

LIS professionals supporting women living in conflict situations

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## Greek Libraries Supporting Women in Conflict Situations: Current and New Roles

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### Abstract:

*During the past two years, 1.3 million people fleeing conflict and persecution have traveled through Greece in search of safety and a better life in Europe. With the closure of the Balkan borders and the implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement in March 2016, more and more refugees are relocating from camps to Greece's towns and cities with the hope to build a better future for their families.*

*As governments enforce restrictions and tighten border controls, reception and transit facilities could become overcrowded and tense, increasing the risks to women and girls. Women and adolescent girls should not be treated like an afterthought in humanitarian, social and cultural response. Specific challenges in transit include family separation, psychosocial stress and trauma, health complications, physical harm and injury, and risks of exploitation and gender-based violence. Language barriers and cultural factors, combined with the intention of asylum-seekers to move through transit countries as quickly as possible, make it more challenging for humanitarian actors to provide essential services, as well as to identify and support particularly vulnerable groups.*

*Libraries, as democratic open public spaces, can play a crucial role in providing access to specific information to women living in conflict situations, creating friendly spaces by providing opportunities for them and / or to their children to learn, share and feel safe.*

*The paper focuses on current projects in Greek libraries working in this direction and proposes a nationwide framework to ensure an innovative function of Greek libraries to bridge the cultural gap faced by women displaced from their own cultures due to conflict situations and integrate them to the European culture emphasizing the role of libraries as main cultural institutions with social orientation.*

**Keywords:** women, Greek libraries, integration, culture, strategy

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## **Introduction**

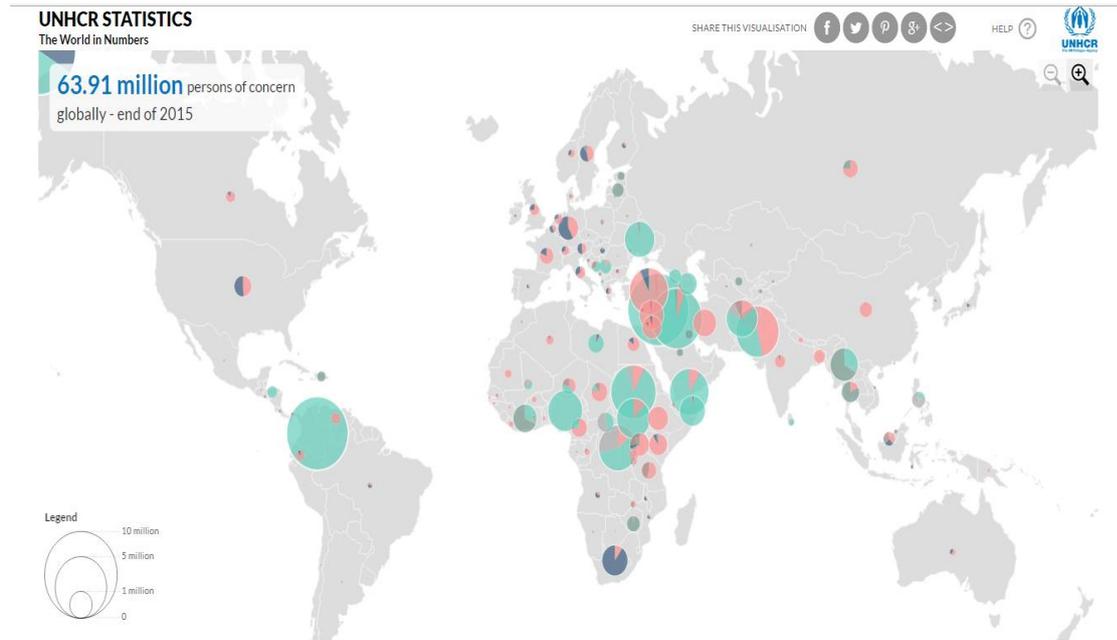
The Initial Assessment Report: Protection Risks for Women and Girls in the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis conducted by United Nations Refugee Agency, United Nations Population Fund and Women’s Refugee Commission refers to the situation making the following statement “For the first time since World War II, Europe is experiencing a massive movement of refugees and migrants, women, girls, men and boys of all ages, fleeing armed conflicts, mass killings, persecution and pervasive sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Many seek refuge in Europe from the ongoing armed conflicts that have torn apart their societies, and are entitled to protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention, its subsequent Protocol, and other international instruments. From January to November 2015, Europe witnessed 950,469 refugee and migrant arrivals through the Mediterranean, with Greece receiving the vast majority of arrivals (797,372). Those arriving by sea are fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic (49%), Afghanistan (20%), Iraq (8%), Eritrea (4%), Nigeria (2%), Pakistan (2%), Somalia (2%), Sudan (1%), Gambia (1%) and Mali (1%). The majority travel to Turkey, from where they undertake a treacherous journey by sea to Greece and then make their way through the Skopje, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria in an attempt to reach their destination countries, including Germany and Sweden. Each day brings new arrivals, and accurate data remains a challenge. Refugees and migrants are travelling en masse, striving urgently to reach their destination from fear of border closures, potentially increased restrictions in asylum policies and the onset of winter.”

