

# Chapter 11

## Governing Migrant (Im)mobility in Greece After the EU-Turkey Statement



Angeliki Dimitriadi

### 11.1 Introduction

Zahia<sup>1</sup> arrived in Greece in 2017. She fled from Afrin, a city in Northern Syria that is part of the Aleppo Governorate and has seen heavy fighting throughout the Syrian civil war. Her daughter lives in Turkey with her husband. Zahia came to Greece with her youngest and eldest son, aiming to reach Germany as their destination. They entered Greece over the land border. On their first attempt, they were apprehended and detained for 2 days by Turkish border guards, who released them when they declared they were from Afrin. The second attempt to cross, in 2017, was successful. They crossed the border undetected and made their way to Athens. Her eldest son had already spent a few months in the city, staying with friends before making his way to Germany. When we met, in 2018, she described how she could not get accommodation in one of the camps because she had not registered on entry to Greece. She recounted the countless hours of waiting at the Asylum Service that had postponed her interview from May 2018 to the summer of 2019, and the exploitation they suffered at the hands of a lawyer who disappeared after receiving payment of six hundred euros. Throughout the waiting period in Greece, Zahia encountered both physical and institutional barriers, in her efforts to remain. Despite having received asylum, she attempted to leave Greece and reunite with her sons in Germany. Zahia's story is not unique. Since 2016, a multitude of barriers have emerged, aiming to deter, delay, contain, disperse and redirect migrant trajectories in Greece and Europe.

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<sup>1</sup>Informant names have been pseudonymised.

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A. Dimitriadi (✉)  
Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy, Athens, Greece  
e-mail: [angeliki@eliamep.gr](mailto:angeliki@eliamep.gr)

The first barrier those attempting to cross to Greece encountered was the new physical border around the hotspots on the islands in the Northern Aegean. As a border within a border, it seeks to deter entry and, when that fails, to contain migrants<sup>2</sup> presence within a specific geographical space. The divergent border screening practices at the land border constituted a second barrier; since 2016, while some migrants are detained, others are registered and simply allowed to move on to the mainland. Migrants' experiences were different and depended primarily on the administrative capacity and will of the border guards and institutions on a given day. This resulted in confusion and mixed information, which functioned as a deterrent to staying in Greece. The third barrier was encountered by those who managed to reach the mainland. It related to the access to the asylum procedure, which in turn determined the access to formal accommodation and cash assistance, though both in practice also depended on availability. This also served as a deterrent: by wearing down asylum seekers, Greece was seen as a transit country once more, unfit for settling in; in turn, this promoted onward movement into the Schengen area. All barriers shared a further commonality; they were part of the governance of mobility that, beyond deterrence, produced also geographical dispersal and containment of those in-country.

The unequal and asymmetric function of the borders and the barriers has been explored in the migration literature (Bojadzijeve & Mezzadra, 2015; Squire, 2011; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010). Borders and barriers, both internal and external, emerge, impacting –deliberately or inadvertently – migrants' mobility at different stages, from entry to onward travel. They are central to the distinction between desirable and undesirable movement, but also to the distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving refugees' in what Caluya (2019) calls 'a politics of differential compassion' (p. 1). Different actors perform and/or construct the borders and barriers: Institutional actors, from border guards to the Asylum Service, erect obstacles that regulate the movement of migrants, while migrants themselves help shape the emergence of barriers, since their mere presence mobilises state institutions to respond and attempt to manage migration, particularly unauthorised migration. Mobility is experienced differently by those who are excluded from entering, as well as by those who are socially excluded during their stay in the country. In many cases, as Tazzioli (2020) has shown, mobility is also a product of state strategy that seeks to divert migrant routes, forcing them to undertake the same journey multiple times and making their stay in the country, difficult. This is also evident in Greece.

The chapter discusses the encounters between migrants and border actors in the period 2016–2018 and how they influenced migrants' trajectories within and from

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<sup>2</sup>The term 'migrants' refers to all people on the move, including asylum seekers. Refugees is used only in relation to those who have received international protection. For a discussion on the significance of categories, see Carling, 2015.

Greece. It thus covers a specific period of the ‘refugee crisis’<sup>3</sup> where a series of measures were applied at the external borders (in this case of Greece) to reduce refugee-arrivals. The analysis is informed by the empirical research conducted within the framework of the CeasEVAL project, with migrants who arrived in Greece in 2016–2018. The chapter contributes with fresh findings on the analysis of the governance of migration in Greece, through the construction of (im)mobility and the role of borders and other (administrative and regulatory) barriers. The focus is on migrants’ differentiated experience regarding entry at the external borders and registration, but also on their access to asylum and –by extension– reception services such as accommodation and cash-assistance. Findings indicate that this differentiation was very much a product of the EU-Turkey Statement and the way it was implemented, but also of the Greek migration management that sought to govern migrant mobility through practices of inclusion and exclusion. The different encounters resulted in journeys being blocked, delayed, deterred, but also encouraged and lengthened.

