Secondary Movement of Beneficiaries of International Protection from Greece to the Netherlands

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Contents

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Executive Summary

In recent years, the secondary movement of beneficiaries of international protection (BIPs) from Greece has greatly increased. More specifically, tens of thousands of BIPs have used the refugee passports issued to them by the Greek authorities to travel to other EU Member States, where they apply anew for asylum. This has had important political, legal, economic, and protection-related consequences. Yet, despite its significance, the secondary movement of BIPs from Greece remains understudied and poorly understood.

This report presents the results of a study that focused on the secondary movement of BIPs from Greece to the Netherlands. The study posed three questions:

1. When do BIPs in Greece take the decision to move to the Netherlands?
2. What factors contribute to BIPs' decision to move onward and does the situation in Greece impact this decision?
3. Why do BIPs from Greece move specifically to the Netherlands?

Data and methods

The study relied on a qualitative analysis of interviews with fourteen individuals who had received refugee status in Greece and had subsequently travelled to the Netherlands and applied anew for asylum there.

Findings

Most study participants decided to move to the Netherlands while they were residing in Greece, and more specifically, after receiving international protection there. The factors that influenced this decision were multiple and complex but pertained primarily to the adverse reception conditions during the asylum procedure and the lack of integration support after recognition in Greece. The choice to move specifically to the Netherlands was based mainly on BIPs' perceptions of the Dutch integration policies and broader socio-economic environment as favourable for rebuilding their lives.

Recommendations

There is a pressing need for a comprehensive reform in Greece that would address the current shortcomings in the reception system as well as the lack of integration support for BIPs. From a broader perspective, the legal and policy frameworks that govern the mobility of BIPs across EU Member States must account better for both migrant agency and structural differences between countries.

1. Introduction

Ever since the establishment of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), the secondary movement of asylum seekers has been a recurring bone of contention between Greece and other Member States of the European Union (EU). Historically, the issue has concerned primarily individuals who travel onward *before* the conduction or completion of an asylum procedure in Greece and then apply for asylum elsewhere.[1]

While this situation continues to persist until today, it has recently taken on a new dimension. Specifically, a significant number of people have started leaving Greece *after* receiving refugee or subsidiary protection (Figure 1). These *beneficiaries of international protection* (BIPs) use the refugee travel documents issued to them by the Greek authorities to travel to different EU+ countries, where they submit a new asylum claim. As returns to Greece are often hampered by legal and practical barriers, the secondary movement of these BIPs commonly leads to permanent settlement in the second Member State.

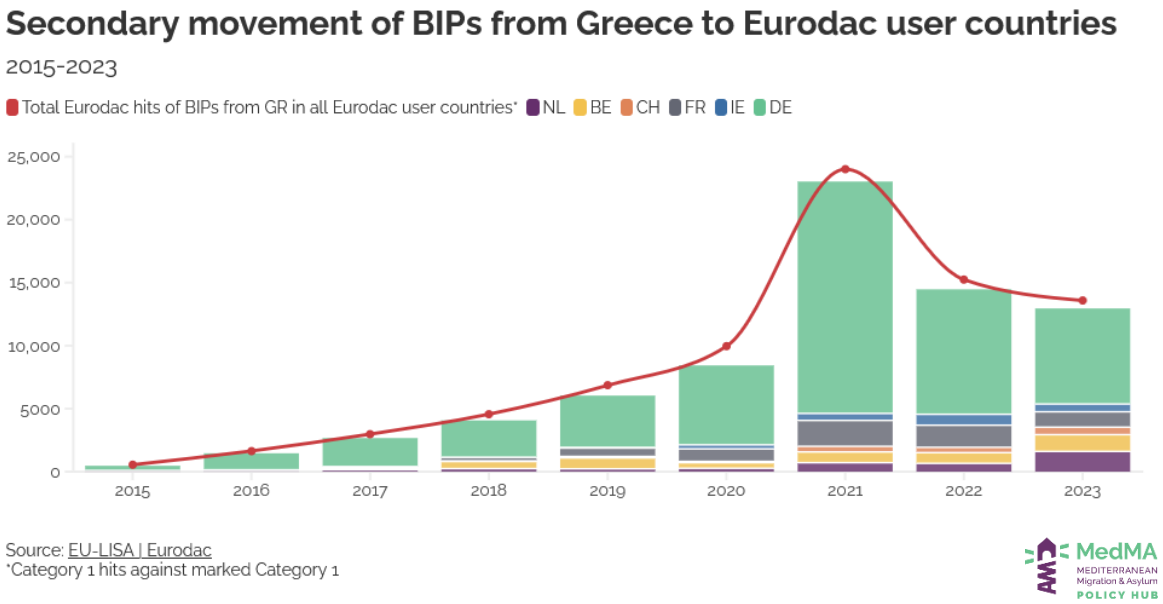

Figure 1. Secondary movement of BIPs from Greec to Eurodac user countries. Source: EU-LISA | Eurodac

[1] Schuster, L. (2011). Dublin II and Eurodac: examining the (un)intended(?) consequences. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *18*(3), 401-416. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2011.566387

The secondary movement of BIPs from Greece has important and multifaceted implications. From a political point of view, it undermines the CEAS by fuelling further tensions between Member States. For example, the governments of several Western European "destination" countries have described the phenomenon as facilitated by a "*flagrant abuse of refugee travel documents*" and have requested from the European Commission to promptly address it.[2] From a legal standpoint, the recent increase in BIPs' secondary movement has led to rich jurisprudence at the domestic level in several EU countries.[3] In addition, it has also led to highly consequential clarifications issued by the Court of Justice of the European Union on the procedures that Member States must follow regarding the asylum applications of BIPs from Greece.[4] In terms of financial consequences, examining anew tens of thousands of asylum applications that have been already positively assessed on the merits by another Member State not only makes little sense, but also puts additional strains on the reception and asylum systems of the second Member State. Lastly, in terms of protection-related implications, BIPs from Greece may spend months and often years in the second Member State awaiting the decision on their new asylum application, with limited access to rights and services.

