

The European Migrant Crisis Situation Overview: Kos, Greece

16th September 2015

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SITUATION OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

During the past three months, the Greek islands have seen an unprecedented increase in the influx of Syrian asylum seekers. UNHCR estimates that, in July alone, Greece has received 50,242 new arrivals, more than the total number of asylum seekers arriving in 2014 (43,200 people). Once in Greece migrants travel to other European countries through arrivals to Athens and Thessaloniki; from where they cross the border into Macedonia and continue up the Balkans toward the EU. For most the final destination is Germany, with Sweden and Austria as second options.

On September 15th a REACH teams travelled to Greece to collect preliminary data to assess the current displacement routes and trends for Syrian asylum seekers travelling to the EU, as well as the motivating factors both for leaving their country of origin and choosing their target destination. The information will compliment findings from ongoing assessment by REACH teams the Balkans and in MENA countries.

This report outlines the findings of the assessments conducted on 16th September on the Island of Kos, one of the first points of entry of Syrian refugees in Greece. Data was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with recent arrivals of asylum seekers. Due to the transient nature of the groups, the limited time spent together, and the complex and disparate nature of motivations and intentions, there are limitations on generalizing these issues, noted as limitations of the assessment. The sample is not statistically representative, but interviews were consistent enough for trends and to be perceived.

DISPLACEMENT

AREAS OF ORIGINS

Syrians represented the largest group of most recent arrivals to the island of Kos at approximately 40%, followed by smaller groups from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Asylum seekers from Syria were mainly from the governorates Damascus and Dar'a, as well as

Lattakia, Homs, Aleppo and Idlib. Syrians who had recently left Syria could be divided into two main groups: Those who had from the south of Syria (Damascus, Daraa, and Homs) and had gone by Lebanon, Turkey and then into Greece; and those from who had left from the North of Syria (Aleppo, Idlib and Kurdish areas) who had gone directly to Turkey by crossing the border illegally at Khirbet Al



Picture 1: Police registration area, Kos

Joz.

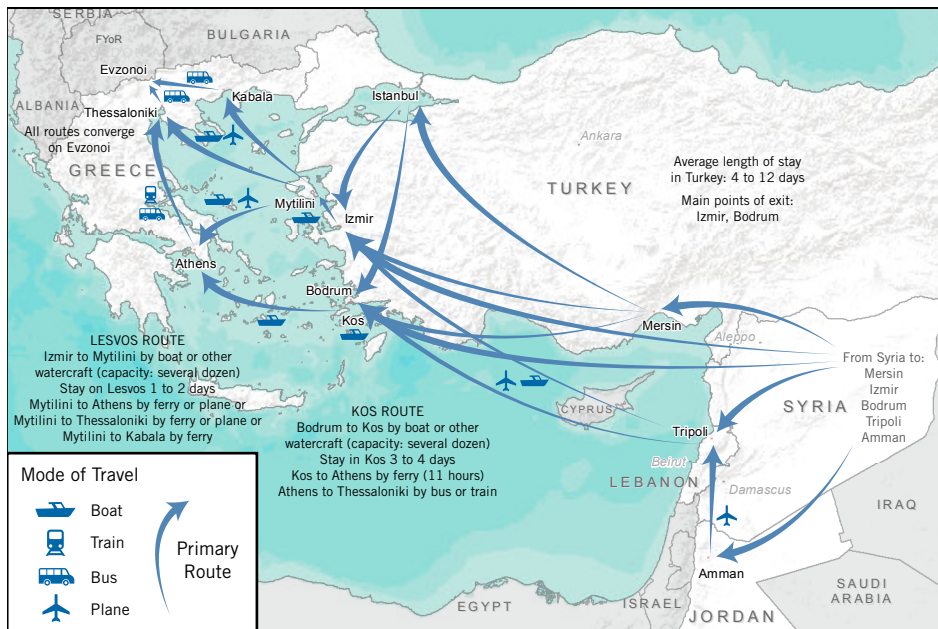
Most groups of asylum seekers interviewed reported spending less than three months in Turkey before coming to Kos, travelling directly from Syria. A few cases of displacement of Syrian refugees who were previously in Lebanon and Jordan have also been mentioned during the interviews.

REASONS - FOR DEPARTING TO THE EU

Asylum seekers coming directly from Syria reported that the main reason for leaving Syria was the fear that armed conflict would spread to their area. Other reported reasons were, in order of priority, fear of being conscripted by the army, active conflict in their areas, as well as the increase of living costs in Syria.

For all interviewed Syrian asylum seekers, the main reason why they chose to come to Kos - and then to Europe – was reported to be the ease to come to Europe at the time of the assessment, due to weather, access to services and support once arrived in their final destination, as well as the decrease in cost in the journey. Safety and security was also mentioned as another incentive for Syrians to come to Europe.

MIGRATION ROUTES



MAP 1: Primary migration routes through Greece

FINAL DESTINATION INTENTIONS

Two thirds of the asylum seekers that participated in these discussions intended to go to Germany as their

final destination. Sweden was the second country mentioned followed by Holland.

Reasons for choosing these destinations varied from the expected level of support from the host country,

Refugee Profile in Kos as of 16th September

According to UNHCR and informal sources, daily arrivals of refugees - including Syrians, Afghans, and Iraqis, are between 100 and 200 per day. Once each boat arrives, they are directed to the Red Cross, where they will be given a number to receive their travel document at the Greek police station to continue their travels.

Most of the Syrian who participated in these conversations confirmed that they come into groups of 40 - 55 per boat from Izmir and Bodrum area. Once they arrive to Kos, these groups will split again and continue their travels within their closer family, friends, or relatives. Within the groups, young people makes the higher percentage of population. The proportion of males is visibly higher than females, and even higher than females alone.

Most of the Syrian asylum seekers who participated in the study have university degrees - or where in the process to obtain.

to the ease to find jobs, and the reunification with family that was already in the country of destination. Other reported reasons were, in order of priority, the speed of obtaining a refugee status process, the ease of finding jobs, access to better education, as well as the fact that the final destination country would not send them back to the first country of arrival in Europe (Greece), in abidance by the Dublin agreement.

JOURNEY INTENTIONS

Kos is one of the first entry points for Syrian asylum seekers in Europe, together with Lesbos and Samos, two of the other Greek islands which have had a significant increase influx of migrants during the past 3 months. Once migrants arrive to Kos, they are provided with a travel document to continue their travel to mainland Greece.

From Kos, Syrians mainly intended to travel by boat to plane to Athens. They planned to buy their tickets themselves and reported that the Greek government has facilitated the availability of boat to do this journey. Once arrived to Athens, Syrian asylum seekers planned to take a bus straight to the Macedonian border, not to Thessalonika.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Social media updates (mainly Whatsapp and

Facebook groups) are the main source of information for migrants. Word of mouth, and information from families already in destination were also mentioned as other sources of information. Interestingly, due to the availability of the Turkish cell network in Kos, Syrian asylum seekers were able to have connectivity to these sources of information constantly. Also, maps with the route to follow and updates had been distributed by an informal source in the area where Syrians arrive in Kos.

Syrians interviewed did mention as a priority the need to have updated and accurate information on the situation of the border crossings in order to facilitate their journey. They also mentioned that they lacked information on the process of asylum seeking in the various EU countries. that was

About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT, its sister-organisation ACTED, and the United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT).

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions. For more information, you can write to geneva@reach-initiative.org. Visit www.reach-initiative.org and follow us @REACH_info