The first section (Sect. 11.2) offers some theoretical clarifications on borders, border actors and mobility and migration. The chapter moves on (Sect. 11.3) to offer a brief overview of the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 and the legislative changes initiated (Sect. 11.4) that resulted in the emergence of new administrative and legal barriers at the borders and on the mainland of Greece. The next section (Sect. 11.5) focuses on the border experiences of migrants, indicating the practices of different actors in governing irregular entry and stay, in the country. Two main border practices were identified by migrants themselves as crucial in the construction of internal barriers: the asylum process (Sect. 11.6) and the access to accommodation (Sect. 11.7) as a part of the reception system (for a detailed discussion on the governance of migrants’ mobility through reception see Mantanika & Arapoglou Chap. 10 in [this volume](#)). The chapter illustrates how different encounters with border actors resulted in containment, dispersal, and (desire for) onward movement and were therefore often more critical than the border crossing itself in shaping migrants’ lives.

## 11.2 Borders and Bordering Practices

Borders are rendered tangible in migrants’ daily lives through the policies of different border managers (border/first reception agencies, policymakers, etc.). In that sense, borders are ‘lines that distinguish political, social and economic spaces’ (Newman, 2006, p. 144). Over the past decade, a significant body of research has

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<sup>3</sup>The term ‘refugee crisis’ refers to a very specific period (2015–2018) and reflects the crisis framework on which policy responses were eventually built. Policy, discourse, and events since 2015 have shown that the arrival of migrants in Europe was treated first and foremost as a crisis of numbers, particularly at the political level. In reality it was a humanitarian crisis and a crisis of management, particularly for frontline states like Greece (see Dimitriadi & Malamidis, 2019).

emerged which investigates the issue of borders (Amilhat-Szary & Giraut, 2015; Mezzadra, 2015; Newman & Paasi, 1998; Walters, 2006), but also tries to 'rework the by-now well-worn focus on the image of the border as "wall" and its corresponding concept of the "exclusion" of the migrant' (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015, p. 57).

Borders, therefore, can refer to physical frontiers and territorial boundaries, but they can also be social categorisations which expand internally and are situated in the middle of the political space (Balibar, 2009). Borders have a dual but complementary identity: they are both institutions and processes, tools of state policy and markers of identity (Anderson, 1996); they function both as a filter for migrant entry (De Genova, 2013) and as a barrier. As an institution, borders delineate state sovereignty and the rights of citizens. As a process, they are an instrument of state policy but also of national identity, continuously changing, since policies and border controls shift (Anderson, 1996, pp. 1–3). This approach is particularly useful for understanding the border processes undertaken by the institutions of the state and their agents at the external border. Border institutions and actors are critical in governing migrants' mobility and, more importantly, their success at 'crossing borders and entering the territory of a state' (Newman, 2003, p. 14). I refer to migrant's mobility as the key objective of border institutions and actors, however the term 'mobility' is not used to denote a common linear movement between and across borders. Instead, drawing from Tazzioli (2020) and Cresswell (2006), and as highlighted by the research fieldwork discussed in this chapter, there are different hierarchies of mobility, regulated by legal, technological and administrative measures, with this chapter focusing predominantly on the latter.

Border institutions and actors are not only situated at the external frontier; they also exist within the state territory, where they (re)make social categorisations and govern the migrants' inclusion and/or exclusion. Migrants are usually faced with a series of rules and procedures embedded in bureaucracies (Campesi, 2014) encountered as early as the external border crossing. Barriers can thus be rendered tangible in migrants' daily lives through the actions of different border managers including border agents and first reception actors, legislators, and housing and employment actors that are usually public but may also be non-governmental or private (Paraschivescu et al., 2019). At the Greek external border, migrant entry is deterred and/or rendered illegal through a process of excluding those deemed undesirable. The *Evros* river and the islands of the North Aegean transform into border zones where 'politics becomes fully entangled in matters of life and death' (Walters, 2013, p. 206).

In the period of 2016–2018, this was particularly evident at the maritime border and on the islands of the Northern Aegean, which functioned as a 'tool of governance of irregular mobility: as gates but also as guardians at the gates' (Dimitriadi, 2017, p. 82). The geography of the islands facilitated the implementation of a geographical containment policy that would have been unenforceable on the mainland. It has also resulted in different border practices being applied there, than at the land border; these include geographical containment, fast-track border processing and differentiated treatment of nationalities.

