, by emphasising the lived experiences of refugees, with a core focus on the reasons and choices people make throughout their journeys.

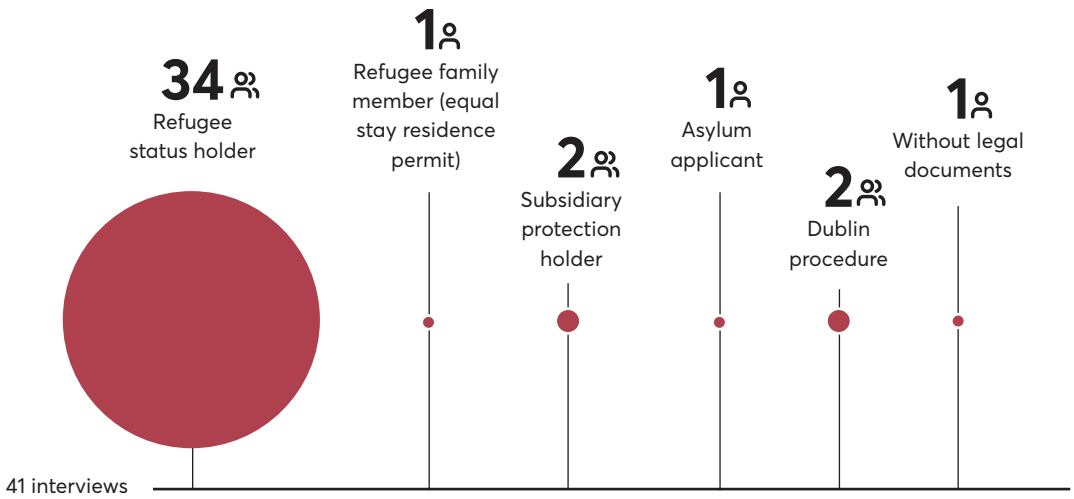
Regarding the structure, the first section highlights the methodology and some of the main demographic data of the persons interviewed as part of this brief. The second section focuses on the reasons people leave their countries and on whether they have the means to do so in a safe and legal manner. In a similar vein, the third section subsequently addresses the reasons people choose to move onwards to the EU once in a transit country that EU member states consider to be safe. The fourth and final section provides data on some of the reasons leading people to move onwards once they are in the EU, and specifically Greece, and on what they themselves consider would support them in the effort to settle and (re)establish an independent life.

Lastly it needs to be stressed that for all intents and purposes this brief does not claim to provide a holistic, definitive or even representative account of the issues examined. It does, however, aim to provide some initial indications on the potential effectiveness of the current policy approach encountered throughout the EU and seemingly consolidated by the pact, with the aim of serving as a first step in a wider endeavour, and of incentivising EU policymakers to reflect on the experiences of refugees and migrants when drafting policies in their name, for the purpose of ensuring these are grounded on and directed at sustainable solutions for the benefit of all.

METHODOLOGY AND MAIN DEMOGRAPHICS

In preparation for this briefing, a total of 41 interviews, with respondents from 18 different nationalities,[3] were conducted between December 2023 and January 2024, with the use of a questionnaire that allowed for some degree of open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted either in-person or remotely, with the support of interpreters. Respondents' inputs were subsequently categorised and serve as the basis for the briefing's structure.[4]

CHART 1 **RESPONDENTS' LEGAL STATUS**



3 Namely: Eight respondents from Syria; five from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); three (each) from Afghanistan, Iran, Türkiye and Senegal; two (each) from Cameroon, Ethiopia and Iraq; one (each) from Angola, Burundi, Eritrea, Kenya, Pakistan, the State of Palestine, Somalia and Sudan; and two persons of Kurdish origin from Iraq and Syria, respectively.

4 A main section of the questionnaire that was not included in the briefing relates to issues regarding access to asylum and conditions of reception in Greece. Reasons for this omission relate primarily to the fact that a significant proportion of respondents (48%) had stayed in Greece for five years or more at the time of the interview. Accordingly, input on these issues would have been of questionable relevance for the present.

The questionnaire was prepared with the core aim of highlighting some of the key experiences and elements in the decision-making process people undergo upon deciding to leave their countries of origin or previous permanent stay, during their journey to the EU, and finally once they have reached the EU. In this context, the input provided by respondents, the vast majority of whom are recognised refugees in Greece, should be read as an initial, quasi-assessment or "reality check" of policies aimed at externalising asylum and deterring refugees from arriving to the EU – including the rationales underlying or promoted by them – from the perspective and based on the lived experiences of people on the move. Though efforts were made to further diversify the sample of interviewees, with a main focus on respondents that are no longer in Greece, these were by necessity limited on account of a number of practical reasons (e.g., language barriers, different time zones), including the limited duration of the current project.

CHART 2 **RESPONDENTS' AGE**

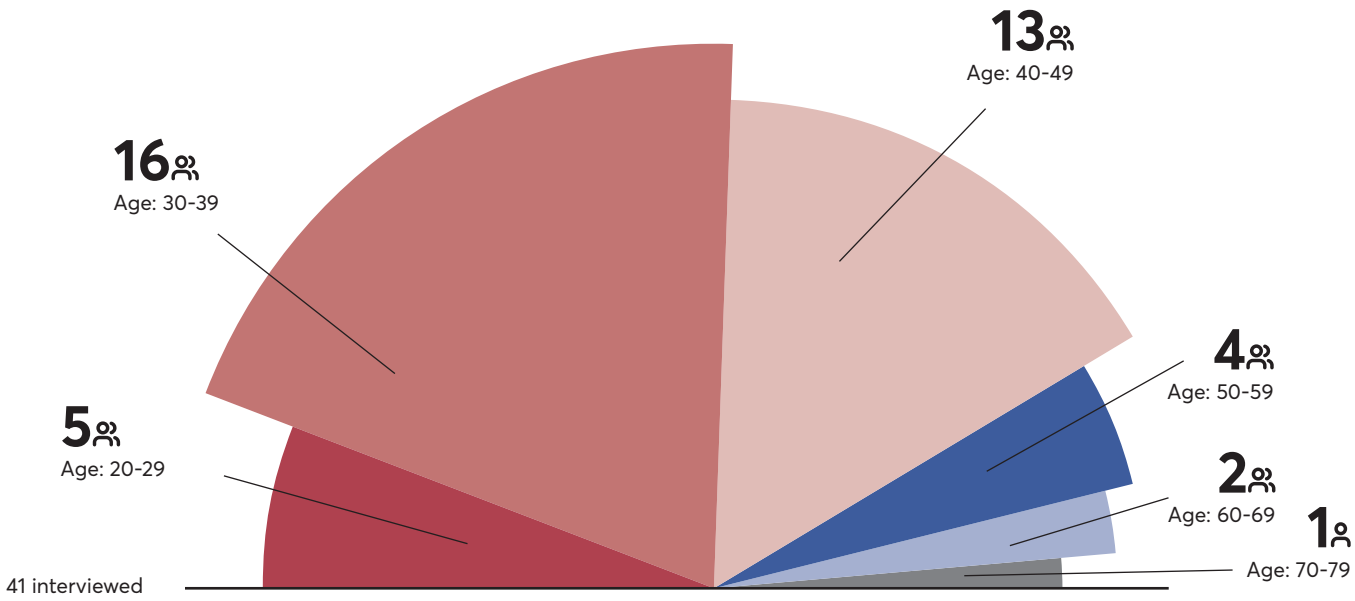
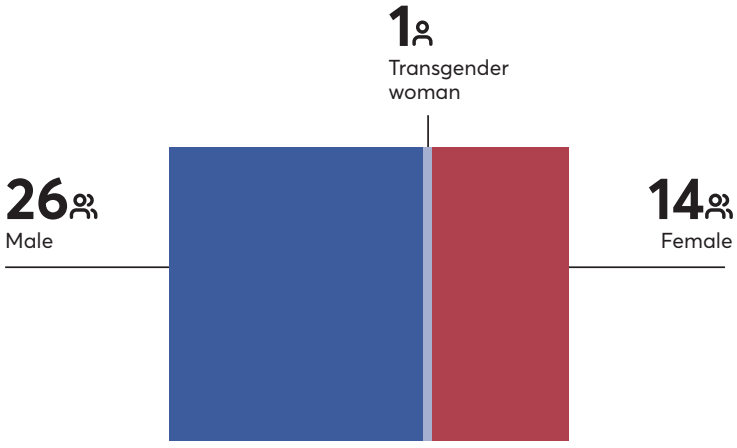


