



Project is co-financed by the European Community under Migration Management-Solidarity

in Action

“AEGEAS” PROJECT

Enhancing reception capacity for migration flows at border areas of Greece (external EU maritime and land borders)

**Migration Management – Solidarity in Action
Assistance to Reception Challenges/Preparatory Actions 2007
European Commission, DG Justice, Freedom and Security,
Direction B: Immigration, Asylum and Borders**

Implementing Partners: Prefecture of Samos (project coordinator), Prefecture of Lesbos, Prefecture of Chios, Prefecture of Evros, Ministry of Public Order, Ministry of Merchant Marine, UNHCR in Greece

Geographical areas covered by Project: Islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos (Aegean sea in the SE Mediterranean region) and the area of Evros (northern Greek land borders)

Budget: EUR472.322 of which 79.74%: EUR376.640 is covered by the European Commission

Dates: Official starting date 15 February 2008, final Grant Agreement signed in May 2008. Scheduled to be completed in February 2009 with a requested extension for June 2009.

Brief Description of the Aegeas Project

The main aim of the Project is to enhance the reception capacity of Greece at border areas receiving alarmingly increased mixed migration flows (Samos and Lesbos have seen a 120% increase of influx in 2008 as compared to 2007). The Project uses special practices and exchange of know-how in coping with increased irregular migration. The three islands participating in the programme are receiving steadily increasing flows of maritime irregular migration, while Evros receives an ever larger number of asylum seekers -including Iraqis- arriving from Turkey to Greece. At the absence of any organized reception capacity, the project responds to an alarmingly urgent need for improvement. It concerns the establishment of local coordination and response mechanisms, as well as permanent support teams in the 4 border locations. The Project has not only started to improve conditions at these four geographical points of crucial importance but has also created the potential to be replicated, as practice and structure, at other border locations and possibly also adopted at institutional level. From its part, UNHCR is providing, through its roving experts and its experienced staff, capacity building at all levels as well as specialized training for authorities and all involved actors.

Objectives

- Creation of a model response structure to mixed flows, particularly in addressing immediate needs of target population.
- Improvement of coordination at local level, among different locations experiencing similar demands, and between local and central level.
- Improvement of reception conditions, with the provision of organised medical care, psychological, social and language assistance.
- Improvement of detention conditions.
- Enhanced screening mechanisms for the identification of asylum seekers and vulnerable groups and the processing of asylum claims.
- Improvement of the provision of legal support, counselling and information to the target population, in asylum and migration aspects.



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- Improvement of long-term support structures for vulnerable groups (women, children, victims of torture/trafficking) through appropriate referral systems.
- Enhanced expertise of local authorities (police, coast guard, prefecture, municipality, hospital) in key asylum and migration issues, including human rights issues.

Results so far

So far, the actions undertaken within the project have gone as planned, and have had a significantly positive impact on the capacity of the prefectures involved to deal with the challenges of migration flows.

Specifically the most important initiatives and results have been:

- The partnership has **employed and trained teams of permanent professional staff** (lawyer, doctor or nurse, social worker, or general caretaker, interpreters) in order **to enhance reception capacity** and the provision of services (legal, social, medical, psychological, language and logistical) as well as actual accommodation / conditions of detention. The Local Assistance Teams have all received specialized training by the UNHCR and orientation to perform their duties efficiently.
- By organizing coordination meetings and educational seminars, **cooperation is enhanced between local interlocutors** (police, coast guard, prefecture, municipality, hospital, NGOs) for a coordinated response to the influx of migration flows.
- Through planned meetings, seminars and visits, the Aegeas project gradually developed the communication and encouraged a **network created among border locations** for exchange of views, good practices and problem-sharing. A good example is the channel of communication created between staff working in the detention centers which resulted to a valuable exchange of know-how and best practices.
- **Improvement of actual reception conditions.** In total, from the 1st of May 2008 until the 30th of November 2008, social support and counseling, medical support, addressing of immediate needs and legal counseling were provided to 11513 beneficiaries (7860 men, 1458 women and 2195 children).
- The lawyers of Aegeas, while providing support, screening and counseling to cases of **unaccompanied children**, exercised continuous pressure to police and judicial authorities to speed up the guardianship procedures for the necessary transfer of the unaccompanied minors to the specialized structures for their accommodation.
- The lawyers and social workers of Aegeas exercised continuous pressure to police and Ministry of Health, which is responsible for **accommodation** of asylum seekers to speed up the guardianship procedures, for the necessary transfer of the asylum seekers to the **reception centers**.
- Screening, identification of and briefing to **victims of trafficking** and victims of **torture**, support and referral to appropriate health and hospital services as well as to expert organizations in Athens.
- Interventions for **medical support** for specific cases (transportation to Athens hospital). Exercise of pressure for the immediate medical check up of all incoming migrants.
- **Asylum procedure:** Legal counseling and support was provided to asylum applicants in order to improve access to the asylum procedure at border areas. In total, within these 7 months (from 1/05/2008 until 30/11/2008) 156 asylum applications were submitted, 105 asylum seekers received the “pink card” (card attesting the status of the ‘asylum seeker’), while 51 withdrew their claim. In 2007 (12 months) the total numbers of asylum applications submitted from these four entry points were 57.
- **Improvement of detention conditions.** Special care for pregnant women and direct and immediate coordination among the social workers of the detention centers and the hospital staff to ensure the necessary medical checks; continuous monitoring with the Police Directorate for the release of families from detention center.
- Organising of a system of provision of first aid items, jointly to all detention centers



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- For the first time in detention centers there was sufficient provision of interpretation services. This facilitated, in a significant way, the profiling and screening mechanisms.
- Demarches to the Ministries of Interior and Merchant Marine for the creation of a system of rational transfer to existing detention facilities, according to their actual capacity. The said activity was implemented for the first time in Greece: from 1 October to 30 November 2008, detainees were transferred from the detention centre of Lesbos to the centre of Chios, in order to decongest the former. Total number of persons transferred: 311
- Pressure exercising to the police staff and the guards for respecting the right of detainees to access the yard on a daily basis as well as to have access to a telephone, in all detention centers involved.
- Compiling of a new information leaflet concerning the operation of each centre, the rules and the staff to whom detainees should address themselves (its translation is also foreseen in English, French, Arabic, Farsi and Turkish). The leaflet was drafted in cooperation with the local police directorates.

The extension of the Aegeas project will involve the implementation of remaining actions such as the creation of a video, the continuation of meetings, trainings and seminars, as well as a trip to Lampedusa for a trans-national exchange of views and best practice.

The Aegeas Project, although at its initial phase, proved a well planned and thoroughly executed project of acknowledged value, since it has succeeded in setting the basis for improving one of the country's most serious and neglected problems, the management of the increased influx of migration flows at the most frequent entry points of the country. In this aspect, it constitutes a concrete step in the direction of helping the country fulfil its legal and humanitarian obligations at a national, European and international level. At the same time, the Aegeas Project is in dire need of continuous support and endorsement at both national and European level. Financial and political support is necessary in order for the Project to succeed in its long term goal of establishing a permanent and gradually institutionalised structure for responding to reception needs of migration flows.

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