Thus, even those who arrive are categorised between eligible and undesirable at every step from disembarkation to the submission of an asylum application. Following the implementation of the Statement, the maritime border moved beyond deterrence, revealing a wider spectrum of containment which extends beyond deterring entry or imposing spatial containment on the island. Rather, it is about disrupting the overall migrant journey. The containment that is part of the bordering process constructed from the Statement decelerates, but also diverts migrant movement and disrupts their presence in different spatial contexts (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020, p. 3). While it can result in spatial confinement, as it does in the hotspots or detention facilities, it can also produce a protracted strandedness and drive onward movement in search of other destinations.

Though bordering practices are most visible at the actual frontier, they are not limited to the external border. Barriers emerge within countries, and although less visible, they are often more powerful in the influence they exert over asylum applicants and migrants. It is through policies of inclusion and exclusion (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013) that migrant presence is negotiated. In most cases, the mechanism for the inclusion/exclusion draws on the legislative framework that reduces or provides access to rights and social benefits for asylum seekers and migrants. The legislative framework results in ‘obstructions’ that are ‘produced by implicit and informal administrative praxes that implement the national laws’ (Artero & Fontanari, 2019, p. 3).

The emerging barriers, particularly since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, regulate migrant (im)mobility through geographical containment and/or dispersal in the country, while often resulting in the desire for onward movement into the Schengen area. The Asylum Service has evolved into a key border actor. Registration for asylum allows access to key social provisions, like housing and cash assistance. Those who entered the land border in 2016–2018 encountered divergent bordering practices that resulted in the registration of some and in the exclusion of others. Institutional bordering practices that seek to determine who can enter and who can remain in the country include waiting for the registration and nationality identification, vulnerability screening and asylum application (with or without an interview), waiting for a decision, an offer of international protection or a rejection on the grounds of inadmissibility or an unfounded application, waiting for deportation and, in some cases, physical removal from the country (returns). The re-bordering that emerges can result in transitory movement and/or in a waiting state, which leaves the individual in limbo, or, in some cases, results in the physical return/deportation of the individual to their country of transit and/or origin. Thus, the governance of mobility includes secondary movement to other EU member states, containment in specific locations (e.g. hotspots) and mobility in specific locations (e.g. camps in the mainland). Physical (im)mobility produces also socio-economic (im)mobility, since reception services are offered to some and withheld from others.

### 11.3 The Impact of the EU-Turkey Statement on Migrants in Greece

Greece has functioned as a country of transit for asylum seekers for the past 20 years (Dimitriadi, 2018; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008). However, it had limited capacity for asylum processing and reception of asylum seekers until 2013. Although, in 2015, a total of 856,723 persons entered through the Greek maritime border (UNHCR, n.d.), the majority continued their journey onwards to other EU member states. A new migratory corridor emerged, facilitated by Germany's suspension of the Dublin Regulation for all Syrians and the de facto opening of the Western Balkan route until February 2016. The closure of the Western Balkan route in March 2016 struck a critical blow to the Greek policy of allowing transitory movement as a way of alleviating the impact of hundreds of thousands of arrivals (Dimitriadi, 2018). The closure of the land border was accompanied by an attempted 'closure' of the maritime border by means of the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016. A key component of the Statement is that all new irregular migrants crossing to the Greek islands as of 20 March 2016, could be returned to Turkey following an individual examination of their asylum application. Until a decision is reached, applicants are restricted from leaving the island, and are 'accommodated' in and around the Reception and Identification Centres (RIC), also known as hotspots.

The Statement has had a dual impact: It resulted in parallel, albeit different, asylum processing on the mainland and on the Greek islands of the eastern Aegean. For those arriving after 20 March 2016 on the islands with hotspots after the 20th of March 2016, a different asylum procedure is in place with the inadmissibility of claims first examined based on the safe third country and first country of asylum rules. Those whose claims are found inadmissible, or whose asylum is rejected on merit, are (in principle) returnable to Turkey. In contrast, for those entering through the land border, the regular asylum procedure is applied.

The Statement resulted in the emergence of a new border zone. The islands situated on the Greek-Turkish sea border continue to function as a buffer zone for onward mobility to the mainland and, by extension, to the rest of the Schengen area (Dimitriadi, 2017).

### 11.4 Legislative Barriers

In April 2016, Law 4375/2016 was adopted to enable the implementation of the 'hotspot' approach and of the EU-Turkey Statement, the latter applying only to the maritime border. The law introduced a partial reform of the asylum application processing system based on fast-track border procedures (Petraçou et al., 2018). Furthermore, it regulated the organisation and operation of the Asylum Service and the Appeals Authority, renaming the First Reception Service as the Reception and Identification Service. According to Law 4375/2016, newly-arrived persons were

transferred to a Reception and Identification Centre and ‘placed under a status of restriction of liberty.’ This practice was replaced in 2017 by the implementation of the geographical restriction, whereby newcomers could not leave the island until the end of the asylum procedure, i.e. throughout the examination of their asylum application (Greek Council for Refugees, 2018).