CHART 3 **RESPONDENTS' GENDER**



REASONS FOR AND MEANS OF FLIGHT

> **I was persecuted, [apprehended] by the police and tortured. I was between life and death. I didn't want to die. I was young, I had a whole life ahead of me.**
>
> *Recognised refugee from Cameroon*

In terms of the reasons for leaving their country, by far the vast majority of respondents (90%) quoted fear for their personal security and/or the security of their close ones as one of the main drivers behind their decision to leave. In two cases, respondents also specified that this fear was closely tied to their previous employment, in one with the coming of the Taliban to power and in another with the refusal to be forcefully recruited to what they termed as a "*shadowy body likely aimed at protecting the regime*".[5]

Given that close to 88% of all respondents had already received international protection status in Greece at the time of the interview, this is hardly unexpected. Yet in a landscape that is often predominated by simplistic and at times inaccurate representations of "genuine" and "bogus" refugees, whereby the former are often depicted as only ever fleeing life or death situations, and the latter as choosing to move due to financial considerations, it is important to recall that the decision to leave one's country is often the result of a combination of (interlinked) driving factors, to which refugees can attribute different levels of importance than external observations or representations may frequently allow for.

> **For me, [the most important reason] was my health condition, which required treatment. The political persecution might have perhaps ended [at some point]. But if I had been arrested and detained, my health condition would have been my death, due to the [negligence] and level of mistreatment detainees face.**
>
> *Congolese father, recognised refugee in Greece*

5 In the words of a respondent from Iraq.

Thus, from their perspective, though the majority of respondents (29 or 71%) quoted fear for their personal security and/or the security of their close ones as the dominant factor behind their decision to leave, more than half (16) of the same respondents also quoted lack of freedom and close to one-third (9) the inability to secure the means of survival (i.e., financial reasons), with others (2) also quoting the inability to study, as further driving factors.

Another 12% of respondents (5) placed priority on the lack of freedom as the main driver, with three also emphasising security risks, two quoting lived experiences of racism and mistreatment and one the inability to secure the means of survival.

Lastly, 10% of respondents (4) placed priority on the inability to secure the means of survival, with three also quoting security risks and lack of freedom, and one the inability to study, as further drivers for their choice. Of the rest (3), one emphasised the inability to study, despite also quoting reasons of fear for their personal security, lack of freedom and inability to secure the means of survival, another quoted family problems without further specifications, and in the third case, which, among others, quoted concerns for their security and a lack of freedom, also due to religious beliefs (Christian), the decision was taken by their parents, due to their being underage at the time.

Contrary to the alarmist language frequently employed even by high-level stakeholders to denote an impending crisis of arrivals at the EU's borders (or elsewhere), upon taking the decision to leave the majority of respondents (22 or 54%) had no specific destination in mind, as the overriding priority was to simply reach safety.

> **I was just thinking of leaving. I didn't even have the time to check Google Maps to see where I would go. [At that point] something inside me just said 'leave', even if I die.**
>
> *Single mother from Afghanistan, recognised refugee in Greece*

Furthermore, of those that did have some type of destination in mind (19 or 46%), the main consideration seems to have been the availability of a safety net (i.e., close relatives and/or friends were mentioned in eight cases), with financial considerations being relegated to a secondary factor, alongside the perceived ability to find security (mentioned in six cases each). From those with a specific destination in mind, the majority (15) highlighted Europe as their destination, with Germany being the primary choice (5), followed by Europe in general (4), and then Greece (3).

> **It there was a way to leave [my country] safely and with dignity I would have chosen it. We are not animals to choose this [illegal] way.**
>
> *Syrian mother, recognised refugee in Greece*

Lastly, in terms of the means of travel, the vast majority of respondents (33 or 80%) left their country in an irregular manner, in most cases (31) due to the complete lack of legal alternatives, which most attributed to their personal circumstances and/or the prevailing circumstances in their country of origin. In two cases respondents quoted obstacles and/or delays in accessing legal means of travel, even though in one case they specified they had tried. The reminder (20%) were able to travel legally, at least up to the last transit country they reached before travelling onwards to Greece.

Of those that started their journey irregularly, 73% (24) stated they would have clearly preferred to travel in a safe and legal way, if the choice had been available to them; 12% (4) considered that if such choice was available it would have signified that conditions in their country wouldn't have been the ones they were forced to flee, thus negating the need for the journey in the first place; 6% (2) would have still chosen an irregular means of travel out of fear of being identified by their persecutors if they had travelled legally; and 9% (3) seemed to have found it difficult to comprehend the question (2) or chose not to reply (1).

I had no other choice. Where could I have acquired travel documents? We had no government.

Afghan father, recognised refugee in Greece

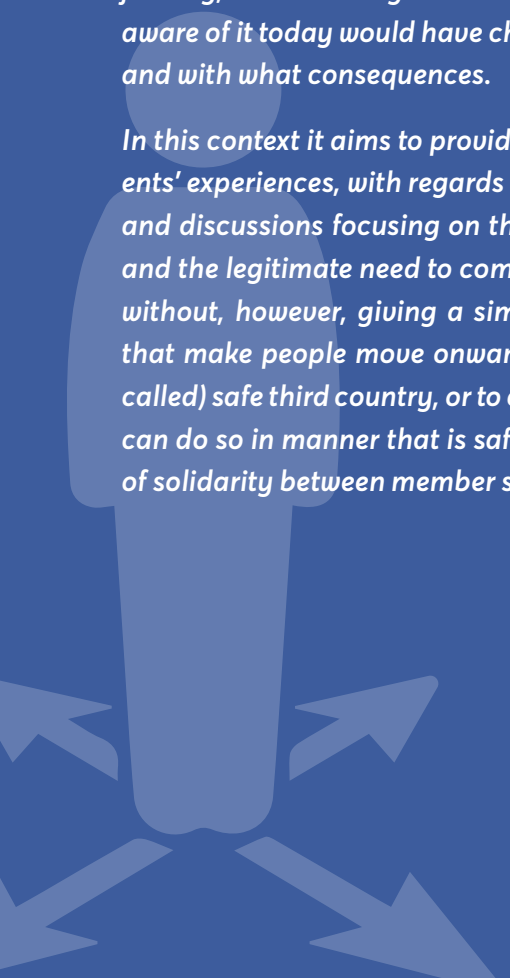
I used fake travel documents. It was the only way. If I had shown my [original] documents, they would have apprehended me. When you are [persecuted] by the state … it is difficult to escape. It would have been dangerous to choose the legal way.

Angolan man, recognised refugee in Greece

ONWARD MOVEMENT TO THE EU

This section covers the last country where respondents found themselves before arriving to Greece. It focuses on whether they tried to apply for asylum or settle there during their stay, the reasons for doing so, as well as the means employed to travel onwards to Greece. It closes with respondents' assessment of the overall level of danger faced during their journey, whether they were aware of it in advance and whether being aware of it today would have changed anything in their decision to leave and with what consequences.