Despite its considerable size and significance, the secondary movement of BIPs from Greece has surprisingly remained off researchers' radar.[5] This is in stark contrast to the abundance of studies on the secondary movement of asylum seekers, which portray the phenomenon as driven by structural deficiencies in the CEAS, implementation gaps in Member States at EU's external border, and migrants' agency.[6] Albeit valuable, the insights from these studies cannot be directly applied to the secondary movement of BIPs due to some notable differences between the two dimensions of the phenomenon. For example, (rejected) asylum seekers may have little to hold onto in Greece and travel on irregularly, often through convoluted, dangerous, and expensive journeys facilitated by smugglers. On the contrary, BIPs deliberately abandon their protection status in Greece and can use their refugee travel documents to reach any EU Member State legally, safely, and conveniently,

[2] Seehofer, H., Darmanin, G., Mahdi, S., Asselborn, J., Broekers-Knol, A., & Keller-Sutter, K. (2021). *[Letter of six Schengen Area states to the European Commission on the secondary movement of beneficiaries of international protection from Greece]*. Retrieved from https://www.statewatch.org/media/2485/letter-six-schengen-states-to-european-commission-secondary-movements-1-6-21.pdf

[3] See, for example, Meyerhöfer, A. (2021). Die Situation von in Griechenland »Anerkannten«. Aktuelle Informationen und Rechtsprechung. *Asylmagazin*(6), 200-206.

[4] Case C-753/22, Request for a preliminary ruling under Article 267 TFEU from the Federal Administrative Court, Germany, ECLI:EU:C:2024:524.

[5] Sabchev, T. (2025). High on the political agenda yet off researchers' radar: Secondary movements of beneficiaries of international protection from Greece. Retrieved from https://med-ma.eu/publications/high-on-the-political-agenda-yet-off-researchers-radar-secondary-movements-of-beneficiaries-of-international-protection-from-greece/

[6] Wagner, M., Perumadan, J., & Baumgartner, P. (2019). *Secondary Movements* (CEASEVAL Research on the Common European Asylum System. Retrieved from https://www.tu-chemnitz.de/phil/iesg/professuren/geographie/Publikationen/CEASEVAL/34_SecondaryMovements.pdf

without resorting to smugglers' expensive services. Therefore, the question why BIPs choose to leave Greece and seek asylum anew in other EU countries merits separate research efforts.

As an initial step in this direction, this report presents evidence from a qualitative study on the reasons behind the secondary movement of BIPs from Greece to the Netherlands. Over the last years, the number of BIPs who apply anew for protection in the Netherlands has gradually increased. As a result, in 2023 the country became the second most prominent "destination" for such secondary movements, albeit still remaining far behind Germany (see Figure 1).[7] In addition, the arrival of BIPs from Greece has led to extensive jurisprudence by first-instance Dutch courts and a decision of the Dutch Council of State, which *de facto* has halted returns of BIPs to Greece, subject to minor exceptions. The Dutch government has also shown keen interest in the issue, monitoring closely the conditions of BIPs in Greece over the last years.[8] Overall, this makes the Netherlands a compelling case for exploring the reasons behind BIPs' secondary movement.

The study posed three research questions: 1) When do BIPs in Greece take the decision to move to the Netherlands? 2) What factors contribute to BIPs' decision to move onward and does the situation in Greece impact this decision? and 3) Why do BIPs from Greece move specifically to the Netherlands? To answer these questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with BIPs who had received refugee status in Greece and subsequently applied anew for asylum in the Netherlands. In simple terms, we endeavoured to explore why the Netherlands and why not Greece from the perspective of BIPs.

The qualitative analysis of the collected data points towards three main findings. First, the decision to leave Greece and seek asylum anew in the Netherlands was primarily done when BIPs were in Greece, and more specifically *after* they had already received protection. Second, although the reasons behind this decision were multiple and complex, they pertained primarily to BIPs' experiences of adverse reception conditions and lack of integration support in Greece. Third, the choice of the Netherlands as country of destination was based mainly on BIPs' perceptions that the Dutch migration/welfare policies and broader socioeconomic environment offered good prospects for successful settlement. Overall, our findings strongly suggest that most BIPs first take the decision to leave Greece, and only subsequently choose to head to the Netherlands among other options that they have considered.

[7] The Dutch authorities do not keep separate statistics regarding BIPs from Greece. We have therefore used the marked datasets provided by the annual Eurodac reports published by EU-LISA as an indication.

[8] See Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. (2024). *Verslag feitenonderzoek naar statushouders in Griekenland*. Retrieved from https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/asielbeleid/documenten/ambtsberichten/2024/09/03/verslag-feitenonderzoek-naar-statushouders-in-griekenland-september-2024

The remainder of the report is structured as follows. In Section 2, we discuss the available evidence on drivers of secondary movements of BIPs and asylum seekers. Subsequently, in Section 3, we elaborate briefly on the collection and analysis of the data. Section 4 discusses in detail our findings, presenting multiple direct quotes from the BIPs who participated in the study. Finally, Section 5 provides brief conclusions and policy recommendations.

2. Drivers of the Secondary Movement of BIPs from Greece: Limited Evidence

Because of its relative insignificance prior to the last few years, the secondary movement of BIPs remained for a long time overshadowed by the much more prominent secondary movement of (rejected) asylum seekers. As a result, the available evidence is rather limited and pertains primarily to professional and popular sources. A report from the European Migration Network published in 2022 indicates that the phenomenon concerns primarily BIPs leaving Greece and is engulfed in legal and practical uncertainties.[9] Occasional civil society reports, practitioner accounts and media publications confirm this observation and provide further details on the implications for BIPs and the impacted Member States.[10] Lastly, academic sources generally refer to BIPs' secondary movement only in passing.[11] Hence, the causes, dimensions, and consequences of this secondary movement remain poorly understood.