Since 2016, the only ways for migrants to leave the islands have been to receive international protection, to be exempt from the border procedure due to vulnerability, to be eligible for family reunification under the Dublin Regulation, or to be included in the transfers the government implements occasionally for reasons of decongestion. However, even those transferred from the island to the mainland – for vulnerability reasons – must return to the island where they submitted their application for their interview and the final processing of their claim.

Divergent practices exist across different borders (Petraçou et al., 2018). An example of this is the fast-track procedure applied at the maritime, but not the land border. Applicable to asylum seekers arriving after 20 March 2016 on the Greek islands, the registration of asylum applications as well as the notification of decisions can be undertaken by members of the Hellenic Police or Armed Forces. Moreover, the asylum interview can be conducted by either the Asylum Service or the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) staff. Fast-track asylum procedures should be concluded within 2 weeks (Greek Council for Refugees, 2017), though this has yet to happen in practice.

The standard procedure for migrants arriving at border points includes their identification (nationality screening) and referral to a Reception and Identification Centre for first reception procedures. After the completion of the identification procedures, third-country nationals who request international protection are referred to the Asylum Service. This means that only those who have been apprehended, rescued or sought a law enforcement agent on arrival themselves have immediate access to the Asylum Service. In 2016–2018, the waiting time for first-instance examination, particularly for those outside the hotspots and for non-Syrians, was usually 2 years.

Differences in bordering practices exist also on the Greek-Turkish land border in *Evros*. New arrivals in *Evros* are subject to reception and identification procedures in *Fylakio*, *Orestiada*, where their movement is restricted to within the premises of the RIC, or the police detention facilities. As the statement does not apply at the land border, asylum applications lodged in the RIC in *Fylakio* are not examined under the fast-track border procedure (Greek Council for Refugees, 2018; this has changed since 2020). On arrival and/or on being apprehended, migrants are detained for a few days or weeks (depending on the space available at the detention facilities) and released with a police-notice that allows them to travel to Athens, where they can make an appointment to submit an asylum request. Those who entered undetected and did not register at the border, would thus find themselves in urban centres unable to access the Asylum Service and having to wait for a Skype appointment. The process often takes weeks and is always dependent on the availability of interpreters.

The following section zooms in on the impact of the bordering practices discussed above and on their impact on migrants’ daily existence in Greece. The

bureaucratic, legal and spatial barriers produce different migrant trajectories. The analysis that follows draws on the empirical research that took place from February to July 2018 in Athens within the framework of research project evaluating the Common European Asylum System (CeasEVAL project).

Fifteen interviews with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees shed light on how bordering practices unfold at the border and on the mainland and shape migrant trajectories. Semi-structured interviews took place in Athens, Greece with Afghans (six), Syrians (seven), and Iraqis (two). Participants were identified through contacts with different communities and the only criteria set was to have all three legal categories represented in the sample- irregular migrants, asylum applicants and recipients of international protection. The overwhelming majority were men, with three female participants. Of the fifteen participants, twelve had entered Greece through the land border. Some had reached Greece in 2016, though most had crossed the border between 2017 and 2018. They described very different border encounters, some of which were physically and emotionally violent. Only one interviewee from Syria intended to stay in Greece from the beginning. Of the remaining participants, eight (8) indicated that their initial intention was to reach Germany, two (2) wanted to go to Sweden, one (1) to the Netherlands, two (2) to Italy, and one (1) to the UK. As it turned out, their initial intention often changed, mainly due to administrative and legal barriers presented in Greece.

## 11.5 Border Encounters

Different border practices were encountered on entry by our informants, largely due to the timing of their arrival to Greece. One of the participants arrived in *Lesvos* prior to the EU-Turkey Statement, when the migrant population was being transferred from the islands to the mainland in preparation for the implementation of the deal. As a result, he was registered and sent to Athens within a few days. It was an entirely different experience for those who arrived in March 2016, just as the Statement was being implemented; both informants were stranded on the islands for months. The third informant arrived on the island of *Lesvos* after the 18th of March 2016. She described her journey, as one with hours spent adrift at sea. When the group finally reached *Lesvos*, they were disembarked by a group of volunteers. The impact of the hotspots on the psychological and physical well-being of migrants has been extensively documented (e.g. International Rescue Committee, 2020), as has the impact of the time spent waiting for an asylum interview.

