

GREEK COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES

ANNUAL REPORT 1/1/2007 – 31/12/2007

I. INTRODUCTION

A) Regarding GCR

1. 2007 was an election year for GCR. On the 17/04/2007 Regular General Assembly elected the new Boarding Council led by Ms. Iro Nicolacopoulou-Stephanou
2. The creation of the new data base, which was financed through a donation, was completed and its use started on the 1st of July 2007
3. The spring Biannual General Meeting 2007 of ECRE (European Council for Refugees), was organized in Delphi with the participation of organizations' representatives and ECRE members from 15 EU Member States as well as 7 other countries (Switzerland, Ukraine, Serbia, Russia etc). Within the framework of this event, a movie and a photograph exhibition were presented on the Project which was implemented by GCR in Afghanistan in 2006
4. Finally, the Project "Quality System on Services of Consultancy Support and Occupation", which was implemented the last two years within the framework of the EQUAL initiative, was elected between the 55 best Projects of the 3rd CSF (<http://www.hellaskps.gr/bestpractices/proj.asp?pld=35>).

B) Refugees in Greece

5. The policies of foreigners' entrance in Greece remain dissuasive. Major lacks exist in accommodation and the confrontation of the problem seems to be based on hasty and fragmentary solutions
6. The number of asylum seekers in Greece was 25.113 in relation to 12.267 requests made in 2006, something that was expected since the procedure had become less time consuming. Main countries of origin were Pakistan, Iraq and Bangladesh, while the arrival of large number of unaccompanied minors remained a major problem. 140 asylum requests were approved (0,56%), mostly to Iraqis, 75 cases were under tolerance stay and 20.684 requests were rejected
7. The number of persons supported by GCR reached 14.000
8. In European level, during the Portuguese Presidency in the second half of 2007: a) the new Lisbon Treaty was signed, which establishes from 2009 status of ad hoc majority concerning the Council decisions on asylum and migration, after the joint decision of the European Parliament and b) 9 out of 10 new EU Member States joined the Schengen Agreement. Also, numerous bilateral readmission agreements were signed and the Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABITs) were created in European level, meaning the creation of units for immediate intervention at the borders. Discussions are in progress concerning a Common European Asylum System

II. Legal Service Activities

1. Legal Aid and Consultancy

- ✚ **Legal consultancy** and support **was provided to 7.490 persons** on asylum issues
- ✚ **Interventions were made before Greek Authorities for 1.708 persons** concerning requests on access to asylum and the majority of them were vulnerable cases
- ✚ Interventions were made to the **Police for 163** detainees (21 of them expressed their will to apply for asylum and many of them were minors) and to the juridical prisons in Avlona for minor detainees asylum seekers
- ✚ Interventions were made for immediate asylum request and the provision of relevant documents for the Police Services for **409 persons**

- ✚ Interventions were made for **1.171 newly arrived** in entry points, among which 2 Turkish citizens, torture victims with serious medical problems, detained to be deported, in Samos. It is worth to be mentioned that one of the two cases has been judged before the European Court of Human Rights, which has sentenced Turkey for violation of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights
- ✚ A successful intervention was made for 16 persons who travelled to Greece ship container and who finally requested asylum in Greece. The issue was given wide publicity in the Greek Mass Media and was reported as a best practice for the solution of relevant cases
- ✚ **3.261 persons received legal support** on asylum issues, in the premises of GCR
- ✚ Interventions were made through visits, telephone calls, faxes and emails to competent Services, were proved necessary for **1.329 persons**. Indicatively, **731 persons** received assistance on their appeal submission for the examination of their asylum request in second degree
- ✚ **47 persons** δέχτηκαν συνδρομή για την υποβολή αίτησης ή /και την ανανέωση χορήγησης ανθρωπιστικού were assisted on their request submission and/or the renewal of humanitarian status while objections were submitted against the pause of the asylum procedure for **29 persons**, 3 of them were unaccompanied minors
- ✚ **1 person** was supported on issues concerning permanent protection solutions (family unification, reinstallation, repatriation)
- ✚ Successful meetings were held between executives and member of the Governing Board of GCR with the Director of the Directorate for Foreigners of the Hellenic Ministry of Public Order, as well as with the Head of the Asylum Department of the aforementioned Ministry, for exceptionally vulnerable cases of asylum seekers
- ✚ 15 successful performances were realized before courts for the support of asylum seekers and 7 performances for the support of women victims of trafficking
- ✚ A representative of the Legal Service attended **37 regular sessions of the Refugee Committee of the Hellenic Ministry of Public Order**, in order to support **191 asylum seekers**
- ✚ **18 cancelation appeals were submitted to the Council of State** for cases of asylum seekers, whose requests were rejected by the Minister of Public Order, while another 14 were prepared and submitted. **9 cases were discussed**
- ✚ The issue of unaccompanied minors, who arrive mainly through Lesbos and Samos and who are released without support or supervision, was posed in written to the competent authorities
- ✚ Finally, there was collaboration with jurists from many European countries for cases of asylum seekers which fall within the Dublin Regulation, as well as with Greek citizens, lawyers and other NGOs

2. Interviews with asylum seekers and potential asylum seekers

Interviews were taken from **2.435 persons (1.943 persons** in GCR's premises, 57 unaccompanied women and 22 unaccompanied minors, **30 persons** in detention places and **462 persons** in entry points-15 unaccompanied women and 129 unaccompanied minors).