In this context it aims to provide a quasi-assessment, based on respondents' experiences, with regards to the effectiveness and results of policies and discussions focusing on the use of the "safe third country" concept and the legitimate need to combat the business model of the smugglers, without, however, giving a similar degree of importance to the causes that make people move onwards to the EU after having reached a (so-called) safe third country, or to ensuring that those without an alternative can do so in manner that is safe, legal and in line with the core principle of solidarity between member states.



> I requested asylum in three different regions [in Türkiye], but I was not granted asylum. They told me asylum was over and that they did not give asylum to anyone [anymore], even though I told them my life was in danger in Syria.
>
> *Syrian father, recognised refugee in Greece, after a 7-month stay in Türkiye*

As was to be expected, for most respondents that reached a transit country before travelling onwards to Greece (37 out of 41), the last country of transit or stay was Türkiye (73%), followed by Libya (11%), Bulgaria and Lebanon (5% each), and Italy and Zimbabwe (3% each).[6] For the majority (70%), the duration of stay ranged from a few days to a year, while for the rest (30%) it ranged from more than a year and up to more than a decade.

Asked whether they had tried to apply for asylum or settle in the last country of transit/stay, less than one in five provided a positive reply (a total of six respondents, all of whom had been granted international protection in Greece at the time of the interview). In their case, the reasons for ultimately deciding to move onwards seem to have primarily related to the inability to access social rights, such as healthcare and education (4), in the transit country, followed equally by the inability to access or to be granted asylum (3), and feeling constantly afraid/not feeling safe (3). The inability to secure the means of subsistence, coupled with not feeling free and/or feeling mistreated, including on account of perceived racism, was also mentioned as a factor in two cases. In two cases the last country of stay was Bulgaria and in four Türkiye,[7] with the duration of stay being longer than a year in all cases, except one.

> **There is no safety in Türkiye, particularly for Syrians. There is no humanity. They apprehended us at the borders, they mistreated us. They mopped the floor with our dignity.**
>
> *Syrian mother, recognised refugee in Greece*

For those that did not try to apply for asylum or did not try to settle in the last country of stay, the reasons for not doing so are presented in chart 4, which highlights a predominance of fear factors with regards to the ability to be effectively protected behind the decision to move onwards to Greece.

Furthermore, as highlighted in chart 5, in the vast majority of cases the reasons for deciding to move onwards to Greece, instead of settling in the last country of stay, were primarily grounded on respondents' personal experiences and, to a lesser degree, on experiences or information they had received from people in their broader personal networks, including those potentially encountered during their journey.

Only in two cases did indications arise that respondents may have had absolutely no say with respect to trying to apply for asylum or settle in the transit country (Libya and Italy, respectively), potentially on account of the smuggling network's modus operandi.[8] In both these cases, no additional reasons for the onward movement were provided.

6 In four cases the last country of stay coincides with the country of persecution (in three cases Türkiye and in one case Cameroon). As a result, given the current section aims to provide an overview of the reasons why people choose to move onwards from a transit country, and in particular countries designated as "safe third countries", data on these four cases are not counted in the statistics provided in the current section. The only exception is the latter part of this section, which focuses on the journey and the means employed to travel to Greece.

7 On the challenges regarding access to asylum in these two countries, see, among others, Council of Europe, *Report of the fact-finding mission to Bulgaria by Ms Leyla Kayacik, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, 11-14 September 2023*, 30 January 2024, https://tinyurl.com/3xhrxsf2, paras. 31-34; and AIDA, *Country Report: Türkiye: 2022 update*, 14 July 2023, https://tinyurl.com/4k53djuk, 28ff.

8 For instance, in one case, confinement in a space in Libya was stated, which seems to provide strong indications on the inability of the respondent to freely decide. In the other case, concerning Italy, the respondent was just told by the smuggler that the final destination would be another country, without specifying which one.