The empirical research in CeasEVAL sheds light on the different border practices implemented at the land border that has been documented less in comparison to the maritime frontier. Starting in 2017, a steady increase of arrivals had already been recorded at the land border in *Evros*. All but three of our informants utilised the land border to enter, in an effort to avoid the geographical restriction of movement imposed on the islands. The level of difficulty also differed, with the land border being a shorter passage and an easier one, especially in spring and summer. Some



participants described various kinds of harassment and abuse, pushbacks and physical harm at the border, in both Turkey and Greece:

The second time the police fired at us. We were 40–45 persons in the car and the police used the gun to fire at the car (encounter with Turkish police near the sea border. Kurdish, male, June 2018).

[...] they had dogs and they let them come up to us –very dangerous– and this is how they caught us. They apprehended us, they took our clothes, everything we had with us –many times they would just leave us with our shorts and [eventually] they returned us to Turkey (encounter with police on the Bulgarian-Turkish border. Afghan, male. July 2018).

Pushbacks have also been documented since 2016 at the land border. Nationality did not appear to be the principal criteria, as testimonies gathered by the Greek Council of Refugees (GCR) revealed alleged pushback practices taking place irrespective of nationality and gender (Greek Council of Refugees 2018). In two cases during my fieldwork, participants described how they were misled –by what appears from the description to have been Greek border guards – as to where the border zone was. Under the guise of assistance, in one case they were turned back to Turkey and in another to Bulgaria.

Some of the informants (four in total) were apprehended at the border and detained. Some received the registration papers with which they could travel to Athens, though two cases of Syrians noted that they were not registered by the police; the longest period spent in a detention facility was almost 3 months. Some crossed with difficulty, while others reached Greece without encountering major obstacles

Not everyone encountered border agents on entry, which also functioned as a ‘barrier.’ To access the Asylum Service, as well as accommodation, new arrivals had to register. At the land border in particular, registration was carried out by the police, which required that the migrant was either apprehended or sought out a police station (if their location made this possible). This marked a significant reversal in how the border crossing and its aftermath unfolded. In the past, detention was a standard policy, regularly applied also for asylum seekers, particularly in the period 2010–2012 in Greece. Due to the consistent use of detention, most arrivals sought to evade border agents for fear of being detained indefinitely. In contrast, by 2018, participants did not seek to avoid detection on arrival, as registration enabled access (or the prospect for access) to formal reception services (accommodation, food and social provisions). Thus, reception was utilised both as an incentive to register and screen arrivals, but also to exclude those that opted-out of the asylum system or that had bypassed border controls undetected. For those who successfully arrived and proceeded on to Athens without being apprehended, their lack of registration impeded their access to accommodation, cash-assistance and even the asylum process:

Until reaching Athens I was not registered anywhere. Here, I went to the police twice to get registered. [...] I told them I need help. I even hoped they would arrest me and put me in detention for two months so I would get registered. [...] but they asked me to leave (Afghan, male, June 2018).

Syrians entering through the land border were either not detained at all or only for a few days, in contrast to Afghans who were usually detained for weeks and/or months. However, the different experiences highlighted by the interviewees, indicated that no singular practice was applied consistently. This created confusion and misinformation among migrants; it also showed that bordering practices were not set-in stone. In 2018, at the land border, avoiding border agents and police served as an impediment to accessing asylum and therefore accommodation and cash-assistance. The different border encounters produced ‘erratic geographies’ (Tazzioli, 2020, p. 6) resulting in the dispersal of migrants across the country. For many, access to asylum was the second critical barrier they had to overcome.

## 11.6 Asylum as a Barrier

The Asylum Service is a key border actor that constructs and deconstructs the legal and social borders at the hotspots and on the mainland, for every individual. Migrant encounters took place at the border, or in Athens, and in some cases would-be applicants were unsuccessful in their asylum applications, despite repeated attempts. The asylum application determined whether they would be able to access housing and cash-assistance, register for a social insurance number, and even find employment. Lack of registration rendered one invisible to the bureaucracy and ‘illegal’ by default. This marked a return to the practices of 2010–2012, when the asylum application –the ‘pink card’– was the only means of temporarily legalising one’s stay in the country and thus enjoying protection from detention and forced deportation (Cabot, 2014). In other words, the document re-emerged as the most critical element, but also as an obstacle to overcome. Those apprehended on the islands went through the screening and registration process in the hotspots, with an asylum interview very often scheduled for the same day:

When we sat down, they made interviews with us. In the beginning!! They did not let us drink some water, take a break. We didn’t know what we were saying. I did not know what I should say. I just said ‘my name is this.’ It’s like an accident when you arrive, and they have an interview with you immediately (Iraqi, female, June 2018).

Migrant interviews take place with the asylum case officer and often with an EASO representative. The absence of information was stressed by all informants, although the biggest barrier to the bureaucratic process of asylum was (and remains) language. Asylum interviews could only take place when there was an interpreter available who spoke the applicant’s language. For languages with few interpreters, the process could take months or years:

There was just one Arabic interpreter, not Kurdish. If you do not speak Arabic, they will postpone your interview. For people that could not speak Arabic it was a big problem because there was no Kurdish interpreter. [...] (Iraqi, female, June 2018).