When it comes specifically to the drivers of the secondary movement of BIPs from Greece, the key issue is the dearth of evidence on BIPs' views and aspirations. Several studies led by Katie Kuschminder are an important exception to this general rule. These studies rely on primary data collected in Greece in 2015 through surveys and interviews with slightly more than 500 asylum seekers and BIPs (as well as other categories of migrants).[12] The findings show that 80 percent of all respondents arrived in Greece already with the intention to move onward to other countries.[13] However, the findings also indicate that decisions may

[9] European Migration Network. (2022). *Secondary movements of beneficiaries of international protection*. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-09/EMN_Secondary-movements_INFORM_final_0.pdf

[10] See, for example, Meyerhöfer, A. (2021). Die Situation von in Griechenland »Anerkannten«. Aktuelle Informationen und Rechtsprechung. *Asylmagazin*(6), 200-206; ProAsyl. (2025). BAMF baut Luftschlösser, um Rückkehr nach Griechenland zu forcieren. https://www.proasyl.de/news/bamf-baut-luftschloesser-um-rueckkehr-nach-griechenland-zu-forcieren/; Sillevis Smitt, T. (2022). Wie asiel krijgt in Griekenland wacht 'extreme armoede'. *One World*. https://www.oneworld.nl/mensenrechten/reportage-wie-asiel-krijgt-in-griekenland-wacht-extreme-armoede/

[11] Thym, D. (2022). Secondary Movements: Improving Compliance and Building Trust among the Member States? Reforming the Common European Asylum System

[12] Kuschminder, K. (2018). *Deciding which road to take: Insights into how migrants and refugees in Greece plan onward movement*. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/migrants-refugees-greece-onward-movement; Kuschminder, K., & Koser, K. (2017). T*he Role of Migration-Specific and Migration Relevant Policies in Migrant Decision-Making in Transit* (United Nations University UNU-MERIT Working Paper Series). https://www.merit.unu.edu/publications/working-papers/?year_id=2017; Kuschminder, K., de Bresser, J., & Siegel, M. (2015). *Irregular Migration Routes to Europe and Factors Influencing Migrants' Destination Choices*. https://repository.wodc.nl/handle/20.500.12832/2175?show=full

[13] Kuschminder, K. (2018).

change *en route*, with one-third of those who had initially intended to *stay* in Greece subsequently changing their mind. In terms of factors that influenced the decision of these respondents to leave Greece, the studies point out to poor living conditions and experiences of hostility and discrimination. Conversely, respondents who had suitable accommodation and worked were more likely to remain in Greece. As for the BIPs who took part in the research specifically, most of them intended to move onward due to structural factors, such as adverse living conditions, adverse migration-related policies, and lack of social support.[14] The findings also suggest that enabling factors that helped respondents settle in Greece were more important for the decision-making than restrictive factors hampering onward mobility (e.g., border control or eventual Dublin returns). Ultimately, the overall conclusion one could draw from the studies of Kuschminder and her colleagues is that the conditions in Greece – as a de facto transit country – play an important role in the decision of migrants, including BIPs, to continue their journey.

While research on the drivers of BIPs' secondary movement remains scant, there is extensive literature on the drivers of migration in general and the drivers of secondary movement of (rejected) asylum seekers specifically. This literature highlights a variety of factors that affect people's decisions to move onward. Many of these factors pertain to the situation in transit countries, including poor living conditions, lack of opportunities for social participation, difficult access to work and study opportunities, limited access to healthcare and social security, asylum seekers' perceptions about stability and security following their eventual recognition, and inaccessible/lengthy procedures for family reunification. Other factors relate instead to the actual or perceived conditions in destination countries. For example, access to ethnic and family networks in another Member State has been consistently presented as an important driver of secondary movement, as well as an important source of information that might fuel the desire of people to move onward.[15] In addition, asylum and welfare policies in destination countries often feature in relevant debates as crucial factors behind secondary movement, although their "pull" or "deterrent" effect has been confirmed only in some studies but refuted in others.[16] Lastly, the perceptions and aspirations of migrants themselves must be also taken into account. Migrants cannot be reduced to rational actors that make decisions based on simplistic cost-benefit analysis, and the

[14] See, for example, Kuschminder, K., & Koser, K. (2017) and Kuschminder, K. (2018).
[15] Havinga, T., & Böcker, A. (1999). Country of Asylum by Choice or by Chance: Asylum –seekers in Belgiuim, the Netherlands and the UK. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *25*(1), 43-61; Jennissen, R., Schliwen, A., Cörvers, F., Muysken, J., Neubourg, C. d., Wijkhuis, V., Kromhout, M., & Wubs, H. (2009). *Migratie naar en vanuit Nederland. Een eerste proeve van de Migratiekaart*; , Brekke, J.-P., & Aarset, M. F. (2009). *Why Norway? Understanding Asylum Destinations*. Institute for Social Research; Brekke, J.-P., & Thorbjørnsrud, K. (2023). *The role of narratives in migratory decisionmaking: The role of narratives in onward migration of Afghan nationals from Istanbul to Europe*.
[16] See p. 57 in Brekke, J.-P., & Aarset, M. F. (2009); also Brekke, J.-P., Røed, M., & Schøne, P. (2023). Family Matters: The Impact of National Policies on Asylum Destinations. *International Migration Review*, *51*(1).

information that they base their decisions upon is often incomplete or false. Ultimately, one's destination may be not only a matter of choice, but also a matter of chance.[17]

Although the above findings are insightful, extrapolating them hastily to the recent secondary movement of BIPs from Greece may well be misleading. In the presentation of their results, Kuschminder and her colleagues do not generally distinguish between drivers of secondary movements for the different groups of migrants who participated in their research. In addition, the data they use were collected in 2015, at a time of widespread "adhocracy" in migration governance in Greece and with the so-called "Balkan route" still open, which facilitated extensive secondary movement from the country.[18] As for the insights from the broader literature, albeit undoubtedly relevant, they do not necessarily consider important aspects that may be rather unique to the decision-making of BIPs, such as access to refugee travel documents or general ambiguity regarding the legal and policy frameworks governing their mobility and stay across EU Member States. Overall, the drivers of BIPs secondary movements from Greece warrant a separate context-specific study, attentive to the causal impact of variety of factors at different levels, as well as to the possibility of multiple causation.

