

Life in Greek Open Camps during Covid-19 Era

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus pandemic has both short-term and long-term effects on society and many researchers have already been trying to outline the new scenario in our life. Open refugee camps, which are a special separate part of our society, should not be excluded from this field of research. Based on data from empirical research and on review of Greek policy, this paper pays special attention to the preparedness of the camps to deal with the spread of the virus as well as the consequences of the measures taken in Greece from March until August 2020 within the open camps. It's not only about human rights since the micro-society of the camps has been shaped in such a way where by examining one phenomenon you encounter another that deserves parallel investigation. It is necessary to have a specialized action plan for each camp, with frequent evaluation and cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. The problem of crisis management within camps is not a problem that comes from the virus but from the operating system.

KEYWORDS: open camps, immigration, coronavirus pandemic, human rights, Greece

POVZETEK

Pandemija koronavirusa ima tako kratkoročne kot dolgoročne učinke na družbo in številni raziskovalci že poskušajo orisati nov scenarij v našem življenju. Odprta begunska taborišča, ki so poseben ločen del naše družbe, ne bi smela biti izključena s tega področja raziskav. Na podlagi podatkov empiričnih raziskav in pregleda grške politike, ta članek namenja posebno pozornost pripravljenosti taborišč za spopadanje s širjenjem virusa in posledicam ukrepov, sprejetih v Grčiji od marca do avgusta 2020 v odprtih taboriščih. Ne gre le za človekove pravice, saj je mikro družba taborišč oblikovana tako, da s preučevanjem enega pojava naletite na drugega, ki si zasluži vzporedno preiskavo. Za vsak tabor je potrebno imeti poseben akcijski načrt s pogostim ocenjevanjem in sodelovanjem z vsemi ustreznimi zainteresiranimi stranmi. Problem kriznega upravljanja v taboriščih ni problem, ki izvira iz virusa, ampak iz operacijskega sistema.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: odprta taborišča, priseljevanje, pandemija koronavirusa, človekove pravice, Grčija

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INTRODUCTION

The pandemic came. Another crisis for Greece. However, this crisis has a great factor of uncertainty, as it is an unprecedented situation for society, affecting many of its parts and highlighting its pathogenesis. Many crisis management models were applied to deal with it, which were largely affected by the way people reacted based on citizens' empathy.

In Greece, the start of the epidemic coincided with the provocation on the Greek-Turkish land border and the attempt of a large number of immigrants to enter in Greece from Turkey. The months that followed brought about significant changes in the management of migration flows, with strategies being pushed and changed by the continuous developments that no one had predicted. Initially, significant weight was given to dealing with the growing flows that threatened Greek borders. Under these conditions, less attention or less projection of the situation is given in the open camps that existed in the country.

The purpose of the research is first to highlight how the coronavirus affected the management of open camps and what changes it brought about in the lives of immigrants. The choice of study of the camps was decided due to the interest that the operation of the camps presents for the society and the discussions that take place about the immigration and its management. In recent years, Greece has experienced great pressures for its proper management and challenges for the integration of immigrants in society. Now, another challenge has been added, the pandemic, which in itself has brought about serious changes in society, and probably more in a society of immigrants who have to deal with major survival problems, such as food and livelihoods.

However, the state has given the main emphasis to tackling the pandemic, providing medical care and addressing its effects on the country's economy. The focus of society has shifted from how the "other" people in our society live, which re-ignites only when a new camp is to be created or when new cases of covid-19 are detected in an open camp and are close to a residential area. This research offers a remarkable contribution, highlighting the effects of the pandemic on migration and in particular the current situation within the camps in Greece. But what makes the research extremely interesting is that it touches on many areas of research: public administration, crisis management, human rights, racism, health care, immigration and society.

METHODOLOGY

The research focuses on the Accommodation Camps for Immigrants and Refugees (open camps) and not on the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) due to their different nature of operation. The RIS are at entry points in Greece and the immigrants are screened. The open camps house the immigrants who have applied for international protection and are entitled to housing and food. Therefore, where the research refers to a camp, it means the open ones that according to their statutes, the movement of immigrants inside and outside is free, observing only the rules of their operation. The research on the living conditions in RIS should be a separate research, which is also of particular interest.

The period of the research is from March 2020 to the beginning of August 2020. The open camps in that period in Greece were 26. These camps were created from the period of 2015 onwards, and operated in collaboration with many agencies (stakeholders), such as the army, local government, NGOs, Hellenic Police, international organizations, health units, but, in each one, they operated with a different composition and with different roles. The refugee population living in the camps is estimated at approximately 84500 people².

The main motivation for conducting this research was the fact that there is no relevant literature or articles on this topic. The research was mainly based on the collection of information from those involved in the management of the camps that were of course evaluated during the on-site visits to two camps in Greece for their verification. For this purpose, the Diavata Camp in the former Anagnostopoulou camp and the camp in Klidi in the Municipality of Sintiki were selected. The choice of these two camps was made to compare the operation of a camp (Diavata) near a large city (Thessaloniki) with the operation of a camp (Sintiki) in a remote location with difficulty in accessing Greek society. They also have another important difference, the camp of Diavata is a camp structured with containers, training facilities and other activities while the camp of Sintiki is a new camp with tents for the immediate housing of new immigrants. It is noted that my access to the camps was made after approval by the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum.

During the site visits, discussions were held with key figures within

2 UNHCR, 2020. Fact sheet. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/77528>

the camps who were called upon to manage the pandemic crisis. These discussions contributed substantially to the formation of a complete picture of the situation. The discussions were semi-structured in order to have a flow in the discussion, asking specific questions but at the same time giving the opportunity to develop some more aspects. The main concern was to capture the pre- and post-pandemic situation. The interviewees are shown in the following table³:

Table 1: Interviews

Role	Date
Commander of Diavata camp	31-07-2020
Supervisor of NGO in Diavata camp ^{3a}	31-07-2020
Member of Central Administration of Red Cross	04-08-2020
Commander of Sintiki camp	20-08-2020

It is mentioned that the Red Cross has signed a contract with the Ministry of Health for the provision of health services in the camps of Sintiki, Malakassa and Corinth from March 2020 through a financing program. The services concern the provision of primary hygiene by sending doctors to the camps (pediatrician, gynecologist, pathologist and dermatologist) but also the provision of hygiene products (soaps, sponges, etc.)