The standard approach in 2016–2018 was to prioritise interviews for Syrians, because in principle they could be rejected as inadmissible (per implementation of

the EU-Turkey Statement). Most cases ended up overturned or pending on appeal, with processing taking as long as 2 years. Until 2020, thousands of applications were pending on appeal.

For those who arrived on the islands without encountering border agents, the process was more complex. To enter the hotspot, they needed to register first with the regional asylum office. Only those who were registered were entitled to enter the RIC and receive shelter, food and medical assistance. However, access was not always possible. For example, on the island of *Chios*, the regional asylum office was not situated in the camp:

To enter the camp, you need to register yourself [with the Asylum Service] but no one can do that, so you have to take the bus and go by yourself. Only people that have friends and have the power can enter and register themselves (Syrian Kurd, male, July 2018).

The reference to power and/or knowing the right people is something that was touched upon indirectly by participants, particularly with regard to navigating legal and bureaucratic processes. The above informant was a Kurdish national from Syria, who had arrived in Greece with his family on the island of *Chios*. Technically stateless, he posed a challenge for the asylum process. The only person who was allowed to submit an asylum application initially was his mother, who held a Syrian passport, but his father was called for an interview instead. He described a rather disorganised process with the asylum staff and a bureaucratic procedure that felt dehumanising:

For them we were not names nor humans, we were numbers. When they announced someone, they would say their number not their name (Syrian Kurd, male, July 2018).

After months of waiting, he eventually decided to call the smuggler and arrange to return to Turkey. He stayed in Istanbul for 3 months to collect money and returned to Greece via the land border, where he was registered on arrival. When we met, he had submitted an asylum application at the Regional Asylum office in Athens. His parents were still waiting on the island for their transfer to the mainland, having received asylum.

Different bordering practices at the land border were also found regarding registration. Not everyone was registered, while migrants –particularly Syrians– were being told to simply go to Athens. This information was not only flawed, but would come to function as a key barrier to the migrants' acquiring accommodation and cash assistance.

Those registered by the police could in principle make an appointment in Athens to receive the threefold (asylum receipt of application). Here, nationality was crucial once again. The language spoken determined when and if an interview would take place. Interviews still depended on the number of interpreters present on any given day, the number of applicants in the queue and the capacity of the service to accommodate them:

The queues are so long I went there four times and nothing. I gave up. I went to the Greek Council for Refugees and said I am Syrian, I am refugee you need to get me an appointment. They said they will try, but it will take some time (Syrian, male, June 2018).

Three months after our interview, he was still waiting for an appointment. Those that did not register on arrival could not access the Asylum Service directly and had to request an appointment via Skype; a different nationality and language(s) was offered each day:

It took me two months to make an appointment through Skype. They gave me an appointment and I had to go to take this official document from the Asylum Service. In this paper they gave me an appointment for an interview in six months! (Syrian, male, June 2018).

Even when an appointment was made with the Asylum Service, the date differed depending on nationality: until 2018, Syrians were prioritised for registration and interviews, whereas Afghans were delayed, with one of the participants receiving an appointment for asylum 20 months after the date of his application, which was in April 2018. The administrative barriers migrants encountered had a direct and immediate impact on their daily life in Greece. Five of our interviewees had still to apply for asylum, unable to access the Asylum Service or book an appointment via Skype. In practice this meant they could physically move, but within specific spaces evading police presence and could not access any of the reception services.

Overall, entry point, nationality, gender and family status (single, with children) as well as the time of arrival in Greece determined migrants' experiences both at the border crossing itself and with the border agent. In fact, acquiring the legal status to access, where possible, housing, cash assistance, health care and other necessary services –was the most critical aspect of the journey to Greece. In this sense, the Asylum Service, was (and remains) a far more significant contact point than the border guards, and access to it had a far-reaching impact on individuals. Multiple border zones emerged, depending primarily on the documents migrants obtained, which subsequently determined the extent of their (im)mobility and irregularity. The latter is a condition that 'any given individual can flit in and out of depending on the relation between his or her movements and activities and the movements and activities of national, international, and transnational agencies' (Squire, 2011, p. 7). Thus, in-country bordering practices acquire far more significance, and have the potential to have a greater impact on migrant lives, than the actual border crossing.

## **11.7 Re-Bordering Through Access to, or Exclusion from Accommodation**

Bordering practices result in the inclusion and/or exclusion of migrants. In most cases, the mechanism for this draws on the legislative framework that denies or provides access to rights and social benefits for asylum seekers and migrants.