Single women travelling alone or with children, pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls, unaccompanied children, early-married children — sometimes themselves with newborn babies — persons with disabilities, and elderly men and women are among those who are particularly at risk and require a coordinated and effective protection response. The assessment found that women and girl refugees and migrants face grave protection risks and that the current response by governments, humanitarian actors, EU institutions and agencies and CSOs are inadequate. The findings emphasize the urgent need to scale up response efforts, implement innovative solutions and strengthen protection mechanisms and services across borders to adequately address the protection threats facing women and girls. In this particular crisis, Europe’s response needs to match its international obligations, responsibilities and stated values.

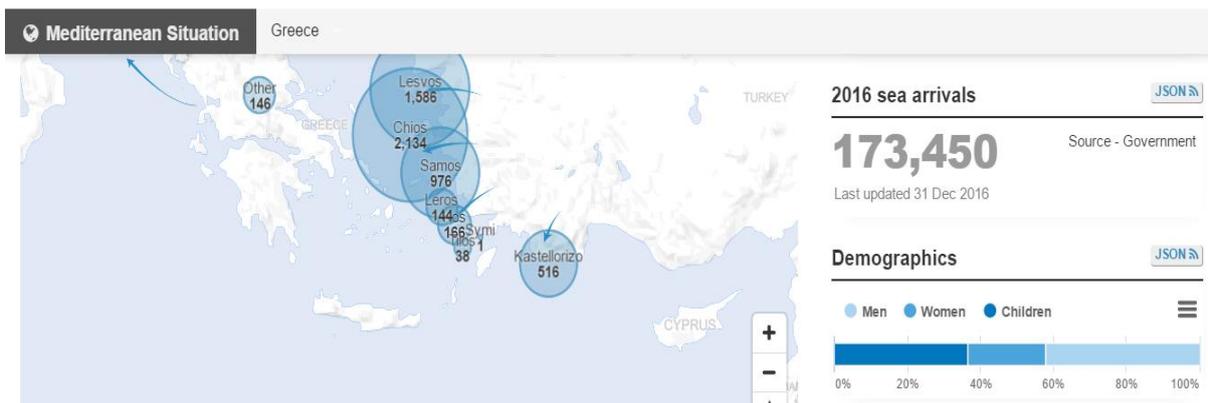
The findings of the team assessment signifies a call of emergency action for practical aid needed to be provided to women and girls refugees, and the role of cultural institutions to the facilitation of their integration and democratic inclusion.