Finally, regarding the management of the situation, a review of the policies was conducted and of the legislation issued for the camps during the pandemic, along with a review of the relevant publications in the press (mainly electronic) on highlighting the issue. The examination of the guidelines issued by the Ministry demonstrates the reaction of the administration and for this purpose was also subject of study in the research.

THE ERA OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The coronavirus has been shown to be quite contagious with serious effects on public health. In societies that did not take precautionary measures in time, it resulted in a large number of deaths. The World Health Organization upgraded the spread of the coronavirus to a “pan-

³ Concrete data (names and interviews) available at the author of this paper.

^{3a} This NGO provides site management support services (water, sewerage, sanitation, non-food items), protection interventions (legal counseling, psychological support and non-formal education (life skills, language courses, space for children).

demic” in March 2020.⁴ Of course, scientists had predicted that there would be a pandemic after the last one in 1918 but they did not know the exact time.⁵ The state of a pandemic in the modern world was unprecedented for everyone, except for a few specialized scientists who, however, did not witness the effects on society. For this reason, the virus was also associated with the word uncertainty.

Greece has few Intensive Care Units (ICU) and the possible sudden spread of the virus would probably mean the collapse of the medical system. The reaction of the government was to limit the social events with a large number of people. Schools closed on 10 March 2020 and social gathering places and shops, such as museums, restaurants and bars, were closed on 13 March. Finally, on 23 March, the restriction of citizens’ traffic, otherwise known as lockdown, began, and was lifted gradually from the 3rd of May. It means that for two months society experienced an unprecedented exclusion.

The borders between the countries were closed and each country tried to safeguard the public health of its society and its security, as it claimed, by restricting the free movement of citizens, even of European Union citizens. The Schengen Agreement was tested and partially repealed⁶, on the grounds that the presence of coronavirus in neighboring countries poses a high risk of new imported cases.

In Greece, the restrictions were combined with the restriction of the transfer of migratory flows from the border to the mainland. Since the beginning of March, the country experienced a sudden attempt of a large number of immigrants to enter at its northern border. At the same time, it was decided to postpone the submission of an asylum application for a month (March). These events triggered in Greece a security crisis in parallel with the health crisis and for this reason, a strictest approach to anyone who violates Greek borders implemented.

WHAT DOES THE PANDEMIC MEAN FOR IMMIGRANTS?

Immigrants who already live in uncertainty from the moment they left their homelands, now they face a higher rate of uncertainty. The

4 Κορωνοϊός: Πανδημία κήρυξε ο ΠΟΥ [Coronavirus: WHO declared a pandemic] <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1068688/article/epikairothta/kosmos/korwnoiios-pandhmia-khry3e-o-poy>

5 Gates, B., 2020. Responding to Covid-19 – A Once-in-a-Century Pandemic?, <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2003762> (Accessed 20 July 2020)

6 Thym, D., 2020. Travel Bans in Europe: A Legal Appraisal, Universität Konstanz <http://eumigrationlawblog.eu/travel-bans-in-europe-a-legal-appraisal-part-i/> (Accessed 21 June 2020)

coronavirus restricted the movements of people, forcing everyone to stay where they are for a long time without knowing how long this condition would last. Access to services was possible only for important reasons and under specific conditions. For the immigrants living in Greece, the access to information about the situation was minimal, as interviewers claimed.

As in all times of crisis when public safety is threatened, extreme beliefs develop. Humans are considered potential enemies that may carry the virus and thus become a ‘security’ threat, as the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben claim (Shani, 2020). In this context, immigrants are the focus of attack and racism by claiming that they are carriers of diseases since they do not live in appropriate conditions and they cross the borders illegally, without border control for COVID-19. The aversion to them grew not only in Greece but also in other countries resulting in strict surveillance measures⁷.

THE MEASURES IN THE OPEN CAMPS

One of the measures someone expects to see in the camps is to restrict the movement of immigrants. At this point, it is interesting to see the press release archive. Most articles in their titles mention movement restriction in open camps while there was not legislative decision. Below, are some titles:

- “By joint decision of the Ministers of Citizen Protection, Health and Immigration and Asylum until April 21, a temporary restriction of the movement of those residing in the Reception and Identification Centers is implemented, as well as in open camps for asylum seekers throughout Greece”.⁸
- For reasons of public health, the two camps in Malakasa and Sintiki, Serres will remain closed.⁹

7 Ο Στρατός αναλαμβάνει τα Κέντρα Μεταναστών στην Ιταλία [The Army takes over the Immigrant Centers in Italy] <https://www.armyvoice.gr/2020/07/%CF%83%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%84%CF%8C%CF%82-%CE%BA%CE%AD%CE%BD%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B1-%CE%BC%CE%B5%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1%CF%83%CF%84%CF%8E-%CE%BD/> (Accessed 31 July 2020)

Acu, C., 2020. “Stay at Home?” How Syrian Refugees Face a Crisis of Shelter in Jordan , *THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF GLOBAL HUMAN MOVEMENT*, <https://centregum.com/2020/07/25/stay-at-home-how-syrian-refugees-face-a-crisis-of-shelter-in-jordan/?fbclid=IwAR3JPwxh3mc1Mih0zrMSTzuUEOQ2NSUXqzLOWbFmsfbwHhg9rv4SCCBeno> (Accessed 30 July 2020)

8 Έκτακτα μέτρα και στις δομές προσφύγων λόγω κορωνοϊού [Extraordinary measures in refugee camps due to coronavirus] Source: www.lifo.gr <https://www.lifo.gr/now/greece/275122/ektakta-metra-kai-stis-domes-prosfygon-lo-go-koronoioy>