CHART 4 **REASONS FOR NOT APLYING FOR ASYLUM OR NOT TRYING TO SETTLE IN LAST COUNTRY OF TRANSIT/STAY**

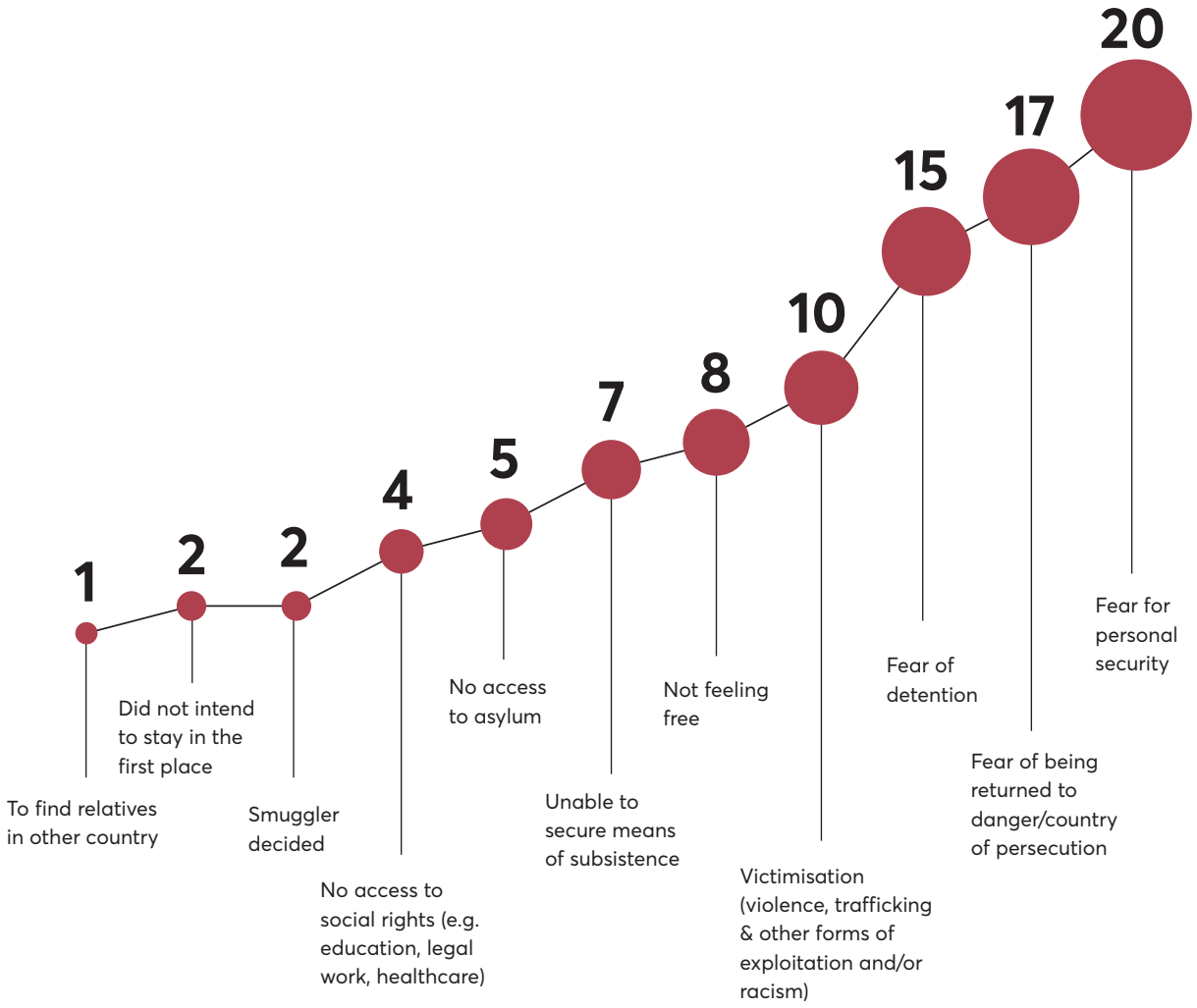


CHART 5 **REASONS FOR DECIDING TO MOVE ONWARDS TO GREECE FROM LAST COUNTRY OF STAY**

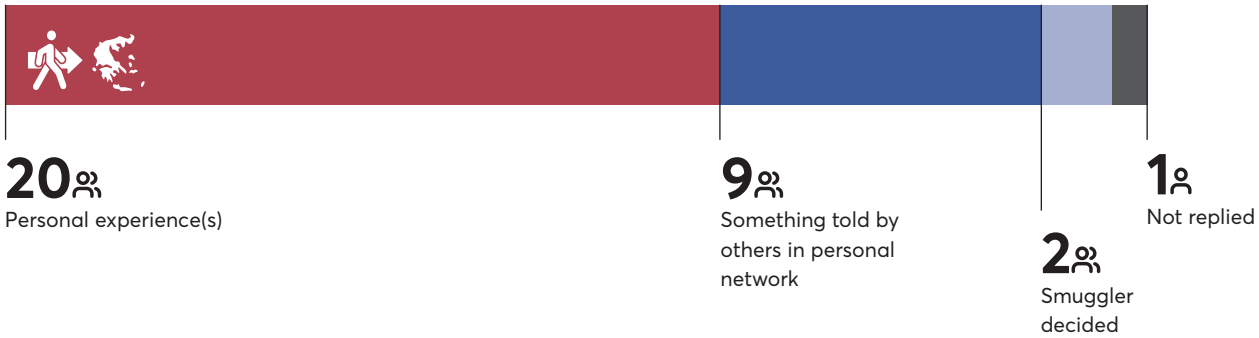


CHART 6 **DURATION OF RESPONDENTS' STAY IN TRANSIT COUNTRY**

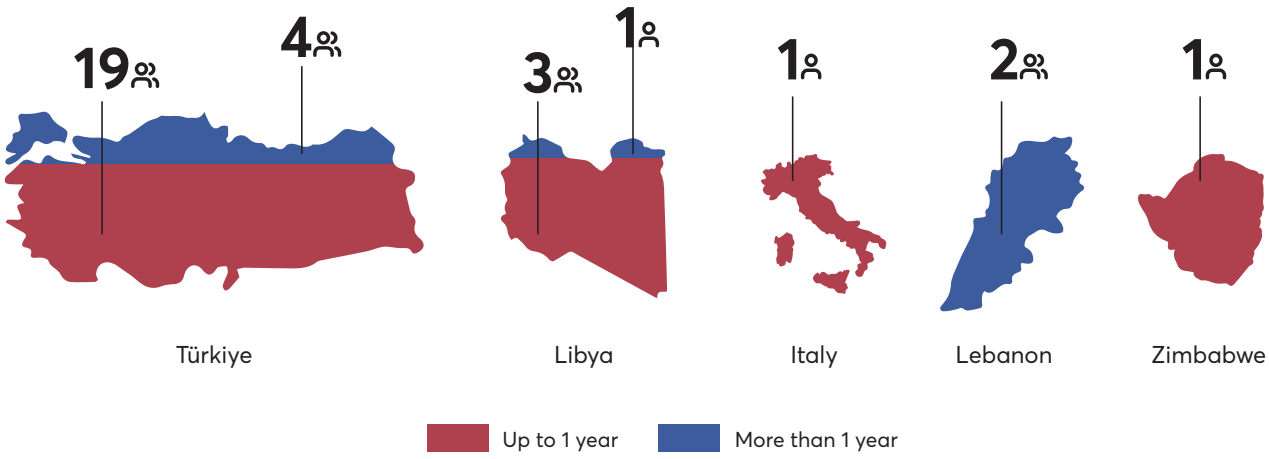


CHART 7 **REASONS FOR EMBARKING ON IRREGULAR/ DANGEROUS JOURNEYS**

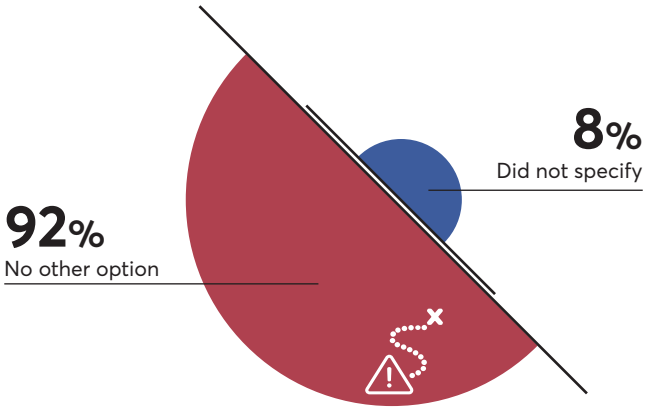
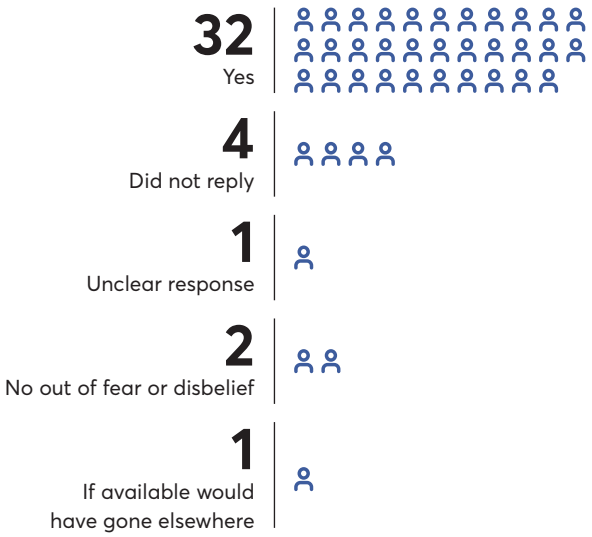


CHART 8 **WOULD YOU HAVE PREFERED TO TRAVEL LEGALLY IF SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY EXISTED?**



As regards the means of onward travel, with the exception of only one respondent, who was able to legally travel to Greece, the rest (40) all travelled irregularly. As for the reasons, in the vast majority of cases respondents quoted the lack of any type of alternatives. In seven cases they also quoted the lack of travel documents and in one the lack of financial resources due to their personal situation (i.e., displacement), as further hindering factors in accessing legal means of travel. In seven cases respondents also flagged a sense of urgency in leaving the country they were in, in one case indicating the irregular means as faster/more effective and in one other that the smuggler may have taken the decision on their behalf.

Most [people] here in Europe believe that refugees come to make more money. I had no other choice. If I had a legal alternative, [this would have meant that] conditions in my country would have been better and I wouldn't have had to leave [in the first place]. I had no possibility to ask for protection in Türkiye.

Iranian woman, recognised refugee in Greece

The last two charts (9 and 10) of this section provide a contrast between the degree of danger respondents faced during their journey until they arrived in Greece, and the degree of danger they might have initially expected based on any prior knowledge they may have had. They also provide respondents' replies on whether, in retrospect, they would still have made the journey, if prior to embarking on it they had been fully aware of the exact level of danger they stated to have experienced.

On this point, there are a number of observations that seem to stand out in particular.

The first is that for the vast majority of respondents the journey was one filled with a constant sense of threat and danger (described as "very dangerous"). This was particularly the case for those making the journey to Greece by sea (64%), but an unexpected number of persons reaching Greece by land stated they had experienced similar levels of danger (26%).[9]

Secondly, less than half of respondents who deemed their journey as "very dangerous" were aware of the dangers in advance, in one case (arrival by land) even quoting misinformation from the smugglers.[10] Yet based on the replies of those that further elaborated on the question,[11] indications arose that prior knowledge of the dangers would have been inconsequential, due to a precedence of the imperative need to flee.[12]

The journey was very dangerous, but not more dangerous than the situation I left behind. [If I had to] I would do it again, [because] it would be better to die at sea than die in Iraq.