[17] See p. 28 in Brekke, J.-P., & Aarset, M. F. (2009).
[18] Sabchev, T. (2021). Against all odds: Thessaloniki's local policy activism in the reception and integration of forced migrants. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *47*(7), 1435-1454. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1840969

3. Data Collection and Analysis

We addressed the knowledge gap identified above by conducting a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with BIPs from Greece who had applied anew for asylum in the Netherlands. We conducted thirteen interviews with a total of fourteen individuals. The recruitment was done by the principal researcher who relied on individual contacts in both Greece and the Netherlands to identify and connect to potential participants. The initial sample was enlarged through snowballing. Each participant received details about the study, provided verbal consent, and was compensated with 25 EUR. Interviews were conducted in person between December 2024 and August 2025, audio-recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. Eight interviews were conducted in Arabic with an interpreter and four in English. One participant provided written answers in Persian.

Attempts to maximize variance in terms of participants' demographic characteristics were taken during both the initial recruitment and the subsequent snowballing. Hence, the sample included participants from Afghanistan (1), Syria (1), Yemen (5), Jordan (1), Palestine (3), Iran (1), Eritrea (1) and Ethiopia (1). Two participants were women who travelled to the Netherlands with their spouses/children (in one of the cases the couple was interviewed together), while 11 participants were single men. Most participants were in their 20s or early 30s, with only one interviewee being in her 40s.

All of them had received refugee status in Greece in the period 2023-2025, except for one interviewee who had received protection in 2021. The time they had spent in Greece varied between a couple of months and more than three years. As per their current living situation, our interviewees resided in reception centres in five different locations across the Netherlands.

It is noteworthy that we faced considerable difficulties in the recruitment of research participants, which is reflected in the relatively long period of data collection (8 months). The main reason for this was that often BIPs from Greece whom we approached were reluctant to participate in a study that explored the reasons behind their secondary movement to the Netherlands, whereas their asylum application was still pending. In addition, unlike the authorities of other Member States such as Germany, the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service, which is responsible for the examination of asylum claims, does not keep statistics or register separately applicants who already have obtained protection status in Greece (personal communication, November 2024). Such challenges pertaining to the collection of primary data may at least partially explain the limited to date research on BIPs secondary movement.

We prepared our interview questions based on the insights from the literature presented in the previous section (see Appendix). In a nutshell, the questions inquired into participants' experiences in Greece both before and after they had received protection there, the time when the decision to move to the Netherlands had been taken, the reasons

behind this decision, participants' sources of information, and their retrospective reflection on the secondary movement they had undertaken. One additional question inquiring into eventual differences between the asylum procedures in Greece and the Netherlands was added to the topic list early in the process of data collection based on insights obtained in the first interview.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed by the principal researcher. Each transcript was incorporated into Atlas.ti, read several times and coded using abductive approach. Data saturation was reached early despite the relatively heterogeneous sample in terms of participants' countries of origin. This was interpreted as an indication of the salience of the identified codes and themes, which appeared to provide consistent explanation for the secondary movements of BIPs from Greece to the Netherlands, regardless of any individual differences between the participants. This interpretation was corroborated by insights from a parallel study carried out by the principal researcher, which included extensive semi-structured interviews with sixteen asylum seekers and BIPs in Greece. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that expanding further the research sample – especially in terms of interviewing single women and families of BIPs – may result in additional novel findings.

4. Findings

This section outlines the findings of our study. It presents the answer to each of the three research questions and then briefly elaborates on participants' retrospective reflections upon their decision to seek asylum anew in the Netherlands. The section relies on multiple direct quotations from the interviews to convey participants' experiences as accurately as possible and in participants' own words.

4.1. When do BIPs in Greece take the decision to move to the Netherlands?

The great majority of the participants in our study decided to move to the Netherlands while they were residing in Greece, and more specifically, *after* receiving refugee status there. For a couple of participants, the Netherlands was either their "*first option*" or "*always in the back of [their] mind*", but nevertheless they had decided to "*give Greece a chance*" and had attempted to settle there.

Only one of the participants had categorically decided to go to the Netherlands before even departing from his country of origin. Although he had never had the intention to seek asylum in Greece, he had had to do so after being apprehended by the Greek authorities when crossing into the EU.

> *The only goal I had was to go to a country where I'd be safe. So, I went to Greece [but] when I saw the reality there, I decided to go somewhere where I can have a future and have a decent life. (Nasser)*

Most of the participants who had taken the decision to move onward while in Greece had done so *shortly after* they had exited the Greek reception system and had received their refugee travel document (between a few days and a couple of weeks). These participants had travelled from the reception center where they had been residing during the asylum procedure to either Athens or Thessaloniki, where the lack of stable accommodation, prospects and network quickly made them feel "*unsafe*" and "*lost*", therefore inducing their decision to leave the country.

Interviewer: So, when did you decide to come specifically to the Netherlands?
Abdu: Specifically, I decided in the last minute [laughs].
Interviewer: At the airport? [laughs]
Abdu: Like, no, in the, like, the last days. When I went to Thessaloniki and kind of felt more like, I felt more lost, because it's bigger than the island, and I didn't know anything there. And, yeah, that's when I decided.