Asylum seekers in Greece in 2016–2018 had the right to free public health care and could be issued social security and employment documents. They also had the right to reside either in an official accommodation facility or to rent on their own, though the State was obliged to provide housing support. Renting accommodation requires financial resources that are not available to everyone.

Accommodation has consistently been a problem in Greece for asylum seekers, even prior to 2015 (Dimitriadi & Sarantaki, 2018). Until 2018, there were 26 reception facilities under the supervision of the Ministry for Migration Policy across mainland Greece, with the government developing 30,000 reception places in collective accommodation schemes (i.e. camps) to respond to the urgent needs presented by the ‘refugee crisis.’ To this, the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) scheme set up by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the European Commission’s Directorate General (DG) Migration and Home Affairs should be included. Designed to temporarily house vulnerable asylum applicants and those eligible for relocation, the scheme in November 2018 included 26,526 places in 4427 apartments and 23 buildings in 14 cities and on seven islands (UNHCR, 2018). This was combined with cash assistance offered to formally registered asylum seekers residing either in the camps, hotspots or ESTIA apartments. Since April 2017, a total of 68,110 individuals have received cash assistance ranging from €90 to €550 (UNHCR, 2018). Despite the ESTIA and the multiple camps, there were still significant shortages in reception when the research was being conducted and this is largely due to how reception unfolded through fragmented spaces and practices (Mantanika & Arapoglou Chap. 10 in this volume). Though the accommodation spaces were set up for asylum seekers, recognised refugees continued to reside there, since they had nowhere else to go.

To access the camps or ESTIA housing, an individual had to be registered with the Asylum Service, with their application either pending examination or with a date set for an interview. As facilities were at full capacity, there was a significant waiting time of months to find accommodation space:

I did register our names in the camps, but nobody called us until now. I went to *Eleonas* and told [them] I would like to stay here. They registered our names and they said they will call but nobody called (Syrian, male, July 2018).

Two of the informants (both male, one Syrian and one Iraqi) succeeded in bypassing the system, demonstrating that knowing the right people can have a far greater impact. One of the informants explained that, although he was residing in one of the camps, he was not officially registered there. A co-ethnic who was employed with one of the Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) as an interpreter gave him access to the camp and a place to stay in one of the tents. Though he had not applied for asylum, he was registered and was eligible for camp accommodation. However, he was unconvinced that the formal route would have yielded similar results:

You know how many are waiting for somewhere to sleep? Why wait when I can get myself in the door? I wanted to stay there only a few nights, but it has been difficult finding a flat so some days I sleep with friends and others I go back to the camp [...]. It’s difficult in Athens, I know there is this option with the NGO flats? [ESTIA programme] but you need to have asylum and I don’t (Syrian, male, June 2018).

Due to the location of the camps on the outskirts of Athens, the residents were in fact removed physically from the urban centre that they nonetheless had to access for the various services. The cost of public transport (roughly three Euros each way) was not within everyone’s means, particularly for families. This was also

problematic for those who were unable to stay in flats and were searching for available spaces in the camps. In many cases, they had to visit in person to ask for available spaces. But doing so came at a financial cost. In contrast, those who resided in rented apartments in Athens lived around the city and could both move around easily and access services.

Vulnerable persons were, in principle, prioritised for accommodation. However, this was not always the case in practice. A female participant, a mother of two, registered for the ESTIA programme (including cash aid assistance) when we met had been waiting for a response for months:

I have registered myself for the apartment programme [ESTIA]... it's been ten months. Until now they did not call me. I have registered my name in three organisations to get a salary [cash aid]. There is the Caritas organisation... it's been six months now (Syrian, female, May 2018).

Each step in Greece was regulated by registration: registering with the police, registering with the Asylum Service, registering for accommodation and cash assistance. Each administrative step was part of the containment created by bordering practices, and as such it continuously produced barriers:

I went to the GCR, they put me on the list and told me that they would call me for an appointment. I am here for two months now, and I sleep here, in the square. [...] I am very tired, I stay in the street in very difficult conditions, I do not have money for anything [...] GCR told me it will take two to three months (Afghan, male, July 2020).

This type of containment, produced through registration and/or its absence, isolated and limited the movement of migrants to specific geographical spaces such as *Victoria Square* in Athens –a common location for migrants to spend the night since 2015. One of the Afghan participants referred to the area as the camp, because ‘It is a bit like a camp, so many people sleep here at night’ (male, June 2020). He had tried to find formal accommodation through NGOs and the UNHCR but had been unsuccessful.

Overall, seven of our informants either lived in squats or were entirely homeless. The squats do not constitute formal accommodation, and in fact most of them in the centre of Athens were dismantled by the Hellenic Police late in 2019, raising the prospect of homelessness for more asylum seekers:

When I first arrived, for a week I slept on the streets, then for a month I was sleeping outside the camp to register there. Then after three months I was transferred to an apartment with many difficulties (Afghan, male, June 2020).