## **Profile of the Population**

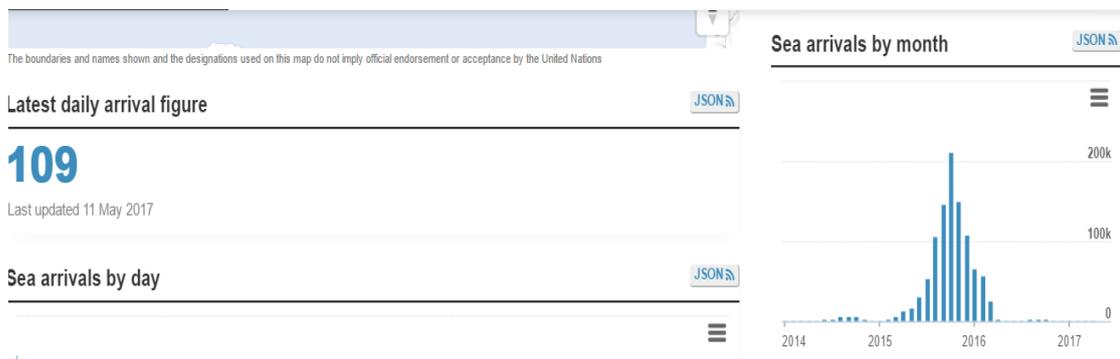
As of November 2015, per government figures, 950,469 refugees and migrants had arrived in Europe through the Mediterranean, with the vast majority of these arriving to Greece (797,372). Approximately, 24 percent are children and 16 percent are women. 3,605 have either lost their lives or are missing. Humanitarian actors have noted a trend in recent months of a larger number of women refugees and migrants, including single women, and unaccompanied children making the journey. One reason for this shift could be the rising perception among the population that women and/or children travelling alone may be prioritized for services and registration, or that they may be more likely to be granted asylum. The tables below show the real picture of refugee flows the years after, in 2016 early 2017.



UNHCR Statistics Map



UNHCR 2016 Sea Arrivals and Demographics in Greece



UNHCR 2016 Daily Arrival Figure in Greece

Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service (from 7.6.2013 to 31.3.2017)

Asylum Applications										
	2013	Difference % (2013-2014)	2014	Difference % (2014-2015)	2015	Difference % (2015-2016)	2016	Difference % (2016-2017)	2017	Total
Total	4814		9431		13195		51092		16870	95402
Monthly average	688	+14.3%	786	+39.9%	1100	+287.2%	4258	+32.1%	5623	2074

Asylum Applications - Gender and Age ranges																					
	2013			2014			2015			2016			March 2017			2017			Total		
Age ranges	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
0-13	255	182	437	389	306	695	920	793	1713	7691	7115	14806	533	508	1041	2344	2156	4500	11599	10552	22151
14-17	272	37	309	575	84	659	615	169	784	3530	1384	4914	345	87	432	1062	365	1427	6054	2039	8093
18-34	2371	600	2971	5161	922	6083	6194	1465	7659	15297	6601	21898	2040	560	2600	5999	2080	8079	35022	11668	46690
35-64	747	338	1085	1513	459	1972	2100	856	2956	5355	3798	9153	546	255	801	1783	1024	2807	11498	6475	17973
65 and over	7	5	12	7	15	22	35	48	83	144	177	321	4	6	10	26	31	57	219	276	495
<b>Total</b>	<b>3652</b>	<b>1162</b>	<b>4814</b>	<b>7645</b>	<b>1786</b>	<b>9431</b>	<b>9864</b>	<b>3331</b>	<b>13195</b>	<b>32017</b>	<b>19075</b>	<b>51092</b>	<b>3468</b>	<b>1416</b>	<b>4884</b>	<b>11214</b>	<b>5656</b>	<b>16870</b>	<b>64392</b>	<b>31010</b>	<b>95402</b>
Unaccompanied Minors (included in the	188	12	200	414	36	450	367	53	420	2035	317	2352	218	10	228	617	51	668	3621	469	4090