9 Υπ. Μετανάστευσης: Κλείνουν οι δομές φιλοξενίας Μαλακάσας και Σιντικής, 07-04-2020, <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/04/07/society/yp-metanasteysis-kleinoun-oi-domes-filoksenias-malakasas-kai-sintikis/>

- Coronavirus: Protection measures in RIS, open camps and Asylum Service.¹⁰
- JMC of Traffic Restriction in the Open Camps of Asylum Seekers, Official website of the Minister of Immigration and Asylum¹¹

However, in the ministerial decision that was issued, the open camps are not mentioned, but only the RIS:

*Article one: 1. The temporary restriction of the traffic from 21.03.2020 until 21.04.2020 of the resident citizens of third countries in the Reception and Identification Services (RIS) of the whole territory “.*¹²

The open camps were finally added, with the Joint Ministerial Decision Δ1 α / Γ.Π.οικ. 42069/2020 - Government Gazette 2730 / Β / 3-7-2020 decision in article 2, which stipulates *that* “the no. Δ1α / Γ.Π.οικ.20030 / 21.3.2020 joint decision of the Ministers of Civil Protection, Health and Immigration and Asylum (B ‘985) applies both in the Reception and Identification Centers (RIS) as well as in all open camps and any kind of camp for third country nationals of the country. “

In other words, until July 03 2020 there was no legal provision restricting the movement of immigrants in open camps. Legally, until then, immigrants are allowed to leave camp during the lockdown period for specific reasons and after sending a message or completing the required form, following the same procedure as the other Greek citizens. The form, of course, must be pointed out that it was written in Greek and English and certainly, immigrants would have difficulties completing it.

Moreover, on March 17, the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum announced a series of protection measures in the open camps, which include the suspension of all visits of individuals and institutions to the camps except those who work there, the mandatory temperature control of new arrivals, virus prevention instructions in a number of languages, such as Arabic and Farsi, general hygiene rules with indoor disinfection, suspension of informal education facilities, closure of

10 Κορωνοϊός: Μέτρα προστασίας σε ΚΥΤ, δομές φιλοξενίας και Υπηρεσία Ασύλου, 17-03-2020 <https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1575981/koronoios-metra-prostasias-se-kyt-domes-filoksenias-kai-ypiresia-asulou>:

11 ΚΥΑ Περιορισμού Κυκλοφορίας στις Δομές Φιλοξενίας Αιτούντων Άσυλο, 23-03-2020, <https://www.mitarakis.gr/gov/migration/1962-dt-yma-ky-a-periorismou>

12 Joint Ministerial Decision No. Δ1 α / Γ.Π.οικ. 42069/2020 “Taking measures against the occurrence and spread of cases of coronavirus COVID-19 in the Reception and Identification Centers, throughout the Territory, for the period from 21.03.2020 to 21.04.2020” (B ‘985).

indoor activities (such as gyms and libraries) and operation special isolation areas in each camp.¹³

On March 27, the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum announced another new package of six (6) measures for the protection from the coronavirus in the R.I.S. Islands and other hosting camps¹⁴, which include the withdrawal of money within the camps by A.T.M., new shops for the purchase of necessities and the strict surveillance of the camps by the police.

WHAT AFFECTS LIFE IN CAMPS?

ADMINISTRATION

The administration of the camps in Greece is organized by the state. According the law (4375/16, Article 15), there should be a commander in each camp who is responsible for the general management. However, many other stakeholders (NGO, Police and Military etc.) are engaged in camps with different duties. Each of them has different project manager in his/her organization. Under these circumstances, the cooperation of so many stakeholders is a challenge and it demands concrete project management.

For the purpose of this research and because we examine the pandemic as a sudden change in our society, we will focus on risk management. Risk management plays a special role on the identification of risks and the development of actions for the best strategic management of each risk. Risks, whether risk or opportunity, are an uncertain factor. But an uncertain factor is like fire, if you control it, it will help you, but if you leave it unchecked, it will grow and destroy you, as Theodore Roosevelt said. What needs to be emphasized is that risk management is not implemented when risk occurred. This is crisis management. Risk management means being proactive in making pre-determined decisions to achieve project goals, as defined by Alex Sidorenko.

The epidemic as a possible danger has always existed but the degree of probability of happening was small. The magnitude of the consequences for businesses and society in the event of its occurrence

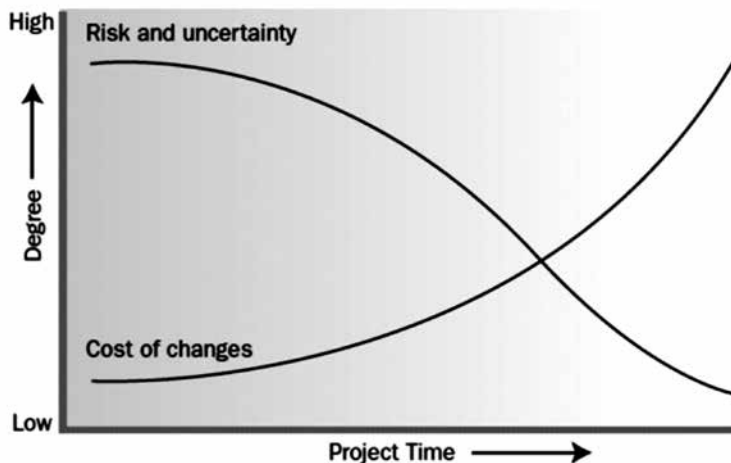
13 Χονδρόγιαννος, Θ., 2020. Μέτρα και φόβοι για την προστασία των προσφύγων από τον κορονοϊό [Measures and fears for the protection of refugees from the coronavirus], <https://insidestory.gr/article/covid19-metra-fovoi-prostasia-prosfygon-koronois?fbclid=IwAR0Sz-4igGHno6XbPhM4QprmnWRqysOW5P1SkL02pdWMuQEHNbwByLJNWUU> (Accessed 20 July 2020).