Although injured (and thus vulnerable), he was accepted into the ESTIA programme following UNHCR intervention. He acknowledged he was one of the exceptions, and that for those arriving from the land border there were few options but to sleep outside or wait for space to open up in the camps.

Accommodation was and remains critical also regarding employment. To register for social security, one still needs a permanent address. Camps have been used in the past as declared permanent addresses, though they are meant to be temporary accommodation. For those outside any formal accommodation structure, however,

the absence of an address impacts severely both their stay and their access to a livelihood. Additionally, they are ineligible for the cash assistance that is provided to asylum seekers living in camps and apartments. Reception conditions can define secondary movement, provoking it or deterring it (Dimitriadi, 2018; Kuschminder, 2018; Kuschminder & Koser, 2017). Entry, asylum application, accommodation, cash assistance and employment are all links in a chain in which every step functions in its own way as a barrier; sometimes, the process allows new arrivals to enter the reception system, and other times it excludes them from parts of –or the entire– reception process. This, in turn, generates spatial dispersal, containment, but also the desire for onward mobility.

## 11.8 Conclusions

New barriers have arisen since the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 and pre-existing borders have been strengthened. New border actors have also emerged alongside the traditional ones (police, border guards), namely the Asylum Service and the Reception and Identification Service, responsible for the registration of new arrivals. Different administrative and legal bordering practices have resulted in the emergence of internal barriers that regulate movement within the country and access to asylum –and by extension– to accommodation.

The chapter sought to highlight how different encounters with border actors within Greece between 2016–2018, and with those situated at the external border, are part of the governance of migrants' mobility. The research findings indicate that multiple administrative (for a discussion on the public policy responses to the 'refugee crisis' see Stratigaki Chap. 14 in [this volume](#)), legal, and physical barriers emerged at different stages of the migrant journey in Greece.

Different border encounters generated differentiated experiences of entry and stay, of containment and (im)mobility, not only physical but also socio-economic and legal. The study demonstrates that migrants' mobility was governed through registration, but also through withholding registration; through access to the asylum and reception system, as well as by preventing such access. Not everyone was registered, either due to the absence of border encounters or due to the action of border actors. The reception and asylum systems did not afford all applicants the same opportunities, while administrative constraints prevented access to asylum, in many cases prioritising specific nationalities over others (for example Syrians over Afghans). It would not be accurate to attribute the different experiences of migrants only to poor management as this implies a lack of intent. Rather, what was described above should be seen as part of the governance of migration in Greece, whereby inclusion and exclusion were interwoven in the management of mobility made up of containment practices, geographical dispersal, deterrence policies and redirection of migrant journeys. Migrants were rendered governable through the bureaucratic process of registration, asylum and reception, 'forcing' some to onward movement,

and others to immobility, while dispersing many in waiting spaces (e.g. islands) for extended periods of time.

Few perceive Greece as the destination. Rather, in-country barriers have reinforced pre-existing plans for onward movement. Empirical data reveals insecurity, resulting from the administrative barriers encountered, but also marginalisation. This further provides evidence of how bordering practices can be utilised to construct containment, but also generate onward movement shedding further light on the complexity of migrants' decisions to engage in further mobilities.

How administrative barriers target and/or affect some nationalities more than others requires further research. The relocation scheme of 2015 was only accessible to those nationalities above the 75% threshold of EU-wide positive recognition. This meant that Syrians were eligible, whereas Afghans were excluded. The experiences of arrivals indicate that differentiated bordering practices were applied in Greece also on the basis of one's nationality, with Syrians being allowed to move in-country when they enter – often unregistered – from the land border, while Afghans tended to be detained for longer, if they were apprehended. A similar divergence was noted between 2016 and 2018 as regards asylum interviews. Thus, a greater understanding is crucial, not only of how bordering practices occur, but also how they diverge depending on nationality and how bordering actors construct barriers that can generate mobility for some and immobility for others.

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**Angeliki Dimitriadi** is Research Fellow at the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in Berlin, where she contributes to the institute’s work on migration. She is a political scientist interested on migration management at the external borders, migration governance in the EU and the European foreign policy on migration. She teaches at the University of Athens on the governance of asylum and migration policy in Southeast Europe (Master’s Programme in Southeast European Studies). Previously, Angeliki was Head of the Migration program at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, where she remains affiliated as a Senior Research Fellow. She has published articles in refereed journals and her most recent monograph, *Afghan Migration Europe: At the Margins, Looking In* (Palgrave, 2018), focuses on Afghan asylum seekers transiting through Greece and Turkey. She holds a PhD from Democritus University of Thrace (2012), an MA from King’s College London (2003) and a BSc from the London School of Economics (2002).

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