Hellenic Republic. Ministry of Migration Policy. Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service Gender and Age range (from 7.6.2013 till 31.3.2017)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	March 2017	2017	Total
ATTICA	4398	6357	7833	14146	815	2094	34828
THESSALONIKI		412	1192	11418	624	3179	16201
LESVOS	30	209	692	5095	930	3059	9085
THRACE	166	900	829	4468	88	758	7121
ALIMOS				3141	317	2174	5315
CHIOS				3398	615	1256	4654
PIRAEUS				2475	460	1665	4140
SAMOS				2433	271	667	3100
RHODES		454	803	932	69	209	2398
AMYGDALAZA	98	606	589	452	132	306	2051
FYLAKIO	122	399	412	448	84	197	1578
LEROS				871	132	303	1174
XANTHI		40	580	386	53	132	1138
PATRA		54	265	415	111	323	1057
KOS				686	97	323	1009
KORINTHOS				324	79	186	510
HERAKLION				4	7	39	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>4814</b>	<b>9431</b>	<b>13195</b>	<b>51092</b>	<b>4884</b>	<b>16870</b>	<b>95402</b>

Asylum Applications - Countries of Origin								
	2013	2014	2015	2016	March 2017	2017	Total	%
SYRIA	252	773	3492	26693	1285	5381	36591	38.4%
AFGHANISTAN	803	1709	1720	4371	591	2397	11000	11.5%
PAKISTAN	610	1618	1823	4695	849	2188	10934	11.5%
IRAQ	107	174	661	4812	504	2187	7941	8.3%
ALBANIA	419	569	1003	1420	126	334	3745	3.9%
BANGLADESH	230	633	739	1215	103	315	3132	3.3%
IRAN	131	361	242	1096	170	432	2262	2.4%
GEORGIA	342	350	386	688	84	227	1993	2.1%
PALESTINE	17	74	60	853	97	635	1639	1.7%
ALGERIA	76	187	131	889	116	312	1595	1.7%
OTHER COUNTRIES	1827	2983	2938	4360	959	2462	14570	15.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4814</b>	<b>9431</b>	<b>13195</b>	<b>51092</b>	<b>4884</b>	<b>16870</b>	<b>95402</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Hellenic Republic. Ministry of Migration Policy. Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service – Greek Towns – Countries of Origin (from 7.6.2016 till 31.3.2017)

The assessment team observed a high number of pregnant women, including in advanced stages of pregnancy, making the journey. Throughout the journey from their country of origin to Greece, refugees and migrants face high risks of violence, extortion and exploitation, including rape, transactional sex, sexual harassment and physical assault, human and organ trafficking. Women and girls, especially those travelling alone, face particularly high risks of certain forms of violence, including sexual violence by smugglers, criminal groups and individuals in countries along the route.

Case study 1: *Fatima was found in a state of shock at the port of a Greek Island. She was traumatized and had suffered violence from the man she was travelling with. On being alerted, government authorities took her to a hospital for treatment. She revealed that her husband had entrusted her and her young daughter to the man she was travelling with in order to get her to a destination country. During the journey, the man confiscated all her and*

*her daughter's travel documents, mobile phone and money and turned physically abusive towards Fatima, denying her direct contact with her husband.*

*Case study 2: Oumo is a young woman from a conflict-affected sub-Saharan African country. She fled her country of origin a month before the team met her, due to the political persecution of her family, including the killing of her brother-in-law and the disappearance of her sister. Fearing for her life, she was travelling alone towards Germany. During her journey to Greece, Oumo was forced to engage in transactional sex twice, the first time to access a fake passport and the second time to gain passage on a boat from Turkey. "I had no choice," Oumo explained. Upon arrival on a Greek island, Oumo slept outside at the port for two nights without any shelter, privacy or information regarding the services available to her. She had been unable to get registered. "I fear that I will go crazy," she admitted.*

There is a dearth of dedicated safe spaces for women and girls, including spaces for confidential interviews with service providers, a lack of psychosocial support, and a lack of translators, including female Farsi and Arabic translators, which is hindering access to existing services. It is important to note, however, that in comparison to the situation on some of the Greek islands, gender-related concerns had been taken into consideration in site planning in some locations. This was evident in the Eleonas camp in Athens where the first Library Box was established after a successful collaboration between Municipality of Athens and the International NGO 'Libraries without Borders'. In Chios island also, new facilities being planned for refugees and migrants are much better suited to individual needs. While protection officers are deployed by humanitarian agencies, and psychological first aid training has been offered to certain humanitarian agency personnel in Greece, this is insufficient for the adequate and safe disclosure of violence by survivors, prioritization and response to those cases.