14 New 6-meter package of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum for the protection from the coronavirus in the R.I.S. Islands and the other hosting camps, 27-03-2020 <https://www.mitarakis.gr/gov/migration/1970-dt-yma-neadesmi-metrwn>

had been estimated to be huge but there are still no accurate data to assess the situation. A contingency plan had never been tested in practice and everyone was faced with an unprecedented situation. For this reason, there is also the view that pandemic is a *black swan risk*, which means an unpredictable factor that could not be predicted and has huge consequences. This view, however, should be rejected as it has been pointed out that experts expected the pandemic but they did not know when it would happen. Moreover, in open camps with a population from many parts of the world, various diseases are circulating and the case of transmission and spread of viruses within the camp is quite possible and should have been prevented.

The following table shows why it is important to predict risks; if the risk is predicted early and the required measures are taken immediately, the cost and impact of this on the project would be small. But if not taken care of it immediately, the cost over time increases significantly.

Image 1: The relation risk and cost



Source: PMBOK guide, 2017, p. 549.

The risk management at the timing of this writing was non-existent in camps' management. After all, who was responsible for designing it? And if one agency had drawn it up, was there acceptance from the other agencies? And was it possible to carry out the contingency plans in case they were required? Thus, the coronavirus found the camps without risk management since there was not even a centralized

administration. The commanders of camps took over in mid-May¹⁵ when the restrictions were gradually lifted. Until then, there was no specific administration with separate responsibilities for each stakeholder operating within them. Their operation was based on the good cooperation and communication of the various stakeholders. Thus, for example, in case a modification was needed in the existing configuration of the space, correspondence was required between the bodies to determine who can be in charge, with the final role in the negotiation of the respective Ministry of Immigration.

Regarding the crisis management planning in the camps, as stated by the Ministry and a relevant publication, the government, recognizing the lack of a special plan to deal with the pandemic within the camps, drafted the Agnodiki plan, which was not made public. According to the Insidestory website¹⁶, *“According to the introductory note of “Agnodiki”, drafted on March 17, the plan aims to protect the human life of all those living in the R.I.S. and open camps, but also to protect the general population from threats and dangers, which may create situations of internal security crisis including health threats “. “It is the National Crisis Management Plan in Refugee Camps for major internal security issues including pandemics”...*

“Agnodiki envisages three classified scenarios: first, the preventive isolation of the area, second, the total exclusion of the area and, third, the evacuation of the area.”

Furthermore, according the official government website¹⁷: *“The Plan includes the development of medical units (examination room, treatment center and isolation ward), daily reporting and control at the points of entry and exit from the structures, recording of any suspicious cases and recording of all the personnel involved.”*

BUT IS THIS PLAN ENOUGH?

It is certainly very positive that a special plan was immediately developed to protect the health of all immigrants residing in the camp.

15 Ορίστηκαν 32 νέοι διοικητές σε υφιστάμενες δομές φιλοξενίας της ηπειρωτικής Ελλάδας [32 new commanders were appointed in existing camps of mainland Greece] <https://www.capital.gr/epikairoτητα/3454813/oristikan-32-neoi-dioikites-se-ufistamenes-domes-filoxenias-tis-ipeirotikis-elladas> (Accessed 28 July 2020).

16 Χονδρόγιαννος, Θ., 2020. Μέτρα και φόβοι για την προστασία των προσφύγων από τον κορονοϊό [Measures and fears for the protection of refugees from the coronavirus] , <https://insidestory.gr/article/covid19-metra-fovoi-prostasia-prosfygon-koronoiis?fbclid=IwAR0Sz-4igGHno6XbPhM4QprmnWRqysOW5P1SkL02pdWMuQEHNbwByLJNWU> (Accessed 20 July 2020).

17 Προληπτικά μέτρα για την αποφυγή της διασποράς του κορονοϊού σε Κέντρα Υποδοχής και Ταυτοποίησης και Δομές Φιλοξενίας Πολιτών Τρίτων Χωρών, 23-04-2020. <https://covid19.gov.gr/proliptika-metra-gia-tin-apofygi-tis-diasporas-tou-koronoiou-se-kentra-ypodochis-ke-taftopiisis-ke-domes-filoxenias-politon-triton-choron/>

It should not be assumed, however, that *“No operational plan can withstand the first contact with the enemy.”*¹⁸ Unbalanced factors are always present and should be anticipated as early as possible so that there are alternative action plans with the least possible consequences.

The situation within the camps should be assessed on a daily basis, potential vulnerabilities should be identified that will enhance the spread of the virus and alternative action plans should be drawn up for each potential risk. For this reason, it would be useful based on the general plan Agnodiki to prepare a special plan for each camp separately, where the Commander together with the other stakeholders will properly evaluate their camp and identify vulnerabilities in the prevention-suppression of spread of the virus in the camp. As observed from the analysis of the situation within the camps, there is no similarity either in the agencies operating inside, or in the provision of medical services or in the layout of the camps. So, a general plan for all camps cannot be implemented.

The involved agencies in case of activation of the plan are the Reception and Identification Service, the Armed Forces, Hellenic Police, National Public Health Organization (N.P.H.O.) and the International Organizations, such as the United Nations for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration. The mere fact that there are so many involved in the action plan is in itself a challenge to its proper implementation. In the framework of the above proposal for the preparation of a specialized plan in each camp, with the participation of all the agencies and their regular evaluation intervals, their immediate activation will be achieved when required. They will also be aware of any changes to the action plan. It is also noted that there must be constant communication, problem solving and management of their disagreements and constant engagement with all issues of the camp.

In this way, the problem of bureaucracy mentioned by the spokesperson of the Red Cross may be solved. As she said, each organization has its own reporting procedures but at the same time references to the other agencies within the camp. As she pointed out, different reports for each player often lead to a waste of time. Under a new administration and a new planning, it would be useful to review reporting in a unified format.