3. Legal Service missions

- ✚ During the year 11 missions were made in entry points: Samos (three times), Thessaloniki, Lavrio, Patmos Chalcis, Zakynthos, Leros, Lesbos and Pyrgos. After the last mission in Samos an intervention for made to the competent ministries for the improvement of the terrible living conditions there
- ✚ Missions were also made to Volos, Evros, Chania, Patra while for the training of the local police authorities a mission was made to Chios. Finally, within the framework of the UNHCR Border Monitoring Project missions were made to Aleksandroupolis, Orestiada Komotini and other regions of Evros, Kavala, Leros, Patmos, Rhodes, Cos, Chios, Kalimnos and twice to Pyrgos Ilias, where 97 foreigners castaways were held

4. Legal Support for Integration Issues

Legal support was provided for the solution of legal problems that **359** persons faced while integrating in the Greek society. The support included information on their rights and obligations to Greece, legal advice for executing their rights, representation before Greek authorities, naturalization procedures, support on cases of civil, criminal, labor, administrative and tax law, as well as interventions to Public Services and Organizations.

5. Project for the Support of Victims of Trafficking

In 2007, special importance was given to the support of victims of trafficking, mainly from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Nigeria. Apart from the legal representation of the victims the members of the Legal Service participated in meetings in the Ministry, they submitted written recommendations and proposals and they visited the Anti-trafficking Department of the Police and prisons. Finally, they participated with recommendations in numerous meetings for trafficking, which were organized from various institutions.

6. Participation in educational, informative and other activities in Greece and abroad

During 2007 there were many participations as well as presentations of members of the Legal Service in Seminars, Conferences, Press Conferences etc, which were organized by GCR and other organizations. A seminar was, also, held (18-19/12) on the presentation of the results of a training project for police officers aiming at the support of the asylum procedures in the Greek borders.

Members of the Legal Service participated, as trainers or speakers, in

- ✚ 4 Seminars which were organized by the Training Institute of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the High Commissioner (Athens, Chania, Heraklion, Thessaloniki)
- ✚ Seminars for volunteers organized by the Hellenic Red Cross
- ✚ Seminars for educators in Aleksandroupolis
- ✚ Training program for intercultural interveners (within the framework of the Community Initiative EQUAL)

while they participated in numerous conferences and seminars in Greece and abroad.

The Legal Service commented on the Report of ECRE regarding the imposed reformation of the Dublin II Regulation, while its members had meetings with executives of Ministries, Embassies, the United Nations, NGOs as well as journalists, within the framework of information on the refugee law.

III. Social Service Activities

The goal of the Social Service is to facilitate the adjustment and the integration of Asylum Seekers, Refugees and of all those who are accepted to stay in Greece under Humanitarian Status. During 2007 the Social Service served, in total, **4.296 persons**.

1. Reception of Newly Arrived Asylum Seekers

- ✚ In collaboration with the Hellenic Ministry of Health and Welfare, **1.234** persons in total were helped, from which **399** were accommodated (**235** persons in **Reception Centers**, **151** in **hotels** and **13** in **guest houses and other frameworks of hospitality**). During this procedure also extremely vulnerable cases were assisted, such as **150** unaccompanied minors, **16** persons with special abilities, **53** women without supporting environment, **93** persons with serious medical problems, **20** families of a single parent and **15** with newborns, **41** families with many children, **18** pregnant, **12** victims of torture, **18** persons with psychological problems etc

- ✚ **815** interventions were made for health issues, **897** meetings for supportive consulting and **1.049** interventions for entrance issues

2. Central Social Service

The Central Social Service provides consulting and information and intervenes to institutions and services for the benefit of the refugees and the asylum seekers

- ✚ Consultancy and help was provided to **857 persons**, while the support to refugees and asylum seekers who haven't solved the major problems that concern them continued
- ✚ With the assistance of volunteers clothing, food and other goods, coming from donations, were distributed to **195** persons, while financial support was given to **70** cases. This support was given also due to private donations and donations from organizations

3. Intercultural Centre "PYXIS"

The executives of "PYXIS" along with the 73 volunteers helped **657** persons, with the following activities:

- ✚ For adults, **23** courses on the Greek language ran (1 for certification in Greek-2 people succeeded) and were attended by **243** persons, **4** English courses which were attended by **21** persons
- ✚ Courses of supportive teaching ran for **41** students, courses on the Greek language for **52** children and adolescences and courses on foreign languages for **10** children
- ✚ Groups of music, dance, doll making, doll theatre, poster creation, creative activities and swimming were formed. Many of them participated in events where they presented their work. Indicatively mentioned:
 - ✚ Doll theatre performance "The Little Prince"
 - ✚ The doll making group was awarded for the "Woman in Afghanistan" doll
 - ✚ Christmas event in the Cultural Centre "Melina" of the Municipality of Athens
 - ✚ Visits in museums, attendance of events and football games, participation in events of other organizations
 - ✚ **1.652** contacts were made with the target population in order to inform them on training programs, health issues, contacts with hospitals etc. **35 children** were registered in schools, while another 23 went to the children's camps of the Municipality of Athens and the Prefecture of East Attica. Finally, **53** children were vaccinated

4. Provision of Supportive Services

The goal of these Services is for the participants to learn Greek, an art, to claim an employment or to be able to hold the one they already have, to be informed on the relations between employers and employees in Greece and to familiarize with the insurance providers. Within this framework, and in collaboration with the Hellenic Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs 370 were aided, 253 out of them found a job, 85 attended training courses on the Greek language and 8 attended training programs. Also, a radio spot was created and other informative material, while a book was published entitled "Guide of Intercultural Consultancy".

5. Recruitment Offices (Peristeri-Athens)

The Recruitment Offices offer consultancy and information on labor issues, support for the development of social and professional skills, help in practical issues, contact with employers and support, references and support of the beneficiaries during their occupation.

The Office of Peristeri provided services in 183 unemployed (156 men and 27 women), while it accommodated an intern. Its executives participated in several meetings, events and researches.

The Office of Athens offered services in 995 unemployed (883 men and 112 women). Their main request, apart from employment, was to obtain a job permit, especially for the newly arrived in Greece.

6. Participation in training, informative and other activities in Greece and abroad

Members of the Social Service actively participated with speeches in the following events:

- ✚ Training seminar in Ferrara, Italy (24-28/1) entitled “Innovative ways to integrate Asylum Seekers into the labour market”
- ✚ Seminar organized by UNHCR on “Basic Principles for the Protection of Refugees-Code of Deontology-Operation Regulations” (31/05/07)
- ✚ Scientific meeting entitled «Protecting children outside family: Cooperation and Networking of Care Services” (29-30/11). Announcement entitled “Intercultural Social Work with refugee families: the role of the social worker in handling incidents and in intervening for children”
- ✚ 19th Conference organized by the Hellenic Society for Social Pediatrics and Health Promotion and the University of Athens (4 – 6/10). Announcement entitled “Phenomenology and Consequences of indoor violence to physical and mental health of foreigner women”
- ✚ 3rd Greek Scientific Conference for facing sexual violence, Athens 16–18/3. Announcement entitled “Quality evaluation of the characteristics of indoor violence of women refugees and migrants”
- ✚ Conference entitled “Consultancy on employment and balance between familial and professional obligations”, Athens 29 – 30/3. Speech entitled “Intercultural consultancy work: reconciliation of familial and professional life”
- ✚ “Training Program for Intercultural Interveners”, held on 10-16/02/07 in the premises of GCR
- ✚ Speech of the Labor Union of Bangladesh in Greece (28/01/2007)
- ✚ Presentation in the Meeting of SYNASPISMOS on UN’s responsibility for women refugees(05/02/2007)

while there were numerous updates to Greek and foreigners social scientists, students, journalists etc.

7. Networking

During 2007 networking with institutions like Hospitals, Doctors and Medical Associations, Hellenic Anticancer Association, Paster Institute, Medecins du Monde, Medecins Sans Frontieres, Public Clinic of the Municipality of Athens, World Pharmacists, Dental School of Athens, and Medical Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims, Pharmaceutical Companies was established and supported. Also, with the Modern Greek Language Teaching Center of the University of Athens, Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Center of Greek Civilization, Hellenic Red Cross, ARSIS, CARITAS, CLIMAKA, Association for Minors Care, church and other guest houses, parishes for the support or the nutrition poor refugees, athletic associations etc. Finally, with Municipalities, Communities, Prefectures, Social Services, Public Services as well as the Public Prosecutor’s Office for Minors of Athens and the Greek Ombudsman, for unaccompanied minors issues (constant collaboration).

IV. Project “IOLAOS” for the Psychosocial Rehabilitation of Refugees with Mental Disorders

During 2007 GCR continued its effort to support the rehabilitation of refugees with mental disorders. The special Unit “IOLAOS” consists of the Guest House (here 9 persons were hosted), the Daily Center (were 286 appointments were made) and the Protected Apartment (were 4 persons were hosted). In October 2007 the guests moved to a new apartment.