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) also published a report indicating that 'women and girls fleeing conflicts and travelling to or settling in Europe are at higher risk of suffering from male violence'. Despite this evidence, there is an alarming lack of data at the national level on the extent of violence against women and girls who newly arrived or need international protection. This lack of data may fuel the perception that violence against women is not a major feature of this crisis. The findings of this thematic focus suggest that several factors contribute to women not being able to report abuse, including:

- a lack of information on how to report such incidents;
- a lack of effective procedures to identify cases;
- Insufficient training of staff in charge of recognizing gender-based violence.

These shortcomings result not only in an underestimation of this phenomenon but also prevent a coordinated and comprehensive response addressing victims' needs. In addition, as the UNHCR, UNFPA and WRC report underlines, women and girls are also vulnerable to gender-based violence at reception centers and other facilities once they arrive in the EU. While governments, humanitarian actors, EU institutions and agencies as well as civil society organizations make efforts to address these issues, FRA's findings indicate that far more could be done to prevent and address continuing abuses against women and girls. While in 2015 about 70 % of the population on the move were men, women and children now make up nearly 60% of refugees and other migrants crossing into Europe. This also means that more women and children risk and lose their lives in the Mediterranean Sea and on the land routes to Europe. Of more than 360 persons who died in the Mediterranean in January 2016, one third were women and children

## **Access to Services and Facilities**

Services and facilities are currently insufficient to meet the magnitude of the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe. While government authorities and humanitarian actors have attempted to put in place systems in some locations to ensure that women and girls have access to services and facilities, the need far outstrips what currently exists. Furthermore, challenges were observed in the availability of dedicated and trained government and staff able to promptly identify persons at risk and those in need of special attention and prioritization.

Although medical services are available to pregnant women in Greece, pregnant and lactating women, even those with health problems, are reluctant to access health services, as they do not wish to delay their journey and that of their families. Humanitarian agencies on the ground gave examples of refugee and migrant women who left hospitals less than 24 hours after having given birth, some after Caesarean sections. Generally, most of pregnant women have suffered severe physical and psychological stress and hence, even if otherwise healthy, are at higher risk of complications, preterm delivery or even death. According to UN Report *Around one in 10 refugees traveling through Europe is pregnant. Better coordinated approaches from states and NGOs are urgently needed to keep women and their newborn babies safe and well.*

## **Protection Response in Greece**

There is a limited number of protection experts responding to this crisis experienced in identifying and responding to women-related protection risks. Most of these personnel are from humanitarian agencies and are currently overstretched and responding to protection risks in an ad hoc manner. This situation leads to serious challenges in the provision of information, ability to identify high-risk cases and provision of referrals and services. To address this, it is necessary for the respective government to put in place response systems with an adequate number of well-trained personnel, inclusive of women coordination and expertise, who can function at the local and national level, and be supported by humanitarian actors. To address the capacity gaps, it is important to strengthen collaboration with cultural institutions, local women's rights groups, volunteer groups with the relevant expertise and libraries as democratic open space inclusive places.

## **Leadership and Coordination**

A key concern, especially related to women prevention and response, observed in some locations in Greece, are challenges emerging from lack of clearly established leadership and clear definition of roles and responsibilities of all actors at the local level. Government-led efforts to establish roles and responsibilities, including referral and reporting structures, will ensure harmonized response efforts at the local and national level among government agencies and humanitarian actors. The unique nature of this crisis, with populations passing through several countries, requires the strengthening of cross-border coordination mechanisms between all relevant country governments with the central aim of strengthening and providing protection to refugees and migrants, especially against women. A network of libraries providing mobile, virtual and ad hoc information and dissemination of this information is more than absolutely necessary.