18 https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Helmuth_von_Moltke_the_Elder

Another important part in the management of the camps is cultural awareness. Immigrants are the subjects of protection within the camps and for this, the way of their reaction to any action plan should be taken into account. It is characteristic that the head of the NGO in the camp of Diavata considers the instructions given by the immigrants as a factor of success in non-spread of the virus. That is, the “Afghan headquarters” within the camp and especially the community leader, who influences its own people and so in the call for distancing and observance of hygiene, their leader helped by properly influencing his compatriots. However, this is not the case in the Sintiki camp, which is a new camp and no ‘community leaders’ have yet been created. Nevertheless, at the same time, there are some others immigrants who do not obey orders and defy the exit and entry measures in the camps as well as any other restrictive measures.

PROVISION OF MEDICAL SERVICES

The provision of appropriate medical care during the coronavirus era is one of the most important issues in our society. The state tried to strengthen the Intensive Care Units (ICU) by all means. The fear in this sector is the inability to provide medical care in the event of multiple cases in one area at a time.

The provision of medical care within the camps was a challenge even before the coronavirus era. The problem in the case of immigrants is that they are not entitled to care except in emergencies. At the beginning of 2020, it is decided a Temporary Insurance and Health Care Number of Immigrant (PAAPA) to be given to all applicants for international protection without exception¹⁹. The relevant application came into force in April 2020 but due to the closure of the Asylum Services this number was not given to the refugees.²⁰As the representative of the NGO points out in the camp of Diavata the fact of lack of A.M.K.A. (a registration in National Health System) or of the above personal number creates obstacles in the service of people with health problems and especially now that access to hospitals is done with specific protocols and procedures.

Of course, the lockdown limited access to doctors and hospitals for all

19 Προσωρινός αριθμός ασφάλισης και υγειονομικής περίθαλψης για τους αιτούντες άσυλο [Temporary Insurance and Health Care Number of Immigrant (PAAPA),] <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/law-news/prosorinos-arithmos-asfalisis-perithalpsis-gia-aitoyntes-asylo.html> (Accessed 01August 2020).

20 Migrant children and asylum-seekers still denied healthcare, 12 February 2020 https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/1801/2020/en/e6czmhEembNmZCMxLMtT1t-M2YS-72Z1VhM9-OHcdlLsnjURW_AlaTkr2SddbR

citizens of the country. This fact also affected the immigrants of the camps who were in fact alone inside the camp and only in exceptional cases were they allowed access to hospitals.

At the timing of research, within the camp of Diavata, there are 40 people from N.P.H.S. but they are general doctors while in the Sintiki camp the medical services are provided only by the Red Cross. The representative of the NGO pointed out that there is already a shortage of basic medicines and in her opinion, more equipment and types of medicines are needed to serve the immigrants. Impressive is the fact that other NGOs donate medicines that do not require prescription to the immigrants, as NGO representative said.

For health incidents, the Agnodiki plan states that *“for reasons of limiting the spread of diseases, viruses, infections” or other health-related threats, it is envisaged that a medical team will be set up with an examination room for at least one person, a hospital / hospital for six people and isolation area for 30 people. In addition, exclusively accredited staff of N.P.H.S.-EODY and EKAB (Emergency Transportation) will move in the area of interest, while staff of the General Secretariat for the Reception of Asylum Seekers or of international organizations and NGOs may participate, with the appropriate protective equipment. “*

However, what the public opinion demanded was the closing of the camps and restriction of immigrants' movement. Apparently for this reason, the press stated that all the camps are closed and not only the R.I.S., which was the truth. The letter of 17-03-2020 of the Panhellenic Medical Association “Letter of P.I.S.” to the Ministry Of Health, Undersecretary Of Health, General Secretary of Dim. Health & EODY titled *“Camps of refugees and immigrants, air travel from the islands and recommendation for necessary protection measures to the media”* is interesting. It proposed the quarantine of camps for the protection of immigrants and society as a whole without further explanation. However, the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (European Center for Disease Prevention and Control) has the opposite opinion, which in its guidelines of 15-06-2020 for the prevention and control of coronary artery in detention centers and refugee camps points out that there is no evidence that quarantining all centers limits the transmission of the virus.²¹

21 ECDC, 2020. Guidance on infection prevention and control of COVID-19 in migrant and refugee reception and detention centers in the EU/EEA and the UK, <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/covid-19-guidance-prevention-control-migrant-refugee-centres> (Accessed 30 July 2020)

It is noted that in addition to the Agnodiki plan, N.P.H.S. has issued specific instructions for Covid cases in hosting camps as mentioned on its official website.

In addition, what immigrants fear is that in case of many sick people within the camp, they will be left alone, excluded from other special care. Of course, it should not be assumed that many immigrants experience the chilling effect as it is called in medicine, *“the fear of possible arrest in case they ask for help”* (Viladrich, 2020). In addition, stigma, in the event of an outbreak, which exists even among indigenous citizens, is a deterrent to seeking help. However, as stated by the officials of the camps, the immigrants respond positively to the courses of personal hygiene and protection and there is a desire to participate in all the relevant programs.

It should not be omitted that in a pandemic, the risk of transmitting the virus is two-way. There is a risk of transmission of the virus from the staff active in the camp to immigrants. As the representative of the Red Cross pointed out, there is a greater chance of spreading the virus from the staff that continues its life after finishing its work inside the camp by participating in a number of social gatherings than from the immigrants who have limited movement. To this end, the Red Cross attaches great importance to the training of its own staff.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Since the outbreak of the first cases, the state has taken a number of restrictive measures for citizens and imposed the closure of businesses and services to protect public health, a public good of particular importance to our lives. There is of course no previous case of lockdown and it is something unprecedented for society and the legal world. There is not even a legal definition of lockdown. In medical terminology, it means medical isolation (sanitation) that is deemed necessary for the necessary incubation period of the disease. From a legal point of view, it can be said that it is the temporary imposition of a restriction. Alternatively, as it has been accepted, the state limits the social influences between people and their movements.