Iraqi man, recognised refugee in Greece

The journey is very dangerous. You are in danger from everyone; the smuggler, government authorities, everyone! [But] I would do it again to live. As a mother, I would do anything to be able to live and have a better life with my children.

Iranian mother, recognised refugee in Greece

9 Specifically, from the total number of 33 respondents that characterised their journey as "very dangerous", 21 had reached Greece by sea, and 12 through the land borders.

10 Misinformation on the perils from the smugglers was also quoted in one additional case, where the respondent described the journey as "quite dangerous".

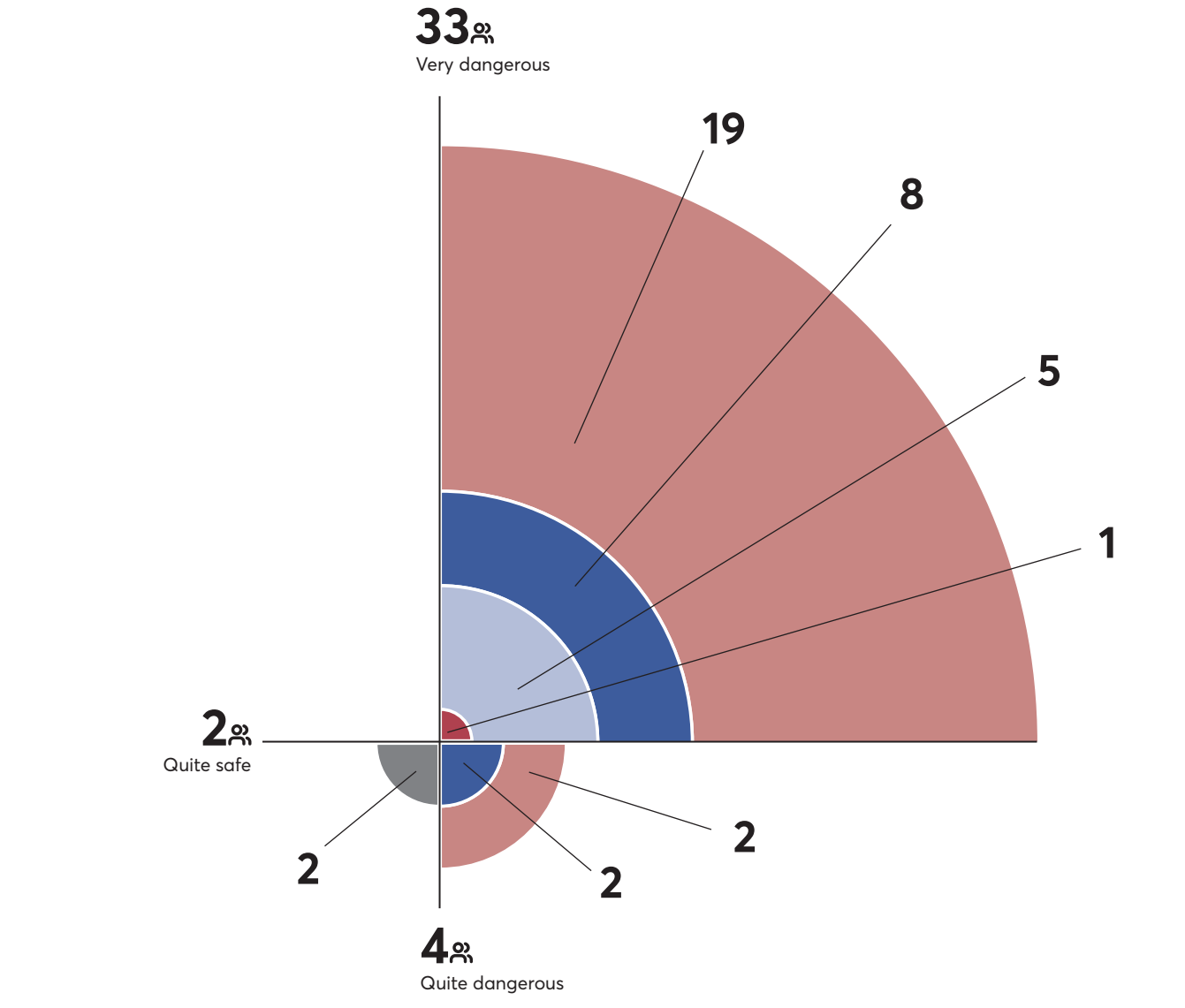
11 Namely 5 out of the 19 respondents who described the journey as "very dangerous", while stating they had no advance knowledge.

12 As one respondent put it, "[at that time] I just needed to escape from my country. I did not have the time to think the degree of danger of the journey", and in the words of another, "I didn't know anything [i.e., regarding the journey]. I just knew I had to leave the country. I had no other choice."

This latter point seems, thirdly, to be further corroborated by the replies respondents gave on whether retrospective knowledge of the journey would have deterred them from making it, if they had to do it again today, with a significant majority considering it would have changed nothing, for similar reasons.

> **We were fully aware of the danger, [but we had to choose] between dying in the war in Syria or during the journey. At the time I was stronger. [If I had to choose again now] I wouldn't have done it. I would have died there.**
>
> *Syrian mother, recognised refugee in Greece*

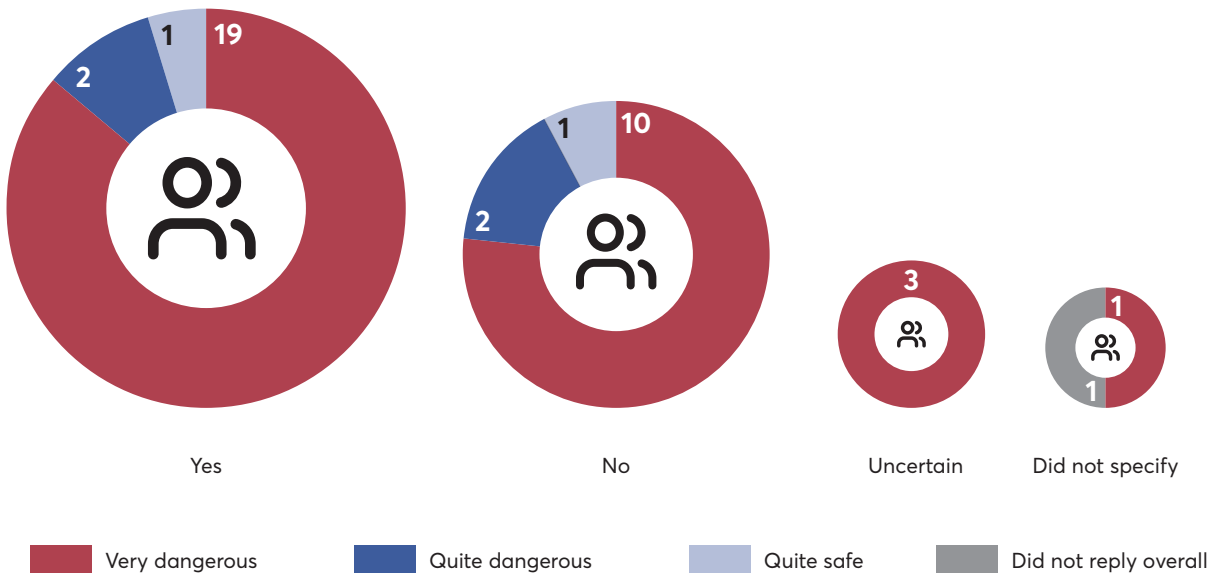
CHART 9 **HOW DANGEROUS WAS YOUR JOURNEY AND WERE YOU AWARE IN ADVANCE?**



Lastly, for those respondents who stated they may[13] have in hindsight reconsidered taking the journey (13), in their words, the consequences for the majority (11) would have been tantamount to having remained exposed to severe risks for their freedom and security, likely leading even to their death.[14] Of the reminder (2), one could not even bring herself to imagine what her life would have been is she had not fled, but was certain that if she were ever given the opportunity, she would become an advocate for the establishment of safe and legal pathways, while the last one preferred not to reply.