## Current initiatives involving libraries

The ECHO Refugee mobile library has a new stop on its route: the Open Cultural Center - OCC in Polikastro. After being evicted from the camps along the border into military camps, many families and individuals were moved back up north to the town of Polikastro and surrounding towns, about 20 minutes inland from the Greece-Macedonia border. This small unassuming town carries so much history within it. It has seen entire families walking for hours in the scorching summer sun on a highway to spend an afternoon on the town square - the same square that has also seen refugees sleeping on benches and on the grass, pausing on the way to what they hoped would be an open gateway to a new life of security and stability. This cultural centre is just one of many run by Open Cultural Center, a group that began their work in Idomeni and has since set up many incredible spaces of this kind. German classes, English classes, children's classes and activities, music workshops, a tailoring/sewing space, and both women's and men's support groups are among the activities being run out of this small but multi-functional space. The team offers transport to and from the nearby towns for anyone looking to participate.



The ECHO Refugee Mobile Library

This year, more than a fifth of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Greece are female and well over a third are children, according to the latest U.N. reports. None of them can leave until they are given appointments by the asylum application services in Athens, a process that can be painfully long due to insufficient staff and a backlog of applications. While the camps on the Greek islands were initially set up as refugee processing facilities, they were turned into prison-like detention centers without freedom of movement following the E.U.-Turkey deal. Private initiatives, like the one taken by The Stavros Niarhos Foundation, sponsor of The unique Cultural Center in Athens including The National Library and The Opera, in its Refugee and Immigrant Support Program aim to provide medical, psychological, legal and consulting support to the vulnerable refugee and immigrant communities in Greece. The Program involves the following separate, yet complementary, axes:

- a) Provision of medical and psychological support to apprehended migrants in the Detention Centers and the border police stations in Evros, as well as the exit points of Patra and Igoumenitsa;
- b) Border monitoring and legal aid for migrants and refugees at Reception and Detention Centers;
- c) Health services support for immigrants and refugees in Athens and Thessaloniki;
- d) Seminars and consulting services for the empowerment and social integration of legal immigrants;
- e) A conference on “Immigration, Multiculturalism and Social Cohesion”

The Future Library, established by funds of Stavros Niarhos Foundation has run a survey to map library services for refugees in Greece. The libraries in the cities of Veria, Kavala, Atalanti, Nafpaktos, Neapoli (Volos), Themi and on the islands of Leros and Leipsoi have responded and are offering the following services and activities:

-  Offering free internet access
-  Offering free computer use
-  Lending board games to refugees
-  Lending books to refugees
-  Running fundraising and charity campaigns to gather food, clothes, medicine and money and transferring the resources to the refugee centres or active NGOs that help refugees.

**Future Library** has organized the design-thinking workshop ‘Libraries helping refugees’ at the Future Library Unconference, on 27th of November 2015. Facilitators have been three people from the following organizations respectively: Future Library, Libraries Without Borders and Google. Participants: 60 people in total with multi-disciplinary backgrounds: librarians, municipal officers, social workers, representatives from NGOs and private foundations, individuals that run refugee supporting initiatives and photographers. Countries of origin of the participants: Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Denmark, France, Romania. The workshop aimed to find answers to the question: How could libraries develop and deliver library services for refugees and respond to the refugee crisis?

**REACT** is dedicated to supporting those fleeing conflicts and living in displaced camps to access education and exercise their right to an independent and dignified economic social and cultural development. REACT supports direct emergency relief, focusing specifically on women, children and the vulnerable. In March, after an initial assessment, REACT director Giovanna Stopponi, together with volunteers in Greece, successfully set up three working libraries of donated Arabic books for both adult and child refugees.

The **Library on Gender and Equality** (LGE) of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality has been operating since 1984 as an open-access and lending library. LGE collects documentation related to issues of gender equality and history of the women's movement in Greek and other languages, and offers a digital database free of access to its material.