Public health is for Greece a right that is protected both by the Constitution (article 5 par. 5) and by the penal code (article 285 of the Penal Code). In order for the State to impose the measure of restriction or prohibition of the movement of citizens, in part or in whole in the territory, a legal decision must be issued concerning the relevant area

or the whole territory respectively. Decisions issued to protect public health, despite the fact that they restrict the freedom of the people, - also a very important right-. However, these decisions were widely accepted and considered to be in full proportion to the intended purpose. It is noted that the Greek Constitution in Article 5 allows restriction “*only when and as stipulated by law*”, giving weight to the legality of imposing deprivation. Article 5 of the E.C.H.R., which has been signed and ratified by Greece, moves in the same direction: “*1. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be deprived of his liberty save in the following cases and in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law:*

...(e) the lawful detention of persons for the prevention of the spreading of infectious diseases, of persons of unsound mind, alcoholics or drug addicts or vagrants;...”

The peculiarity of the provisions of E.C.H.R. is that they are talking about deprivation of liberty and not about restriction of liberty as most measures state now. There is no relevant case law except in the case of *Enhorn vs Sweden* (no. 56529/00) in which, however, the Swedish national was suffering from a disease and his movement was restricted. In this case, the court ruled that the restriction is in accordance with article 5 of the ECHR, despite the fact that the article refers to deprivation and not restriction. But what if there is restriction to healthy citizens? Is this restriction subject to article 5 of E.C.H.R. since it explicitly refers only for the case of persons capable of transmitting the disease?

In the above context, there has been a lot of discussion about the legality of enforcing restrictions and the securitization of the covid-19 in states' effort to prevent the spread of the virus. Many states have declared a state of emergency and bypassed democratic institutions to protect citizens from the virus. Transparency in these cases is not so visible and the draconian measures were considered problematic. On the other hand, there is the view that authoritarian regimes control better the virus as they can and do monitor citizens more closely and by this way limit the spread of the virus.

Under the above conditions, the creation of a climate of isolation of the camps was promoted and was observed in Greece as well. As noted above, the Ministry and the media spread that the camps are closed while this restriction was valid only for the R.I.S. until 03-07-2020. In the measures announced by the Ministry, the goal was to provide services to the immigrants inside the camps (placement of ATMs)

while the strict supervision by the Police was emphasized in every announcement. Even when the restrictions for Greek citizens had been lifted, there were still restrictions on the camps and in particular a regulation on the hours of entry and exit from them. The United Nations for Refugees spoke of “*discriminatory treatment of refugees, leading to their stigmatization*”.²²

Of course, in such an environment the minorities and non-citizens are disproportionately affected by the crisis. First of all, they are considered as a threat to society because of their way of life (overcrowding, large families) but also because of the overwhelming of the health system by them and not by the Greek citizens of the country. For this reason, immigrants and minorities experience marginalization, discrimination and inequality, especially in access to health care.²³ The situation of marginalization created within the camps results in the creation of appropriate conditions for increased violence, tensions between migrants, domestic violence and the victimization of the most vulnerable groups. These phenomena, as observed, have increased throughout society, let alone in a camp where conditions are more unfavorable and uncertainty is enormous. However, the increase in violence and any mental illness is difficult to be measured and be recorded given the lack of data but also the fear of immigrants to report the acts to the competent authorities.

It is very likely that these people will feel strongly social isolation, have financial difficulties and feel weak. As the representative of the NGO in the camp of Diavata pointed out, the immigrants want to leave from Greece. Although Greece responded well to the first phase of the virus, they believe that their lives will be better in another European country.

It is also emphasized that during the pandemic, the Asylum Services in Greece were closed for two (2) months (from 12.03.2020 to 18.05.2020) and the asylum seekers could not apply for asylum or to renew their application, creating additional insecurity and fear for their future. Of course, for the second case (renew), their application was automatically extended, but in the first case, the immigrants were

22 Αιτήσεις για εθελοντική επιστροφή [Applications for voluntary return], <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1089962/article/epikairothta/ellada/aitheis-gia-e8elontikh-epistrofh> (Accessed at 08 August 2020)

23 The UN and the Council of Europe have already highlighted the problem facing these categories of citizens. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/national-minorities-and-covid-19-inequality-deepened-vulnerability-exacerbated> and <https://www.ecmi.de/infochannel/detail/ecmi-minorities-blog-securitising-the-covid-19-pandemic-the-impact-on-democracy-and-minorities?fbclid=IwAR33VWxUJ0A2WQ9if7mZn40bbaxC4udrarX6h8bRQs0HDxN4QibRyUx8ZEc> (Accessed 01 August 2020)

living in an uncertain situation. Failure to file a full application does not guarantee them the rights of an asylum seeker.

Coronavirus insurance is a threat to all citizens and the fight against the pandemic must be a fight for human rights. The marginalization of immigrants and the adoption of strict measures are not in the benefit of society in the long run.

MIGRATORY FLOWS

One would expect that restrictions around the world and Greece specifically due to the strengthening of forces at the border would reduce migratory flows dramatically. Certainly, the numbers are not the same as before the coronavirus but what is observed is that the immigrants did not lose their will to come to Europe²⁴. The problems they face in their countries are so difficult that the pandemic is not an obstacle to their plans. On the contrary, because of the virus, the situation in their countries has become worse both financially and in terms of the provision of health care. In this context, despite the economic crisis in almost all countries, these people continue to want to leave. Some researchers are talking about a new wave of migration due to a pandemic.²⁵

Of course, in times of pandemic, traffickers not only do not stop their work but also add new stricter lines and conditions²⁶. Crossing the border is not easy now and so the traffickers had to take more risks. This risk has also been passed on to immigrants who, as vulnerable to the new conditions, are now at greatest risk of achieving their goal and reaching their destination. The lack of information about the restrictions that applies both in Greece and in other countries made their position difficult. It should not be overlooked that organized crime of migrant trafficking finds fertile ground within the camps in the above context of their marginalization and entrapment.