Particularly this latter point should be reflected on in the context of policies and/or practices aimed at deterring refugees from reaching Greece and the EU, including through EU-funded multimillion-euro information campaigns in countries of origin or transit aimed at deterring irregular arrivals to the EU that have failed to bring the envisioned results,[15] for the purpose of holistically assessing their potential consequences and reaching balanced approaches between human rights and security considerations where required.

CHART 10 **KNOWING THE DANGERS, WOULD YOU UNDERTAKE THE JOURNEY AGAIN?**



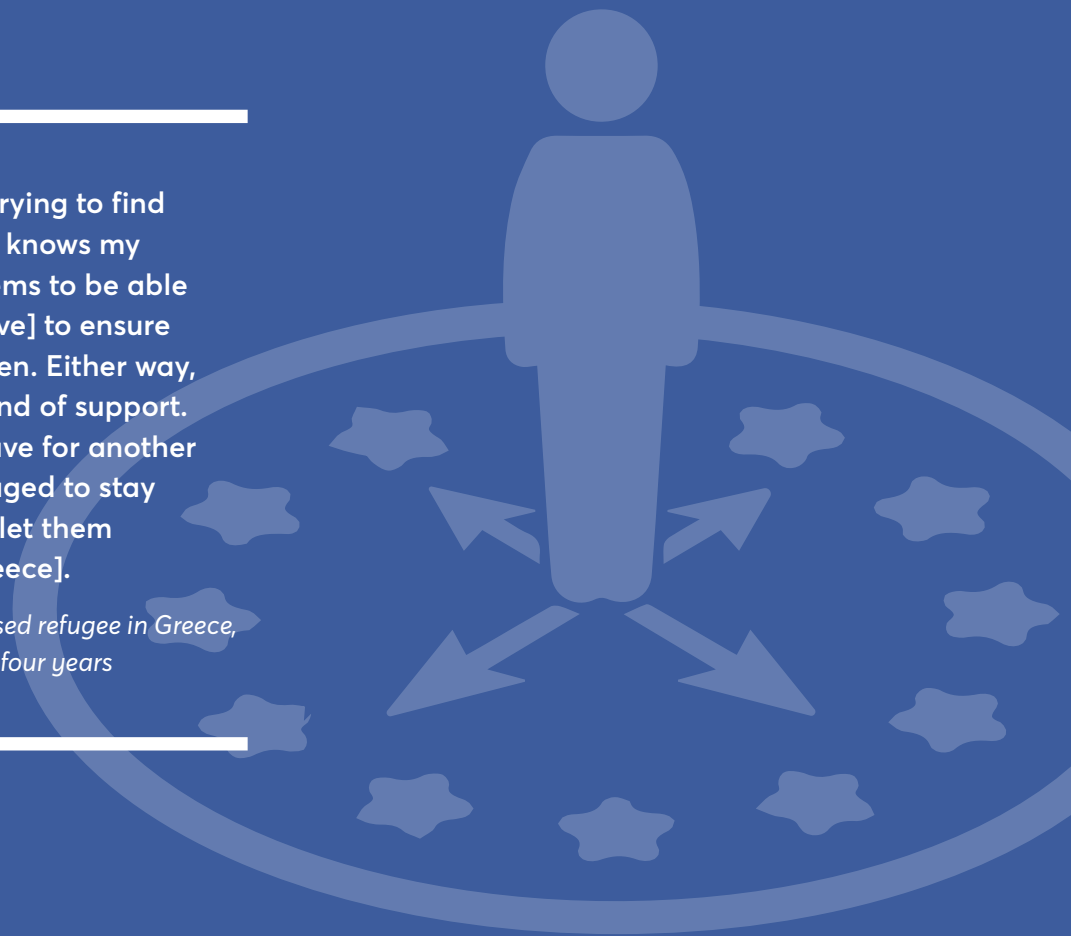
13 A certain degree of uncertainty did arise during the discussions.

14 In the words of some of these respondents, when asked what would their life have looked like today if, as per their relevant replies, they hadn't made the journey: "I would have either been in hiding or in prison"; "My life would have been at risk because we were under threat"; "I would have been suffering. I would have been dead"; "I would have died"; "There is danger there. You couldn't know if tomorrow you would be alive or not. You could pass through a road one day and be killed on it the next"; "I would have definitely been in the army and they would have made me fight. I wouldn't have been safe at all."

15 See Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), "New research finds information campaigns to deter migration have little effect," 8 April 2024, https://tinyurl.com/mr33t8vt.

ONWARD MOVEMENT WITHIN THE EU: INTEGRATION URGENTLY NEEDED

This last section attempts to examine the main challenges faced by refugees in Greece, in an effort to once more flag the need for long-term, sustainable, state-led integration policies, and, to the extent the sample of respondents could allow, highlight some of the reasons why people seeking protection and/or a better life often choose to move onwards within the EU, even after they have received international protection in Greece.



"

I am a single mother [trying to find work]. Everyone here knows my situation, but no one seems to be able to help. [So I would leave] to ensure a better life for my children. Either way, I am here without any kind of support. At least I could try [to leave for another country] and if I managed to stay there, good, if not, let them return us [to Greece].

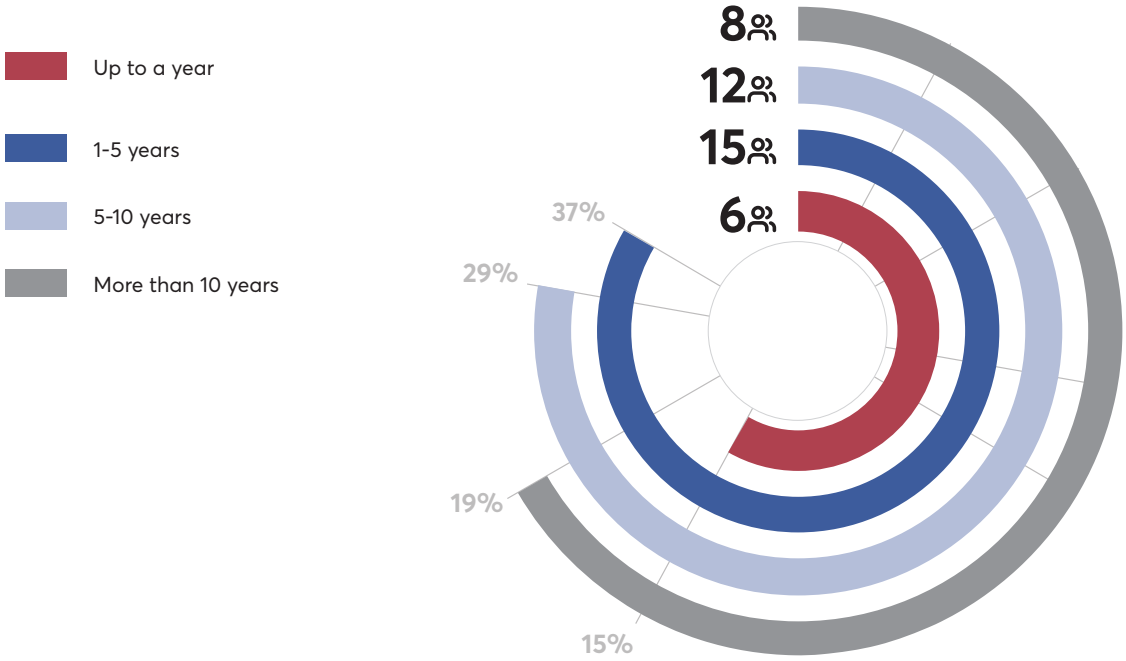
Single mother from Syria, recognised refugee in Greece, where she has lived for four years