In contrast, several participants had decided to move to the Netherlands after a *relatively longer period* of attempts to settle in Greece as BIPs (between a few months and a couple of years). During their stay in Greece, these participants commonly struggled with housing insecurity and precarious work conditions – including both regular and irregular employment – which eventually brought them to their wits' end. Saleh, for example, worked irregularly in seasonal jobs for several months. When he was unable to subsequently access unemployment benefits or social assistance, he had to borrow money from his family to meet his immediate expenses. This was rather embarrassing for him, and he decided to move to the Netherlands in search of better opportunities. Similarly, after receiving protection in Greece, Fatima and Adam had moved to an island where they had done domestic and agricultural work respectively. After four months and having not received the remuneration promised to them, they had decided to leave for the Netherlands. Lastly, after losing his job as an interpreter, which had helped him rent his own apartment and live independently for more than a year, Bilal was unable to access rental subsidies or other state support despite his best efforts.[19] Disillusioned, he had decided to move onward:

I tried to find a way, honestly speaking, in the country. I didn't want to leave Greece. And, like, in a year, one and a half year, I thought OK, that's it for me.

[19] Bilal was not eligible for rental subsidies or other support provided in the framework of the HELIOS program because when he received his refugee status, he was not residing in a reception facility but lived independently.

4.2. What factors contribute to BIPs' decision to move onward and does the situation in Greece impact this decision?

In line with one of the main premises of the secondary movement literature, our findings suggest that BIPs' decisions to abandon their refugee status in Greece and seek asylum anew in the Netherlands are usually influenced by multiple converging factors rather than having a single cause. That said, two themes emerged from our analysis as by far the most prominent drivers of secondary movements of BIPs from Greece: *adverse reception conditions* during the asylum procedure and *lack of integration support* after receiving protection.

In terms of adverse reception conditions, nearly all participants provided vivid descriptions of the dire circumstances they had experienced during their stay in the Greek reception system. The most salient issue they pointed out was the living conditions in the Closed Controlled Access Centres on the Aegean islands, which were portrayed as overcrowded, unhygienic, and lacking sufficient electricity, running water, and essential items such as beds, mattresses, and blankets. The poor quality of the food distributed to asylum seekers was also a common point of reference. Another very salient issue was the way participants were treated by the authorities and the staff of the reception centres. Being berated by the security/police or ignored when asking for information or assistance were frequently mentioned examples in this regard. Lastly, two additional less salient issues were the lack of medical help and not having received the monthly financial allowance that asylum seekers are entitled to, with the latter rendering people unable to purchase food or other essentials.

When I was in the camp, first four days, I had to sleep in... on the street. Even inside the camp, I didn't have a room, so I was, I was outside. I was sleeping outside and covering myself with only my jacket. After four days, they gave me a room. And in the room, I didn't have a blanket. They didn't give me a blanket, they didn't give me a mattress, they didn't give me anything. So, I was just sleeping, I found a [piece of] wood and I was sleeping on the wood. And after two or three weeks, like, whoever leaves, like, if you know the person, you tell them, like, oh, can you please give me your mattress, and then they give you a mattress. You get a mattress. The hygiene situation was very bad, it wasn't, like, hygienic. It wasn't a clean camp. Four people sleeping on the floor, with no nothing – with no blankets, no mattress, nothing. And the food was very bad. So, basically, those were my, the reasons that made me terrified, or be afraid from camps in general. (Nasser)

When I was in the camp, they put me in a room with 13 other people and the electricity used to come one hour in the day and one hour during the night. Only two hours in the 24 hours we had electricity. And the bathrooms were far away from where we used to sleep. No washing machines. No whatsoever hygiene, care, nothing at all. (Ekram)

I was terrified. I was terrified by the, how the security guards and how the police officers used to treat us. So, I was terrified as well. That was one of the reasons, that they had, I decided to leave. I was afraid. (Mounir)

In terms of lack of integration support, the most often cited and consequential provision that contributed to participants' decisions to leave Greece was the so-called "30-day rule". According to this provision, from the moment BIPs are notified about the positive outcome of their asylum application, BIPs are not entitled to receiving food anymore and have 30 days – or in some cases less, according to the testimonies of our participants – to leave the reception centre where they reside. When the period had lapsed and if BIPs had not yet complied with the requirement, they had been "*kicked out*" by the police and "*thrown out on the street*", which commonly translated into either homelessness or insecure housing, difficulties finding a job, and insufficient means to cover one's direct needs. Thus, in combination with the still "fresh" experience of adverse reception conditions, the 30-day rule had led most participants in our study out of Greece in a matter of a few days to a couple of weeks.

Beyond the 30-day rule, participants referred to several other policy-related factors that did not facilitate or even obstructed their eventual settlement in Greece. For instance, HELIOS – arguably the only integration program for BIPs in Greece – was either described as ineffective by those who had registered to it (primarily participants who had received protection in 2023) or was not even known to others (primarily participants who had received protection in 2024). In addition, the general lack of social assistance for BIPs, the lack of protections for those who were employed, the challenges accessing healthcare and education, and the extremely difficult procedure that rendered obtaining Greek citizenship nearly out of reach, were all cited as relevant factors that made even those who had tried to settle in Greece ultimately leave the country.

[...] before I receive my ID and my status, I didn't plan to leave the country. But once I received it, I thought it's better to leave after seeing how they treated us in the camps and the procedure of integration and all that. So, it was the reason for me to decide to leave the country. (Chadli)

And I didn't have any kind of integration programs that they offered me to sign [up to]. Once I received my documents, I was told, I was given a paper that I have to leave the camp within 30 days. Otherwise, I will be forced to leave the camp. I didn't have any, any, any place else to go. That's why I chose to come to the Netherlands. (Khalid)

After receiving the ID, I was given a notice that we have to leave the camp within 20 to 30 days. Otherwise, we will have to, we will have to be forced to leave the camp, and they will call the enforcement, like police enforcement, to kick us out of the camp. There was no any kind of integration programs – no housing programs, no integration programs where you can find your way after you receive your ID. There is supposed to be some kind of an integration program where you can learn the language, where you can find your way, where you can find a job, where you can be prepared to be in the society, integrate into the society. Unfortunately, there wasn't any programs like that. No legal aid, no medical care, no social workers. That was the reason, the main reasons that I had, after receiving my ID and passport, I had to leave the country. (Mounir)