24 The 06-07-20 Press Release of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum: First Semester 2020: The image of immigration in Greece is changing: (a) with a 51% reduction in flows on the islands <https://www.mitarakis.gr/gov/migration/6202-allazei-i-eikona-tou-metanasteutikou>

25 The impact of the covid-19 emergency on migration flows and the new redistribution strategy after Malta agreement: "As indicated in the EUROPOL report published on 19 May 2020 by the European Migrant Smuggling Center (EMSC), prolonged economic instability and the persistent lack of opportunities in some African economies, in particular the drastic reduction in the tourism sector, could trigger another wave of migration: for instance, the appearance of migrants from Egypt on 10 July." <https://www.respondmigration.com/blog-1/impact-covid-19-emergency-migration-flows-and-new-redistribution-strategy-after-malta-agreement> (Accessed 10 August 2020).

26 Sanchez, G., Achilli, L., 2020. Robert Schuman Centre/ EUI, May 2020 https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/67069/PB_2020_20_MPC.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (Accessed 20 June 2020).

What effect does this have on camps? Migration flows result in the need to decongest the islands and Evros region by transporting immigrants to inland camps. Even during the lockdown period, immigrants were transported at a time when there was a recommendation for everyone not to move²⁷. As a result, the likelihood of the virus spreading through the camps increased. Of course, it should be emphasized that due to the open type of camps, it is easy for new illegal immigrants who managed to reach Thessaloniki for example on their own, to enter and seek asylum as soon as they arrived at the Diavata camp.

However, due to restrictions around the world, the returns of immigrants to their origin country have also stopped²⁸. For a long time (April-July 2020) there were no returns of immigrants to their countries, even to neighboring countries²⁹. At the same time, migrants could not leave through the voluntary return program³⁰. They were trapped in Greece, even if they wanted to leave. They were forced to stay in an environment against their will. The program of volunteering return was reactivated on 30 July 2020.

RACISM ATTITUDE

The rhetoric of hatred and the reactions of the inhabitants against the camps made their appearance as mentioned above in the local communities. Of course, these have existed since the crisis of 2008 when nationalist policies and a vocabulary of fear emerged. The coronavirus crisis has brought to the fore dilemmas that divide various professional, scientific or social groups, but also the citizens themselves. With the justification of the protection of public health and safety, they came into direct conflict with the rights of immigrants for movement and residence.

Local communities reacted to the view of immigrants going to supermarkets or going out and demanding secured measures from the government. The government responded by placing ATMs and small shops inside the camps, restricting their move and satisfying

27 The Ministry Press Release dated 04-06-2020: 13,728 inland transports from January 1 - the decongestion of the islands is essential, <https://www.mitarakis.gr/gov/migration/6163-enimerotiko-maios>

28 ΒΗΜΑ, 2020. Μητράκης: Αυστηρή αλλά δίκαιη μεταναστευτική πολιτική [Mitarakis: Strict but fair immigration policy] <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/07/22/politics/mitarakis-aystiri-alla-dikaii-metanasteytiki-politiki/> (Accessed at 08 August 2020)

29 Even Albania, where deportations are made by road, due to coronavirus, did not accept returns of its illegal nationals from our country.

30 Γεωργιοπούλου, Τ., 2020. Αιτήσεις για εθελοντική επιστροφή [Applications for voluntary return] <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1089962/article/epikairothta/ellada/aithseis-gia-e8elontikh-epistrofh> (Accessed 08 August 2020).

the common sense. In many cases, where covid-19 cases occurred inside the camps, there were also requests to remove the camp and close them. The mayor of Ermionida, Giannis Georgopoulos, had sent two letters to the government, dated April 3rd and 7th, in which he expressed his concerns about the effective prevention of the spread of the coronavirus due to a hotel full of refugees.³¹

On the other hand, the inhabitants of the islands had already strongly expressed their views on the decongestion of the islands.³² In this context, the government decided to establish two new camps at the beginning of the coronavirus era, one in Serres and one in Malakasa, assuring that they will be closed camps.³³ In fact, government deployed police forces to guard them in order to calm down the reaction of the people. Immigrants were transferred to these camps which provided accommodation in tents. The government also intended to reopen hosting hotels; hotels in the areas of Pella and Kilkis but the reactions of the residents changed its initial relocation plans.³⁴

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for an end to *“hate speech around the world”*, saying the coronavirus pandemic had triggered a *“tsunami of hatred and xenophobia, scapegoats and danger”*. He added that hatred against immigrants can be found both online and on the streets.³⁵

With regard to the camps in question, it should be emphasized that immigrants are more careful and obey to the protection measures. They are aware that the spread of the virus within the camp will create most problems in their lives. Thus, they claim that they are wrongly criticized for not obeying the rules of hygiene in relation to other citizens.

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- 31 Χονδρόγιαννος, Θ., 2020. Μέτρα και φόβοι για την προστασία των προσφύγων από τον κορονοϊό , [Measures and fears for the protection of refugees from the coronavirus] <https://insidestory.gr/article/covid19-metra-fovoi-prostasia-prosygon-koronois?fbclid=IwAR0Sz-4igGHno6XbPhM4QprmnWRqysOW5P1SkL02pdWwMuQEHNBwByLjNWUU> (Accessed 20 July 2020)
- 32 Επεισόδια στη Χίο: Κάτοικοι λένε «όχι» σε νέα δομή φιλοξενίας - Προπηλάκισαν τον Μητράκη [Episodes in Chios: Residents say “no” to new hospitality structure - They ousted Mitarakis] Πηγή: [iefimerida.gr](https://www.iefimerida.gr/ellada/hios-sygkentrosi-diamartyrias-katoikon-dimarheio/) - <https://www.iefimerida.gr/ellada/hios-sygkentrosi-diamartyrias-katoikon-dimarheio/> (Accessed 22 July 2020)
- 33 Σαββίδης, Π., 2020. Μεταναστευτικό - Σέρρες: Αντιδράσεις και αντιπαράθεσεις για τη Δομή Μεταναστών στο Κλειδί, [Immigration - Serres: Reactions and controversies about the Immigrant camp in Kleidi] <https://www.prothema.gr/greece/article/1004963/serres-giati-kollaei-i-kleisti-domi-sto-kleidi-sidikis/> (Accessed 20 June 2020)
- 34 Κιλκίς: Ένταση και διαμαρτυρίες κατοίκων για την επαναλειτουργία δομής φιλοξενίας μεταναστών στις Μουριές [Kilkis: Tensions and protests of residents for the reopening of the immigrant hosting hotel in Mouries] Πηγή: [iefimerida.gr](https://www.iefimerida.gr/ellada/kilkis-diamartyries-katoikon-domis-metanaston): <https://www.iefimerida.gr/ellada/kilkis-diamartyries-katoikon-domis-metanaston> and Ρατσιστικές αντιδράσεις στην προσπάθεια φιλοξενίας προσφύγων που ανήκουν σε ευάλωτες ομάδες, [Racist reactions to the attempt to host refugees belonging to vulnerable groups] https://www.karatzova.com/2020/05/blog-post_86.html (Accessed 20 July 2020)
- 35 ΟΗΕ: «Όχι» στη ρητορική του μίσους, [NO at Rhetoric of hate] <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/05/08/world/oie-oxi-storitoriki-tou-misous/> (Accessed 01 August 2020)