"

As a preliminary observation, the vast majority of respondents (85%) had been in Greece for at least a year at the time of the interview, with close to half (48%) having lived in Greece for five years or more. Based on this, it seems logical to consider that inputs provided in this section hold stronger relevance with respect to ongoing needs and gaps vis-à-vis integration in Greece, and less with respect to the reasons why refugees often choose to move onwards within the EU while in Greece, even though these issues are interlinked.[16]

> **I wanted to learn the language, but there were no language lessons. I wanted to find work, but they told me "you are not allowed to work". If we had a job and some way of learning the language, I think no one would have left [Greece].**
>
> *Respondent of Kurdish origin who left Greece after a three-month stay*

CHART 11 **DURATION OF STAY IN GREECE**



16 For instance, as per data collected in the context of an ongoing survey carried out under the auspices of UNHCR in Greece, as part of which more than 1,300 surveys were conducted predominantly with applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in Greece between February 2022 and April 2024, 19% of those surveyed stated their intention to move onwards within the EU. As for the main reasons, these by far regarded employment opportunities in other member states, followed with a significant difference regarding the possibility to receive state support, including with regards to accommodation, the availability of family members and a number of other considerations, all of which are linked, to different degrees, to core aspects of integration and integration prospects (or, in this case, the lack of such prospects). See UNHCR, Greece: Inter-Agency protection monitoring of refugees in Greece, https://tinyurl.com/3z6t3y9f, in particular section 13 on intentions.

Namely, of the total respondents interviewed as part of this project, close to one in three (13 or 32%) had either already left Greece (5), with one exception irregularly,[17] or were, to varying degrees, considering leaving Greece at the time of the interview (8). In all cases respondents had received international protection in Greece, where they have been residing for at least one year and in most cases for several years. Yet they all felt that despite their efforts, they had not received sufficient support, in particular from the Greek state, to be able to settle or succeed in living independently in the country. Moreover, from those determined to leave at the time of the interview (3),[18] the potential of repercussions in case they left, such as being potentially apprehended in order to be returned to Greece or not having the right to work in another EU country, did not seem to have any effect on their decision.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents (28 or 68%) were at the time of the interview certain of their willingness to remain in Greece, without, in some cases (2), being able to exclude the possibility of leaving in the future.[19] Quite similar to the previous group (already left/are considering leaving), in this case, too, the vast majority of respondents (18) felt they had not received sufficient (if any) support from the state to be able to settle.[20] By contrast, however, in four cases they did consider state support had been sufficient, while in another four they indicated they have received assistance from Greek citizens and civil society organisations. Perhaps more importantly, the duration of stay for this group extend, in most cases (20), well beyond four years, providing strong indications of (at least) a willingness to settle permanently in Greece, irrespective of the challenges most continue to face.

In turn, though the research sample is undeniably too small to be able to draw definitive conclusions, this does seem to indicate that ongoing conceptualisations of Greece as an exclusively

I ended up [choosing to stay] in Greece because our cultures have many similarities. Even in our appearance we feel the same. I have been here for eight years. I could have left, but I haven't. I feel at home here. I have said it many times, Greece is my second homeland.

Iranian father, recognised refugee in Greece, where he has lived with his family for the last eight years

I love my religion, and as an Orthodox Christian, I wish to stay here. I know many people are leaving for other countries. I have thought of it myself. But I wish to stay here, where I feel at ease, where I felt safe, and forget my past. My future is here.

Single woman from Ethiopia, currently without legal documents in Greece, where she has lived for more than six years

17 The exception concerns a successful family reunification case under Dublin procedures. Yet during the interview it arose that due to significant delays in the procedure, at some point in time the respondent had also considered leaving Greece irregularly, out of fear that these delays would ultimately obstruct their reunification with their family.

18 Of the reminder (5), three could see themselves staying under conditions and two seemed to be more inclined to leave.

19 In an additional case, the respondent also stated to have unsuccessfully tried to move onwards in the past.

20 In the words of a respondent from Iraq, a recognised refugee in Greece, where he has been living for the past year: *"I have tried everything, including trying to find job, but no one hired me. [Upon status recognition] they only told me to go to Athens, where I would be able to cover my needs, but no one helped me in Athens either."*

transit country for refugees are somewhat misplaced and that, concomitantly, comprehensive, long-term and sustainable integration policies should figure more prominently in the priorities of Greece's migration policy.

Greece is in my blood now. I have lived a whole life here. I even catch myself thinking in Greek. I only wish I could be granted citizenship to be able to finally calm down.

Single man from Iraq, beneficiary of subsidiary protection in Greece, where he has lived for more than 20 years

Despite my skills, I cannot find work. Accommodation is [also] a huge challenge. The state needs to provide solutions, but with a quality approach. There is no serious effort with regards to integration. There are no Greek language courses and no professional rehabilitation. They see refugees as second- and third-class people; they don't care about them.

Turkish father, with postgraduate education, recognised refugee in Greece

Chart 12 presents the main uncovered needs respondents consider(ed) having while in Greece. It includes separate categories in order to highlight the frequency at which each need was mentioned based both on the total sample of respondents (yellow bars) and on respondents' intention vis-à-vis staying in Greece or moving onwards, including in cases where respondents had already left Greece. Though the sample is limited in scope, as has already been mentioned, a number of interesting observations arise from this disaggregation.

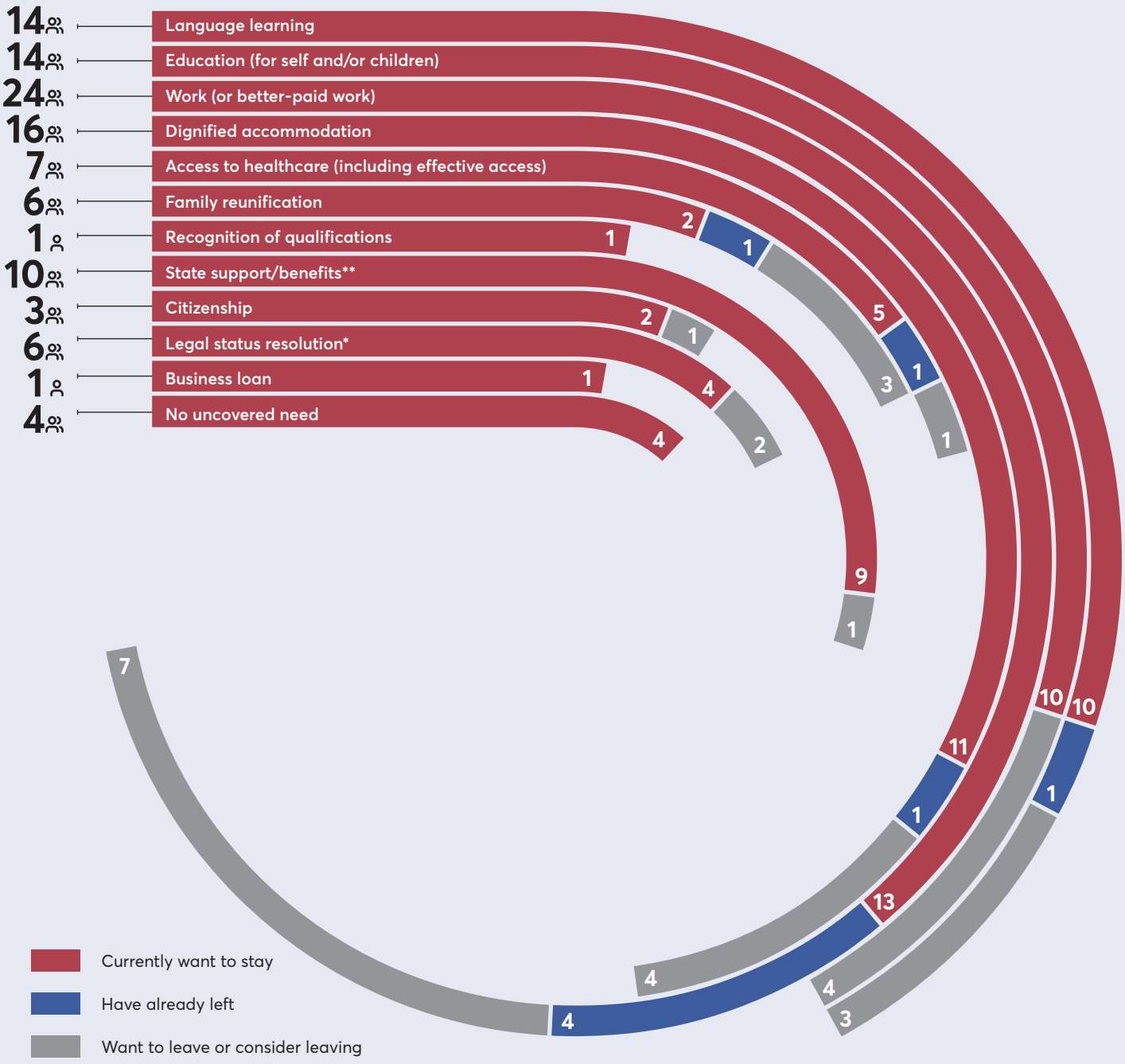
For starters, it quite clearly arises that the need to access (declared/legal) work and/or find better-paid work figures prominently as the main need highlighted by all respondents, irrespective of their intention to stay or not in Greece. On the one hand, this highlights the need to address in themselves the high levels of exploitation faced by refugees in Greece in the work environment (i.e., undeclared or partially declared work), which has been highlighted elsewhere in more detail.[21] On the other, the finding is in line with the findings of other relevant surveys,[22] and seems to reaffirm what the UNHCR representative in Greece has quoted as refugees' *"strong desire to work and contribute to the economic life of their new communities"*,[23] as long as they are given the opportunity to do so.