My life changed totally after receiving my decision. At least, when I was in the camp, I had a roof. I had a place to stay. But after I received the decision, I was told that I have only 30 days to leave the camp, by force. Otherwise, I will be kicked out. When I left the camp, I didn't have any place to go. I didn't know where to go. And due to the reason that I have no one in Greece, I found a job where I can work just for the house. Like, the employer told me that you can work with me, and I can give you a house. And that's the only thing – no salary, nothing. And sometimes, like one day he gives me food, and the next day he doesn't. Sometimes he gives me food, sometimes he doesn't, but at least I had a roof. So, basically, I started, and it was very heavy. The job was very heavy. And I can't, due to my health problems, I can't work, like, in heavy jobs. But I had to work because I needed a place to stay. And after that, after working for one month. I saw that I can't live in this countrv no more. I decided to leave. (Nasser)

Lastly, in addition to the adverse reception conditions experienced in the reception system and the subsequent lack of integration support, there were also some less pronounced factors that had made the BIPs in our sample resort to secondary movement. For example, several participants referred to feeling "*unsafe*" in Greece as a reason to leave the country. For some, the source of this feeling was the inability to have dignified living conditions; for others, it was the lack of support from the authorities following concrete instances of victimisation (e.g., being threatened, robbed, etc.). In addition, experiences of racism and discrimination in the context of interactions with state authorities and the Greek society in general were also described by some of the participants as important factors that contributed to their decision to leave the country. However, this finding was not consistent across our sample: in contrast, other participants described that they had felt very welcomed in Greece and had not experienced any racism or discrimination.

4.3. Why do BIPs from Greece move specifically to the Netherlands?

Our first observation in relation to why BIPs chose specifically the Netherlands is that their decision in most cases was anything but straightforward. Before departing from Greece, most participants had also considered alternative destinations, such as Germany, Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom. The reasons that had led them to move to the Netherlands and not elsewhere were usually complex and can be divided into two categories: reasons related to specific Dutch migration and welfare policies, and reasons related to broader socio-economic factors.

Most of the participants described the reception and integration policies in the Netherlands as generally favourable for asylum seekers and refugees. Integration support was by far the most important factor that contributed to their choice, with often cited examples being assistance with learning Dutch, pursuing studies, taking on apprenticeship, or finding a job. Other prominent factors emerging from our analysis included the guaranteed accommodation in a reception centre during the asylum procedure, as well as housing upon one's eventual recognition. This made participants genuinely feel that they would be "*treated like a human being*" in the Netherlands and not left on the street like in Greece or other Member States that they had considered. Lastly, some less prominent factors mentioned by the participants include stable path to citizenship and access to medical care.

The reason I chose the Netherlands was due to the integration program that they offer. […] They support you to integrate into the society by learning the language, by learning some kind of profession that we can use, and work, and find jobs. The uitkering [social welfare] program here is very nice. They help you to integrate into the society, to stand on your feet, and to count on yourself. (Mounir)

Basically, it's safer to live in a country where you can find yourself, a country where you can count on yourself, where you can build up a career. The integration program here is much better than in Greece. They help you to learn the language. They help you to get a house. You won't be thrown on the streets. You can stay in the camp until you find a house. Like, it's not like Greece – once you receive your ID, you are kicked out. Jobs, job opportunities are much higher here. Those are basically the main reasons that made me decide to come to the Netherlands. (Nasser)

As already alluded to in the above quote, when it comes to broader socio-economic factors, our analysis highlights participants' perceptions that in the Netherlands they would have better long-term opportunities to rebuild their lives. BIPs genuinely considered the Netherlands to be a country where one can unfold his/her potential through finding a decent job, continuing one's studies, learning the local language, or as Daud pointed out, a country "*where if you work hard, it will pay you back; if you provide something to the country, the country will double it and bring it back to you*". Participants also genuinely considered Dutch society to be safe, peaceful, welcoming, and therefore easier to integrate into, which was juxtaposed by some participants with experiences of racism or discrimination they had had in Greece. Less prominent but nevertheless consistent across participants were references to the Netherlands as a place where one could freely exercise his individual freedoms (speech, religion, raising one's children, etc.).

The reason why we left our countries is for safety. And safety is not just breathing. Safety is more, like, to have… to have a future. Not just living and doing under fear of… Fear comes with everything. But here in the Netherlands now I have the right to study, I have the right to work, I have the right to build up something for myself, for my kids in the future, for my wife. (Bilal)

It is important to clarify that in line with previous findings from studies on the secondary movement of asylum seekers, participants' decisions to move specifically to the Netherlands were based on their *perceptions* about the country rather than on the objective situation there. Participants' perceptions were at times formed through access to inaccurate or incomplete information that primarily came from the Internet/social media and less so from contacts in the Netherlands. This led to misconceptions among BIPs regarding both the Dutch migration/welfare policies and the broader socio-economic prospects that the country offered. As an example, some BIPs had chosen to move to the Netherlands – along with other reasons, of course – because they incorrectly assumed that the asylum procedure there was "*short*", that family reunification was easy, or that they could obtain Dutch citizenship in just three years.

Contrary to our expectations, social connections in the Netherlands did not emerge as a crucial factor influencing participants' choice of destination. Most participants (nine out of fourteen) had either relatives or friends in the Netherlands who indeed had played some role in BIPs' decision-making. However, participants' relationship with these contacts was either not close, or in the cases where it was, it served primarily as a channel of (inaccurate at times) information – in addition to the abovementioned primary role of the Internet/social media – rather than as source of practical support. Staying with relatives or friends in the Netherlands for a longer period was exceptional; almost all participants had gone to Ter Apel and applied for asylum either directly or very shortly after their arrival to the country. It is also noteworthy that some participants had chosen to move to the Netherlands despite not having any close contacts there, and even though they had relatives in other Member States. These findings cast doubt on the prominence that social networks commonly receive in scholarly and practitioner discussions on secondary movement, illustrating potential differences as per the factors driving the secondary movement of BIPs compared to (rejected) asylum seekers.

