



Concern Over the Worsening Climate Against Refugees and Migrants in Political and Public Discourse

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The Racist Violence Recording Network (the Network) is increasingly concerned by a noticeable shift in public discourse towards xenophobia, racist rhetoric, and diminishing adherence to fundamental principles of the rule of law, in the context of migration and asylum management in the country.

Recently, the public and media discourse around refugees and migrants, particularly in relation to the rise in new arrivals via Libya to Crete – has reflected a growing climate of anxiety and polarization. This has been further fuelled by statements from political leaders, political parties, and public authorities. The use of derogatory terms such as "clandestines," the portrayal of new arrivals as an "invasion" and a "population replacement" attempt, and the dissemination of misleading claims about privileges and benefits supposedly given to migrants and refugees at the expense of others are just a few examples having a negative impact on local communities and fuelling social division. Such narratives contribute to the portrayal of these individuals as a threat to society, instrumentalize fear and undermine social cohesion. As the Network's findings have repeatedly shown, this type of rhetoric may normalize, encourage, and ultimately escalate intolerance and racist violence.

The arrival of refugees and migrants in Crete has put pressure on local capacities and communities, particularly in the absence of an organized reception facility in the area. The Network has emphasized many times in the past, in similar situations, that the rise in xenophobia is often linked to the lack of a coherent, well-resourced and human-centred refugee and migration policy. Such a policy would help prevent overcrowding and avoid exposing newly arrived individuals to precarious conditions—challenges that ultimately affect both refugees and migrants as well as local communities. A recent concerning incident, in which flares were thrown at a group of newly arrived persons temporarily hosted in a stadium in Rethymno, underscores this point. The incident was rightly and promptly condemned by local authorities.

Policies such as the suspension of asylum applications for those entering from North Africa, as well as proposals to criminalize irregular entry or stay in the country, risk further targeting refugees and migrants. While States have the right to manage their borders, such measures raise serious legal and ethical concerns – particularly when combined with narratives that depict all new arrivals as "illegal invaders" and ignore the obligation to provide international protection to refugees. The right to seek asylum is a fundamental human right, enshrined in international, European and national law, and applies to everyone regardless of how or where they arrive in a country. Even at times of migratory pressure, States must ensure that people seeking asylum have access to asylum procedures and are not returned, prior to a final decision on their asylum claim, to a place where they would face threats to their life or freedom. This would breach the principle of non-refoulement – an essential pillar of international law from which no derogation is permitted.

Competent authorities play a critical role in ensuring a coordinated response and adopting policies for the dignified and lawful reception of those arriving in the country, as well as in preventing and combatting the phenomena that lead to the dehumanization and targeting of "others" —refugees and

migrants—based on origin, nationality, or religion. In recent years, Greece has experienced the surge of organized racist violence, which posed a threat to public safety and fundamental rights—a phenomenon that, by no means, has been eradicated. We therefore urge all those who, especially in institutional roles, through their actions or statements foster an environment conducive to such incidents, to reflect on the grave responsibility they bear.

Political leadership, institutional representatives, and the media have a shared responsibility to promote public dialogue on migration and asylum that is evidence-based, measured, and rooted in the principles of international law and respect for the human dignity of all.

The responsibility to combat racism and xenophobia lies with all of us—and first and foremost with the institutions that express, formulate and implement policies at central and local level.

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The **Racist Violence Recording Network** was established in 2011 by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. The Network comprises of 55 members: Aitima, Solidarity Now, Antigone -Information and Documentation Centre, University of Aegean Anti-Racist Observatory, Arsis, Doctors of the World (MdM), Amnesty International, Network for Children's Rights, Network for Social Support of Refugees and Immigrants, "Pleiades - Hellenic Action for Human Rights", Hellenic League for Human Rights, Hellenic Red Cross, Greek Council for Refugees, Greek Forum of Migrants, Greek Forum of Refugees, Human Rights Commission of the Bar Association of Rhodes, Positive Voice, Medical Intervention, Caritas Athens, Caritas Hellas, Centre for Research on Women's Issues "Diotima", "Babel" Day Centre, Centre for the Support of Repatriated and Migrants - Ecumenical Refugee Program, Network for the Support of Refugee and Migrant Rights (Patras), World Without War and Violence, LATHRA? - Solidarity Committee for Chios refugees, METAction, Rainbow Families, Group of Lawyers for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants, Group of Lawyers for the Support of Refugee and Migrant Rights (Thessaloniki), Homosexual and Lesbian Community of Greece, Association of Afghans United In Greece, Association of Social Workers of Greece, Greek Transgender Support Association, Faros tou kosmou, Forum of Migrants in Crete, Refugee Support Aegean, Act Up Hellas, ASANTE, Colour Youth - LGBTQ Youth Community of Athens, Generation 2.0 RED, HIAS in Greece, HumanRights360, Melissa Network, PRAKSIS, A21, Simeio for studying and fighting the far-right, Lesvos Solidarity, Steps, Legal Centre Lesvos, Aegean Migrant Solidarity | Christian Peacemaker Teams, the Panhellenic Confederation of the Greek Roma "Ellan Passe", International Rescue Committee (IRC), Centre for the Study of Social and Humanitarian Crises (CSSHC), Thessaloniki Pride, I Have Rights