In a refugee camp in an abandoned supermarket warehouse in Greece there is a beautiful shipping container filled with books. The story of how it got there starts with a holiday in Jordan on the way to the Dead Sea when Mandy Gillam, her brother Selwyn Hodges and his wife Jess, all from New Zealand, passed by a camp for refugees fleeing war-torn Syria. "All I could see was tents for miles and I had never seen anything like it," Gillam said. "So I guess that's where we all began to think about what we could do." Several emails and Skype conversations later, the trio, who have been living and working in the United Arab Emirates, arranged to volunteer at a camp for Syrian refugees in the small village of Kalochori in Thessalokiki, Greece. Jess Hodges, a nurse, had connections with Nurture Project International, an organization that assists pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers in refugee camps. Gillam and Selwyn Hodges, both teachers, arranged with the camp coordinator to volunteer for five weeks, starting in July. "Throughout the process we really struggled with the concept of providing a beautiful library for people who hardly had clothes or enough food to eat," Gillam said.

Among other initiatives is the “**We Need Books**” having as a goal the creation of a library in every refugee camp. A new lending library is already in function in Elliniko camp and a new one is about to start at the end of May 2017 in Shisto camp. More than 300 titles of books have been translated from Farsi to Greek. The founder is a woman, Ioanna Nissiriou, tv producer, who found in pdf the Syrian school books and she tries hard to achieve their typing. For adults she prefers books focused in European culture, as a tool for the refugees to get acquainted to the values, the ideas and the main principles of Europe.

The unique nature of this crisis, with populations passing through several countries, requires the strengthening of cross-border coordination mechanisms between all relevant country governments, energizing libraries and other public and cultural institutions with the central aim of strengthening and providing protection to refugees and migrants. Setting up and systematizing cross-border information sharing on high-risk individuals, such as unaccompanied children, single women, women with disabilities, pregnant women and those with chronic health issues is a gap that needs to be addressed urgently.

The E.U.-Turkey deal that came into effect March 20 2017 only exacerbates the situation for women. Doina Bologna, the UNFPA representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, was assigned in mid-May as the organization’s senior emergency coordinator for Europe. She says: “Currently, the migration flow through the Balkans has practically halted, with only an estimate of 200-300 illegal or irregular migrants being counted by UNHCR in transit towards the Western European countries. Some 50,000 refugees or migrants are reported to be currently stranded in Greece and accommodated in some 40 camps.” But it must be underlined that care and services for pregnant women are slowly starting to improve. In the last few months, UNFPA has introduced four mobile health clinics with ultrasound equipment in Serbia and Macedonia, although border closures now limit women’s access to these. Meanwhile, UNHCR is rolling out 20 [Blue Dot centers](#): Child and family support hubs located at strategic sites (such as border entry or exit points) that will provide a package of services including mother and baby/toddler spaces, counseling, psychosocial first aid and social workers.

## **Information Distribution**

Even though several library programs are running in various public libraries, eg. Koropi Public Library, Athens Public Library, rare structured initiatives could be spotted having to do with library projects and library services focused specifically on women. *“We have husbands and sons in Germany. We feel so hopeless about the possibility of going there now. In Syria, we were so far away. Now we are so close but we cannot reach them.” Asha, 8 from Syria, living in the Eleonas refugee site since February 2016 with her cousin.*

## **Recommendations**

Assistance is available for vulnerable refugees, including pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and children provided by many experienced and ready-to-assist local and international aid groups on the ground. Greeks have shown an extraordinary willingness to provide help despite the extremely difficult situation Greek people experience because of the severe and long economic crisis. The Nobel Prize candidate from Lesbos Island proves the kindness, generosity and self sacrifice of Greek people. This of course cannot and should not replace a national plan focusing on the protection and support of women and cannot and should not replace the European plan to support Greece as the problem is a European and

international one. The EU-Turkey agreement stipulates that Turkey will take back a large number of migrants from Greece despite serious concerns that Turkey may not be a safe third country under EU and international law and policies. Recent political insecurity deepens these concerns. *“In Syria we were afraid of men if we left our house. Here we are afraid of men if we leave our tent.”* Nahla from Aleppo, Syria, lives at a camp. She explains that *desperation, displacement, depleted finances, terrible living conditions, uncertainty about their future and the agonizing lack of information are boiling over into domestic disputes. Men are feeling powerless and frustrated and their outlet is violence”*.