4.5. BIPs' reflections on their decision to leave Greece and seek asylum anew in the Netherlands

In addition to yielding insights into when and why BIPs decide to move from Greece to the Netherlands, our analysis also sheds light on how BIPs assessed themselves this decision, both at the time when it was taken in Greece and after they had already spent some time in the Netherlands.

For most participants, the choice to leave Greece and by extension abandon their secure yet evidently hollow refugee status there was not an easy one. Rather, the BIPs in our sample had had different concerns about their onward journey before departing from Greece. For Bilal, for example, going

once again through the pressure and uncertainty of the asylum procedure and experiencing the fear of potentially being sent back to Afghanistan was no less than a "*torture*". Yet, because of his precarious living situation in Greece, he considered that he had no other choice but to seek asylum anew in the Netherlands. Similarly, Anousha shared that albeit necessary, the decision to leave Greece after having spent more than three years there was "*very difficult and painful*". In her case, what led to this decision was concerns about the safety of her family, which had received multiple threats but no adequate reaction or support from the authorities. Overall, most participants had reluctantly accepted that despite the risks that secondary movement entails, it is still preferable compared to what Greece had offered and held in store for them.

Because this feeling, this stress [of going through the asylum procedure again], it's too much, man! It's really too much… It's consuming, it's… Especially if you don't have anyone. For example, some people have people in Germany, have people in France, have people… even here, in Netherlands. So, if they get rejected, […] they go with a friend or something. Me – where am I going? Where do I go? You know it's, it's terrifying, it's terrifying… […] if I had these opportunities in Greece, I would never consider going, seeking asylum [in the Netherlands]. (Bilal)

When it comes to BIPs' retrospective reflections on their decision to leave Greece, the views that we recorded were generally divided between two positions. On the one hand, some participants felt genuinely disappointed by the lengthy processing times in the Netherlands which they had not anticipated, partially because of being misled by inaccurate information as explained earlier. For example, Mounir, who had been waiting for more than 15 months for his asylum interview with the IND, described feeling frustrated by the inability to move forward with any of his plans regarding employment and education, as if his life was "*frozen*". Ekram also expressed his disappointment with the protracted asylum procedure in the Netherlands, adding to it his concerns about the rise of the far-right, racism, and anti-Muslim sentiments in the country. On the other hand, while equally dissatisfied with the long processing times, other participants had seemingly accepted them as preferable to the alternative of remaining in Greece and enduring further adversities. After getting familiar with the notable differences between the Greek and the Dutch reception systems, these participants were convinced that moving to the Netherlands had been the right decision.

One particularly intriguing finding emerged from the answers that participants provided when asked if there was anything that could have made them remain in Greece and not travelling onward. Some participants – including those who originally had had

another country of destination in mind – could not imagine any reasons that could have made them settle in Greece. Having also lived in the Netherlands for a while, they were confident that Greece would never offer them the same living conditions or opportunities. Most of the BIPs we spoke with, however, replied that they would have stayed in Greece if they had received adequate integration support, including help with finding accommodation, employment, and learning Greek. Other factors that these participants mentioned as potential reasons that could have made them remain in Greece were having a decent job, opportunities to continue one's studies, and a stable path to citizenship.

If I had a chance, an opportunity to build up a career, to have a life, the same integration programs that are provided here in the Netherlands, if it was provided in Greece – yes, I would definitely stay in Greece. Who wants to go through, like, the entire procedure all over again? Yeah, I would definitely choose to stay if I had the same opportunities, the same kind of support, the same kind of health, medical care, integration, job opportunities, learning the language... Yeah, I would stay. (Nasser)

I could be staying in Greece, if I had a little support from the government to integrate into the society, to learn the language, to find a job. And yes, I would consider staying. (Chadli)

If Greece was giving us the same integration program that the Netherlands provides, the same – learning the language, being helped to be integrated into the society, having a social worker who helps you until you find your way, having opportunities, job opportunities, getting the opportunity to be a citizen, not just having like the residence permit and being an asylum seeker, no, having like an actual chance to get the citizenship – yeah, I would definitely stay in Greece. (Khalid)

Finally, while probing into BIPs' concerns regarding their decision to move to the Netherlands, we stumbled upon another intriguing finding. More specifically, our participants found the Dutch asylum procedure particularly strict, in stark contrast to their experience with the Greek asylum procedure. Some participants had not had an asylum interview in Greece at all, while those who had had one commonly described it as rather short, "*easy*", "*not go[ing] into too much detail*", and with the authorities accepting claimants' statements without requiring additional evidence. On the contrary, the asylum interview in the Netherlands was long, "*very strict*", and resembled a proper investigation. For Ekram, whose views were echoed by other BIPs, such differences were indicative that in the Greek asylum procedure claimants were treated as "*something to get rid of*": "*all that they want is to finish your procedure, to close your file, and send you away*". In this respect, while our study does not provide evidence that the asylum procedure in Greece causes secondary movement to other countries, it certainly suggests that it might be a potential intervening factor. In any case, further research into the reasons for and the consequences of the notable discrepancies between the Greek and the Dutch asylum procedures is warranted, especially in view of the broader implications such discrepancies may have.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

While the recent notable increase of the secondary movement of BIPs from Greece has significant political, legal, economic, and protection-related implications, it remains understudied. Consequently, in their search for explanations and solutions, policymakers may find the option of borrowing insights from studies on the secondary movements of asylum seekers as rather appealing. Although such an approach may be helpful in some respects, it may also pose risks of generating misconceptions that can eventually translate into flawed policies.