21 See M. Casalis et al., *Home for Good? Obstacles and Opportunities for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Greece*, December 2023, https://tinyurl.com/ycyacy57, 28.

22 For instance, see the aforementioned ongoing survey (n. 16) carried under the auspices of UNHCR in Greece and in particular section 12 on priority needs.

23 UNHCR, "Refugees at work: A win-win for refugees, business and society," 16 February 2023, https://tinyurl.com/4dvn6ujz.

CHART 12 **UNCOVERED NEEDS IN GREECE**



* Given four out of six respondents who highlighted this need are recognised refugees in Greece, legal status resolution seems to mostly relate to the frequent month-long delays beneficiaries of international protection face in Greece each time they have to renew their legal documents, during which, in practice, they lose access to their rights.

** State support/benefits, in the strict financial sense, was only prioritised by respondents in two out of ten cases. In the majority of cases (7), respondents prioritised finding work/better paid work, with some stressing their need to feel independent, while in three cases it arose that state support would also (if not exclusively) be tantamount to respondents having somewhere safe to leave their children, in order to be able to work or look for work.

> **I never thought about going to another country. I'm now active in the [agricultural sector], working alongside [colleagues] all of whom are Greek. We make and sell our own [products] and after every [business] trip, I return to Athens and feel I have come home. I also have social sensibilities. When Athens was flooded, I helped my [local] municipality; after the earthquake in Türkiye, I helped out with the collection of basic goods; and have donated blood for the [victims] of the Tempi train crash.**
>
> *Turkish man, recognised refugee, living with his wife in Greece for the past five years*

This is further corroborated when considering that the need for state support/benefits ranks fifth in terms of the priorities quoted by respondents, and is preceded by the need to find (dignified) accommodation, access education and learn the language, all of which, though highlighting separate challenges in themselves, also serve as preconditions for accessing and maintaining dignified employment.[24] Furthermore, as highlighted during the interviews, for most the need for state support/benefits seems to be perceived as a temporary means of support in their journey to financial autonomy (i.e., paid work), and not necessarily tied to support in the strict financial sense. For instance, three out of ten respondents who mentioned this need, all of whom were women and mothers, emphasised their need to be supported by having somewhere safe to leave their children while working or looking for work, further highlighting the added obstacles faced by refugee mothers in the country.[25]

Lastly, when considering the needs flagged by respondents, and in particular challenges vis-à-vis securing employment and dignified accommodation, accessing education, having the opportunity to learn the language, reunify with their families or being able to overcome (administrative) challenges with regard to regularising their stay, including through the possibility of acquiring Greek citizenship, it arises that the inability to cover these needs is a factor, to a significant degree, in respondents' considerations with regard to staying (or not) in the country. In turn, this further highlights that effectively managing onward movement within the EU requires more than just rules aimed at penalising such movement – such as the ones foreseen in the recently agreed EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, whose effectiveness remains to be seen[26] – and namely more focus being placed on establishing uniform rules aimed at creating environments conducive to integration, in a manner that reflects the different capacities of member states, that would provide refugees with opportunities to instead move on in their lives.

24 On the interconnection between the right to adequate housing and access to other rights, such as work, see, among others, OHCHR and UN Habitat, *The Right to Adequate Housing* (Fact Sheet No. 21/Rev. 1), https://tinyurl.com/3xtkefkx, 9.

25 On this point, see also, among others, GCR, IRC and Diotima Centre, *Seeking a New Life, Seeking Employment: An Assessment of the Employment Situation of Applicants and Beneficiaries of International Protection in Greece*, March 2022, https://tinyurl.com/3zyxwxwu, 11.

26 For some brief points on this matter, see ECRE, "Migration pact agreement point by point," 9 June 2023, https://tinyurl.com/4ewnkfw9; "So that's it then? Agreement(s) on the EU asylum reform," 6 October 2023, https://tinyurl.com/fxw3dtab and "All pact-ed up and ready to go: EU asylum law reforms," 16 February 2024, https://tinyurl.com/4xaa3w7m.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As already noted in the introduction, the current brief does not purport to provide a holistic or even representative account of the reasons people choose to embark on dangerous journeys towards the EU or the decision-making processes they undergo throughout these journeys. It is merely envisioned as a first, preliminary step in a long number of steps that still need to be taken in order to address an all-too evident gap in policy decisions affecting refugees and migrants, including those that led to the recently adopted EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: that is, the complete lack of consideration of refugees and migrants lived experiences – let alone their will – or the choices available to them during their journeys, which is often coupled with negative portrayals that seem to "conveniently" legitimise the EU's increasingly deterrent approach towards refugee protection.[27]

In the same context, it aims to showcase refugees' voices, with a view to contributing to their inclusion in a public course that all too often seems to be locked in a Manichean division of "friend" or "foe" that similarly ends up stripping them of their agency.

Is it enough? It is nowhere near the case. Yet in a policy environment where the following quotation from Hannah Arendt, from her seminal essay "We Refugees", seems to remain relevant, it is an ongoing endeavour in need of constant repetition.

> **Apparently nobody wants to know that contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings – the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends.**
>
> *Hannah Arendt*
> *H. Arendt, "We Refugees," Menorah Journal 31, no. 1 (1943): 69-77.*

27 On the (negative) narrative portrayal of refugees and migrants and the "devaluation" of their personhood in specifically the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, see J. Häkli. *et al.*, *Devaluing Personhood: The Framing of Migrants in the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum*, 13 February 2024, https://tinyurl.com/yc5xwdmu and relevant additional sources referenced therein.

Enhancing the voices of those affected by the EU's policies on migration and asylum

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