## **Recommendations**

We believe in libraries serving all groups in our communities. Therefore, we are glad to collaborate with various library groups to share the most current best practices and models to serve immigrants and refugees.

- ✚ Expedite family reunification cases and ensure legal protection mechanisms and policies that are gender-sensitive and respect family ties.
- ✚ Boost financial, material and human resources to safeguard female asylum seekers and improve their access to reproductive health and psychosocial care.
- ✚ Establish maternal, newborn, reproductive health, child health and mental health services in all refugee sites and deploy cultural mediators and interpreters there and in referral hospitals.
- ✚ Coordinate closely with UNHCR and humanitarian organizations on the improvement, designation and coordination of sites and services available at them, ensuring that all refugees, particularly vulnerable women and girls, can access the assistance they need.
- ✚ Simplify and streamline administrative requirements and decision-making processes to reduce bureaucratic delays.
- ✚ In general, more humane migration policies should be prioritized by all EU states. European countries have to facilitate safe passage and access to asylum, improve reception conditions, foster effective integration into host societies and ensure a fairer distribution of asylum seekers.
- ✚ In developing and implementing these policies, particular attention should be paid to the situation of women, girls and children, notably the victims of sexual and gender-based violence. UNHCR, UNFPA and the Women’s Refugee Commission have put forward a number of recommendations in this regard. They call for the establishment by states of a coordinated response system within and across borders that protects women and girls. States and EU agencies need to acknowledge the protection risks and put personnel and procedures in place specifically to prevent, identify, and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. In this regard, particular attention should be paid to female refugees and migrants’ reluctance to report violence or to access services. Reception centers and accommodation facilities need to be safe, accessible and responsive to women and girls. Last but not least, it is crucial to prioritize women, children and survivors’ of sexual and gender-based violence in family reunification procedures, as well as in relocation and resettlement schemes. Doing so would reduce incentives for these women and girls to move on by dangerous irregular means and reduce their exposure to sexual and gender-based violence.
- ✚ Open lines of communication between National Library of Greece (NLG) and all the other libraries, universities and information technology staff are essential. Librarians develop Web meetings tailored to specific concerns and assignments of their

colleague librarians; the point is not only to provide information, but to give the necessary guidelines to the librarians, to “e-educate” them to locate appropriate electronic resources.

### **Greek Government’s National Policy for Libraries**

A policy having as a central coordinator the National Library of Greece can be implemented providing, through cell phones from the public libraries network website, information about asylum procedure, health and medical advices, cultural events, possibilities of activities and collaborations, invitations to integrated planning projects. This requests strategic planning, good project management and funding.

Last but not least close collaboration with IFLA initiatives, like the webinars, UN activities and participation in parallel national libraries initiatives undertaken in other countries dealing with similar problems. IFLA Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning Section (CPDWL) and the New Professionals Special Interest Group (NPSIG) have partnered with the American Library Association (ALA) to present a one-hour webinar about library services to immigrants and refugees including models and best practices from different regions of the world. IFLA's Public Library Section has developed an impressive compilation of services from different regions of the world and a recent campaign about services to refugees. EBLIDA in Europe has developed a strong campaign to promote services to these populations. IFLA's Library Services to Multicultural Populations Section has produced detailed guidelines and a toolkit about the topic. The guidelines have been translated in Greek by Antonia Arahova.

### **Conclusion**

Female migration is not a new phenomenon but it is increasing, as is female refugees’ and migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking, exploitation, discrimination and abuse. Single women travelling alone or with children, pregnant and nursing women, adolescent girls, and elderly women are among those who are particularly at risk and require a coordinated and effective protection response. Estimating that the current response to refugee and migrant women and children’s needs by governments, humanitarian actors and EU institutions has been insufficient, human rights organizations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and women’s rights organizations, have called for immediate action. Greece is the country that hosts the majority of women refugees feeling trapped on their way to west Europe. Libraries as cultural institutions can play a vital role in the coordination of efforts and the dissemination of information in an accurate and reliable official way playing their democratic role as public open spaces against discriminations promoting the integration of foreign population in needs especially women in conflict situations.

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