The findings presented in this report are instructive in this regard. In a nutshell, they suggest that the main drivers of BIPs' secondary movement from Greece are the adverse reception conditions and the lack of integration support in the country. Contrary to the common assumption that most protection seekers arriving in Greece are fixated upon "greener pastures" farther west, most of the participants in our study had decided to leave Greece only after they had been exposed to the risk of destitution, with some of them having left the country rather reluctantly. When it comes to their choice of destination, the participants in our study had taken multiple policy and socio-economic factors under account, relying on imperfect information. Again, in contrast to the expectations we had based on insights from studies on the secondary movement of asylum seekers, family and other connections in the Netherlands did not emerge as an important factor explaining BIPs' decisions. Lastly, perhaps the most intriguing finding of our study is the willingness of most participants to settle in Greece regardless of their adverse reception experiences, had they been provided proper integration support.

The nuances that emerged through participants' accounts emphasise the need to draw an important distinction. On the one hand, albeit a small minority, some BIPs in our sample had either little or no intention to settle in Greece in the long run. This suggests an interpretation of BIPs' secondary movement as at least partially a structural phenomenon underpinned by migrant agency and notable socio-economic and policy discrepancies between Member States. On the other hand, most participants in our study decided to leave Greece overwhelmingly because of the adverse institutional "welcome" that they had experienced there. This suggests that apart from being a structural phenomenon, BIPs' secondary movement is also – and perhaps more importantly – a specifically Greek feature. Such an interpretation is consistent with the apparently much more pronounced secondary movement of BIPs from Greece compared to the respective movement from other Member States at EU's external border.

The distinction between BIPs' secondary movement as a structural phenomenon and as a Greek particularity calls for a corresponding distinction in the necessary policy responses to it. As an inevitable consequence of the differences between Member States, BIPs secondary movement appears rather immune to policies based on deterrence logic. This is a relatively straightforward conclusion when one

considers the results of almost three decades of CEAS reforms largely aimed at addressing the secondary movement of asylum seekers. Instead, a more realistic and pragmatic approach would be to somehow account for both structural differences and migrant agency in the framework governing the mobility of BIPs across Member States, considering also the lessons from the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive for people fleeing Ukraine. For example, at a time of labour shortages in different sectors and in different countries, more flexibility in the procedures regarding BIPs' movement between Member States to take up employment might benefit individuals, businesses, and governments alike. The current recast of the Long-Term Residents Directive may provide opportunities for the incorporation of changes in this direction. Another option might be to creatively use the solidarity mechanism that the Pact on Migration and Asylum establishes, which foresees the relocation of BIPs (in addition to asylum seekers). Ultimately, in the long term, it is difficult to imagine another logical end goal of a truly *common* protection system in the EU but the mutual recognition of positive asylum decisions.

In parallel, as a Greek "idiosyncrasy", the secondary movement of BIPs requires urgent and drastic policy changes in Greece. In this respect, some self-evident recommendations based on our findings are the improvement of the reception conditions for asylum seekers in line with the current EU standards, the reconsideration of the "30-day rule" regarding the termination of material support and the exit of the reception system after recognition, and the establishment of a functioning integration program that would help BIPs get back on their feet in the short term, and become self-fulfilled members of society in the long term. For example, the apparent lack of connection between BIPs' aspirations and skills, and the significant shortages in different sectors of the Greek labour market, is rather paradoxical. Importantly, our findings suggest that any reforms pertaining to BIPs situation in Greece must be comprehensive and address the entire period that these individuals spend in the country: from their arrival, through their asylum procedure and recognition, and up to their eventual permanent settlement and acquisition of citizenship.

On a final note, addressing BIPs' secondary movements simultaneously as a structural phenomenon and as a Greek particularity in line with the above suggestions appears beneficial from multiple perspectives. For BIPs, it can open greater and more realistic possibilities to build one's future in Greece, if one wishes to do so for one or the other reason, while also opening more opportunities for those who would like to pursue a career or studies in another Member State. For Member States, it can gradually replace the current conflict-ridden system with one where BIPs would be valued for their contribution to addressing labour shortages, rather than being treated as a burden shifted by one Member State onto another's reception system. Finally, for the CEAS at large, it can at last put the emphasis where it must be – on the solidarity and mutual trust between Member States.

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Appendix

1. Can you briefly describe your experience in Greece?
2. Did your life in Greece change after you received refugee status/subsidiary protection there, and if so, how?
    - Inquire about the total length of stay in Greece and the length of stay after being granted protection.
3. When did you decide to come to the Netherlands and seek protection here?
    - Inquire if the decision was made already in the country of origin or 'en route' (before arriving to the EU, while in Greece, after).
    - Inquire if the decision was made before or after being granted protection in Greece.
4. Why didn't you stay in Greece after you received refugee status/subsidiary protection there?
    - Inquire what specific policy-related or broader socio-economic factors influenced the decision to leave, even though the respondent had received protection status.
    - Inquire what – if anything – would have made the respondent stay in Greece.
5. How did you travel to the Netherlands?
    - Inquire about the cost of the journey and any concerns about it (e.g., border controls, etc.).
6. Why did you choose to come to the Netherlands specifically?
    - Inquire if the respondent had previous knowledge or assumptions about policy-related (family reunification possibilities, housing, welfare, schools, etc.) or broader socio-economic aspects (work opportunities, work conditions, etc.).
    - Inquire about the source of information.
    - Inquire about the role of relatives/contacts/social networks in the Netherlands. If relatives – did the respondent know about/use the Dublin procedure for family reunification before receiving protection?

- Inquire if the respondent considered alternative destinations, and if so, why.

7. In retrospect, how would you asses your decision to come to the Netherlands?

   - Inquire about concerns related to the outcome of the asylum application in the Netherlands, being transferred back to Greece, future settlement in the Netherlands, etc.

8. Can you compare the asylum procedure in Greece with the one in the Netherlands? [*added after the first interview*]

9. Is there anything else related to our conversation that you would like to add?

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