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Motivations, experiences and consequences of returns and readmissions policy: revealing and developing effective alternatives



Executive Summary

RR on the Ground: Implementation of the RR Policy, its Impact, and State Agents' Assessment and Perception

Case Study: **Greece**

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This document provides a concise summary of the key findings of RR on the Ground (WP4). For detailed analysis, evidence, and comprehensive insights, please refer to the full report. The information in this summary should not be considered complete or fully representative of the entire study.

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Executive Summary – the case study of Greece

1. Introduction

This report discusses the effectiveness and implications of the Returns and Readmission (RR) policy in Greece from the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in its implementation. The study, conducted through interviews and focus groups with state and non-state actors in carrying out RR measures, and to analyze their views on the policy’s effectiveness and overall impact.

To achieve this, the research involved interviews and focus groups with agents and actors working in the RR and detention fields in Greece, providing valuable insights into the policy’s strengths and weaknesses from the ground level.

Participants voiced strong criticisms regarding the effectiveness of the RR policy, with a major concern being the lack of transparency in the decision-making process. Many highlighted poor communication between authorities and migrants, particularly regarding return and detention decisions. The lack of clear information about these processes led to confusion and a sense of uncertainty among migrants, compounding the already difficult circumstances they faced. Another significant issue raised by participants was that, aside from assisted voluntary returns and some chartered return flights arranged in collaboration with countries of origin, the majority of planned returns fail to materialize. This gap between policy intentions and actual outcomes calls into question the effectiveness of the RR framework in achieving its goals.

Furthermore, the implementation of RR and detention measures has resulted in challenging living conditions for many migrants. These conditions are exacerbated for those whose asylum applications are rejected, leading to a heightened sense of uncertainty about their future. Several interviewees noted that this precarious situation often drives rejected asylum seekers to consider illegal routes of departure, risking their safety and well-being. The combination of harsh living conditions, limited prospects for legal status, and the looming threat of detention and deportation has created a volatile environment that can push migrants toward dangerous alternatives.

While there are alternative legal pathways available, such as the three-year law, after it received an extension, only until the end of 2024 and the seasonal agricultural work permits, the implementation of these options is hindered by bureaucratic obstacles. Participants emphasized the complexity and inefficiency of the procedures involved in securing these permits, which often result in delays and missed opportunities for migrants. These bureaucratic hurdles add another layer of frustration for both migrants and the agents tasked with managing their cases, further highlighting the systemic challenges within the RR policy framework.

In conclusion, the findings from the interviews and focus groups paint a picture of an RR policy that struggles to meet its objectives and that crucially often leads to human rights violations. While there are some positive aspects, such as seasonal work permits as a possible alternative route, the overall implementation of the policy is marked by a lack of transparency, poor communication, and significant bureaucratic inefficiencies. These challenges not only hinder the effectiveness of the RR policy but also contribute to adverse conditions for migrants, including potential rights violations and the risk of illegal migration.

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2. (Im)mobility and Deportation Procedures

According to the findings the process of decision making is described as “obscure” leaving many migrants uninformed about their legal status and possible options. Many decisions do not occur as planned, leading to legal limbo and pushing some to irregular migration.

3. Rights and Protection

Fundamental rights protections are inconsistent. While some monitor mechanisms that exist, oversight remains weak. Legal assistance is limited, with migrants having to secure representation in cases, independently. Reports of fraud and manipulation highlight vulnerabilities within the system, while human rights violations in detention centers persists.

4. Living Conditions in Detention Centres

Migrants in pre-removal centres endure overcrowding, poor sanitation and inadequate healthcare. Though, some facilities have been improved many remain in remote areas, limiting access to essential services.

5. Social Connections

Research findings reveal that isolation is experienced within detention. Family members are not separated within detention and in case of proof, are placed together.

6. Compliance and Resistance

Research shows that most migrants comply with RR measures, believing that it may improve their legal status. However, prolonged uncertainty and poor conditions have led to riots and protests in certain facilities over the years, reflecting a broader dissatisfaction with the system.

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