It is also noteworthy that the employees of NGOs and other bodies within the camps did not stop offering their services during the pandemic, except during the lock down period when they are not able to go to the camp. There were no cases of employee phobia against immigrants. In the schools of the area where the children of the Diavata camp attend, no case of assault on a child was observed and since the schools opened in June, the children have been attending their classes normally.

In the camp of Sintiki there were reactions of the inhabitants from the beginning of its creation until the assurance that the camp will function as a closed camp. The camp initially operated as a closed type but later became open, which caused dissatisfaction among residents who insist on restoring the closed type camp, despite the fact that the camp is in a remote location and several kilometers away from homes.

Fortunately, the successful outcome of the fight against the virus in Greece so far, has provoked small reactions against immigrants, but there are indications of the strengthening of far-right beliefs in the event of an increase in covid-19 cases and the prevalence of fear in society.

CONCLUSION

In this new reality of the pandemic era, the crisis has highlighted the pathogenesis of camps. People neglect the life of immigrants inside camps and how the next day in a camp would be if the virus spreads throughout the camp, it is still one unanswered question.

This research in two open camps in Greece underlines the main problems that should be confronted. Firstly, there is a lack of centralized management and risk management plan that would help to stop the spread of any virus within camps. Secondly, violation of free movement rights is at the limit of legality. Thirdly, migratory flows did not stop completely during the coronavirus era. Fourthly, access to the health system by immigrants is not easy. Finally yet importantly, racist views have increased and there were protests from residents to the relocation of immigrants.

Following these findings, it is necessary to have a specialized action plan for each camp, with frequent evaluation and cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. The problem of crisis management within camps

is not a problem that comes from the virus but from the operating system. If it fails, we will talk about systemic failure. Risk management becomes essential and that is why it is necessary to have a central administration within the refugee camps, proper preparation with many alternative action plans and daily evaluation of the available data so as to deal with any new threats that will hinder the implementation of action plan. Each camp should develop its own plan taking into account the particularities that characterize it and its own channels of communication with the co-competent agencies.

It should be also equal treatment of all citizens, immigrants and non-immigrants, without discriminatory restrictions. The circumstances in refugee camps, natural foreclosure, housing conditions, as well as exclusion from social services and health services increase the possibilities of covid-19 spread. The provision of additional medical services is considered extremely necessary. This can be done in two ways, either by deploying more doctors to the camps on a daily basis for their on-site examination or by providing the possibility of serving immigrants in hospitals on a more frequent basis. At the same time, it would be useful to perform a coronavirus test on a regular basis within the camps to reassure citizens rather than restricting the movement of immigrants unnecessarily when they are healthy.

In addition, in this context, the isolation areas should be immediately determined, as provided for in the Agnodiki plan, and the existing facilities should be improved by increasing the distances between the tents or better replacing them with containers.

Nevertheless, does the Agnodiki plan apply a different protocol than the one that applies to other citizens? According plan, the entire camp would be isolated, which constitutes discrimination against immigrants. In every other case of camp within the state (nursing homes or services), there was no universal ban on all citizens except those who tested positive. The legal regime of preventive restraint of immigrants within the camps cannot be considered as a legitimate measure to combat the spread of the virus.

As far as racist attitudes, raising public awareness on the provision of equal services and opportunities to all citizens can reduce racist beliefs. As the Minister of Immigration and Asylum himself stated, the measures are stricter for immigrants.³⁶ Immigrants are stigmatized

36 Τα μέτρα που πήραμε στις δομές ήταν πιο αυστηρά από τα γενικά μέτρα για την προστασία από τον κορωνοϊό [The restrictions were stricter for immigrants], 11-4-20, <https://www.mitarakis.gr/press/81-tv/1991-metra-domes>

and unjustly accused of spreading the virus. Xenophobic responses from various actors in the country do not help while on the contrary they bring negative effects on public health. The economic crisis is unfortunately setting aside humanism for the sake of improving economic interests. As the economy worsens, there will be new harsh attitudes towards immigrants. The concept of security is changing and it may not be the same after the crisis.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has stated that it is not a health crisis; it is a human crisis that is destroying lives and deepening distrust.³⁷ However, the mere outcry of austerity measures is not always to the benefit of human rights unless accompanied by other acts. A tendency for mutual assistance should be developed despite the individual approach taken so far to crisis management. The crisis can lead to more sustainable humanitarian aid and a different policy in all areas. It is an unprecedented crisis and it is difficult to predict the future. However, we can predict trends and risks. If we do not take action, the most vulnerable, as refugees living in camps, will face many challenges.

37 Coronavirus pandemic fast becoming a 'human rights crisis', UN chief warns, 23/04/2020 <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/23/coronavirus-pandemic-fast-becoming-a-human-rights-crisis-un-chief-warns> (Accessed 16-08-2020).

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