GCR remains a main institution of reference while there were many cases where Social Services of Psychiatric Departments of Hospitals contacted IOLAOS Services. In 2007:

- ✚ The in service training, of persons with little experience in structures which concern mentally ill or of persons who are not experts on mental health, was continued
- ✚ The collaboration with the Greek Red Cross’ volunteers continued for Greek lessons, while English lessons from volunteers started

- ✚ The curative program ran based on the special needs of each guest, while the effort to assist and encourage the most functional of them in order to enter the labor market continued. Four guests found a job for a few months. Two guests of the Protected Apartment attended the workshop of pre-professional training of Eginition Hospital, four times a week
- ✚ During 2007 3 serious recurrences were faced, while only in one case hospitalization was proved necessary due to suicidal predispositions and self-destructive behavior

All personnel participated in series of conferences and seminars on mental health.

V. Other Projects

Within the framework of its operation and in collaboration with Greek and international institutions, GCR implemented the following Projects:

- ✚ “Guide of Humanitarian Protection”, aiming at the support of foreigners in Greece through the contact of a guide on their rights and obligations. Due to changes in the legislative framework its finalization was delayed
- ✚ «Fostering the Best Interest of the Child in Care Institutions for Unaccompanied Minors», within the framework of which the quality of foundations of unaccompanied minors reception was examined and the skills and abilities of their personnel
- ✚ «Identifying and Promoting Good Practices for Unaccompanied Minors in the EU Asylum Legislation», aiming at the elevation, analysis and study of the implementation of the schemes of the European Legislation on Asylum and Refugees for unaccompanied minors
- ✚ “Services at borders: a practical co-operation”: Study on the asylum procedures as well as in the access of asylum seekers to it in collaboration with other European countries
- ✚ “Raising the voices of young refugees: a step forward to organise ourselves” supported by Council of Europe/ European Youth Foundation: Main event: European meeting of young refugees in Budapest to launch European Network for Young Refugees
- ✚ «SunPraxis-Collaboration for Employment”, aiming at promoting policies which will make more effective the procedure of access in employment, giving for the first time emphasis in the collaboration with the employers. 189 persons were helped
- ✚ «Observatory and Network for the Empowerment of Economic Migrants and Refugees in the Labor Market”, with emphasis to intercultural operation and intervention
- ✚ “Network for the arsis of Social Exclusion of women”, aiming at the provision of consultative support to extremely vulnerable refugee and asylum seekers families and at the implementation of creative workshops for the children of refugees and migrants. Within the framework of this project a)creative workshops for the children of refugees and migrants ran, b) through special consultancy at home 21 vulnerable refugee families were assisted, c) a leaflet with basic information was prepared and d) a study entitled ‘Migrant and Refugee Women in Greece’ was elaborated

VI. Collaboration of GCR with wider Associations

During 2007 the collaboration of GCR with the National Committee for Human Rights continued, having as a result two recommendations of the Committee, one on issues of trafficking and one for the implementation of the refugee and asylum law.

Within the framework of GCR’s participation in the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), issues concerning mostly research and rescue in the sea (access to Europe), return to the countries where the first asylum request was submitted, conditions of detention of the asylum seekers, as well as unfair implementation of the community directives concerning asylum, were discussed.

In 2007 the participation of GCR in the National Consulting Committee of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the Governmental Initiative “Citizens Work” and in the Federation of Non Governmental Organizations continued. GCR, also, remained an implementing partner of the

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Greece, which during 2007 financed the services of one lawyer full time.

VII. Promotion of GCR's Work

Basic actions for 2007

- Send of press releases, which had as a result at least 50 references to GCR in the Mass Media
- Consolidation of new collaborations which led to the promotion of GCR's activities and to the circulation of newsletters

VIII. Fund Raising from Private Donors

The efforts for fund raising from private donors in 2007 focused on appeals, via telephone and written, on radio and television spots and on appeals to newspapers-magazines during holiday. Also, a telephone line for donations operated and two big events for fund raising were organized. One of the two events was a singing concert of the famous artist Ms. Barbara Hendricks.

A very important donation was the job offer for two refugees in Ilia, for the reconstruction of the areas destroyed from the fire. This offer had such an appeal, that it was repeated this year for four refugees. Big donations were, also, made for buying electronic and other equipment for GCR's premises.

Many donations in kind were, also, offered. The offer of services, such as free creation of invitations for the events and of leaflets, free transfer when needed etc, was also of great importance.

The Governing Board of GCR expresses its appreciation to all those who assisted its work during 2007, as well as all the members of its personnel, who worked with ardency and loyalty, for the better support of refugees.

Athens, 9th of April 2007