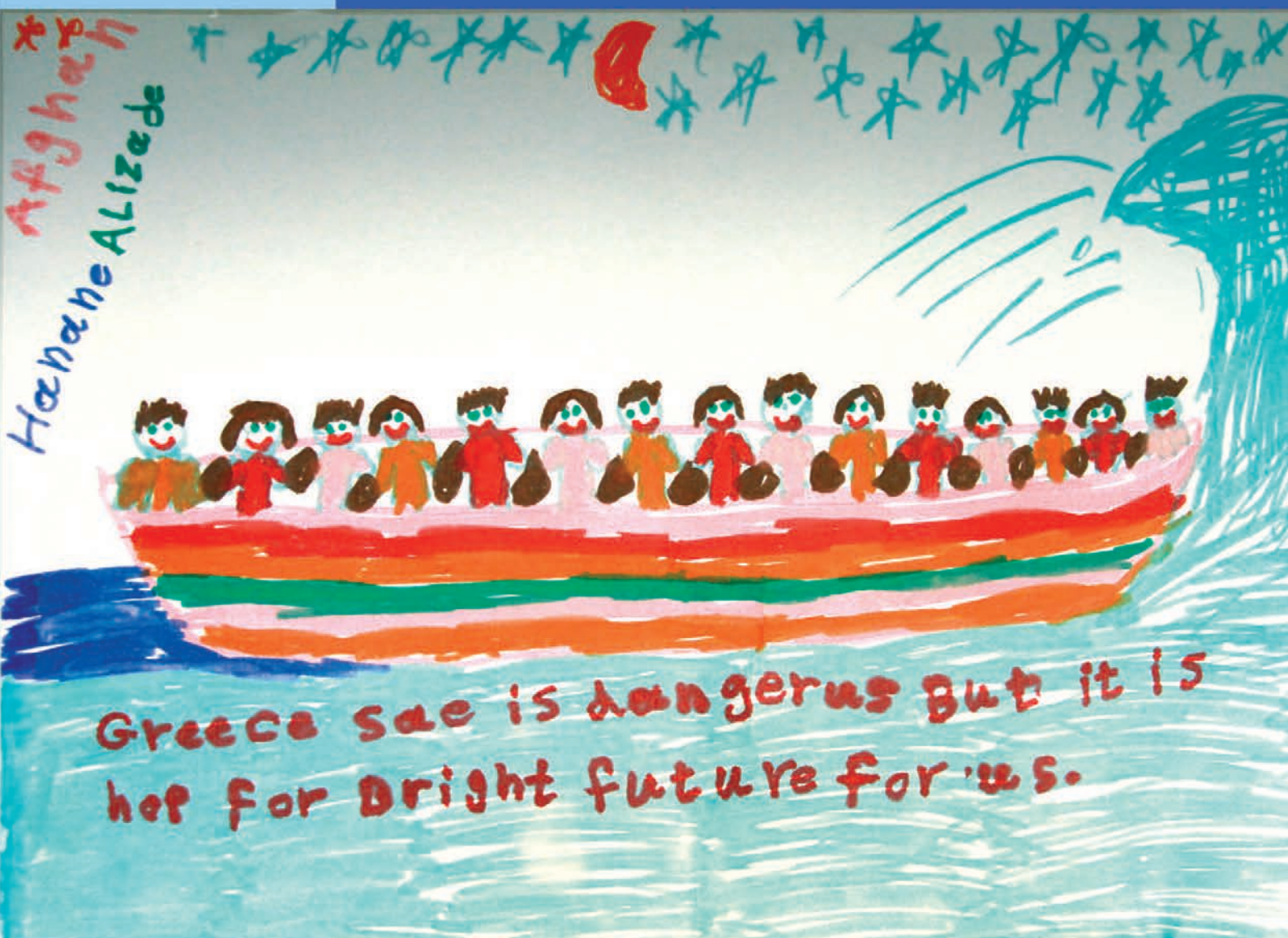


Greece: assessing health-system capacity to manage large influxes of migrants



REPUBLIC OF GREECE

Joint report on a mission
of the Ministry of Health of Greece,
Hellenic Center for Disease Control
and Prevention and WHO
Regional Office for Europe



Greece: assessing health-system capacity to manage sudden large influxes of migrants

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Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention
and WHO Regional Office for Europe



Abstract

Further to the arrival of large influxes of migrants at Greece's land and sea borders, the Greek Government invited the WHO Regional Office for Europe to organize a joint mission between 15 and 19 December 2014 to assess health system capacity to manage large influxes of migrants. The mission aims were threefold: to assess the ongoing preparedness and response activities of the local health system; to plan ad hoc technical assistance if required; and to pilot the draft WHO toolkit for assessing health system capacity to manage large influxes of migrants in the acute phase. The members of the assessment team undertook site visits at first reception centres and pre-departure facilities, and conducted interviews with all key stakeholders. From their findings, their main recommendations include improvements in living conditions in migrant centres, the preparation of a national multisectoral contingency plan, a harmonized health data collection system and a strengthened migrant immunization policy.

Keywords

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Contributors

Members of the mission team

WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development, WHO Regional Office for Europe

- Dr Eleni Antoniadou (Temporary Adviser)
- Ms Sara Barragán Montes
- Mr Matteo Dembech
- Dr Santino Severoni
- Dr Abigail Sheffer

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Stockholm, Sweden

- Dr Jonathan Suk

International Centre for Migration, Health and Development, Geneva, Switzerland

- Dr Giuseppe Annunziata

Peer reviewers and contributors, intern

WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development, WHO Regional Office for Europe

- Ms Kate Langley

Abbreviations

| | |
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| FRC | first reception centre |
| FRONTEX | European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union |
| KEELPNO | Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention |
| NAHOC | National Health Operations Center |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PHAME | Public Health Aspects of Migration in Europe |
| RABIT | Rapid Border Intervention Teams |
| UNHCR | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |

Executive summary

In view of the increasing number of migrants entering Greece by land and sea, the Greek Government invited the WHO Regional Office for Europe to conduct a joint mission to assess the current capacity of the health system to manage large influxes of migrants.

Greece represents a gateway into the European Union for thousands of migrants, and pressures are accordingly high at its borders, especially the border with Turkey. The external frontier of the European Union between Turkey and Greece is made up of a 203 km land border in the Evros region in the north and a sea border in the Aegean in the south.

Migration pressures decreased throughout 2012 and 2013: however, the Arab Spring and the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic have had a tremendous effect on migrants' movement patterns and led to an increase in the number of migrants crossing into Greece in 2014.

The construction in 2012 of a 12.5 km razor wire fence in the area of Evros, along the border with Turkey, resulted in a rise of over 220% in apprehensions at the sea borders in the eastern Aegean Sea and Dodecanese islands in 2014. The pressure of migration flows became so great in the Aegean Sea that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) referred to the situation in Greece as one taking on the characteristics of a humanitarian crisis.

The influxes of migrants to Greece can be described as a series of medium- to large-scale events that happen repeatedly, often simultaneously, and increase significantly in frequency during the summer months. Large numbers of individuals enter the country either by sea (usually the Aegean) or across the land border with Turkey. The groups of migrants entering the country vary in numbers from tens to several hundreds. The large geographical area affected by the events and the multiplicity of entry points pose particular challenges of emergency management. These range from the need to coordinate different actors, including various institutional bodies belonging to different ministries, to the logistical complexity of the search-and-rescue and settlement processes.

Recommendations

1. Establish and maintain minimum living conditions in all types of existing migrant centres, in accordance with the right to life with dignity.
2. Define and implement a national multisectoral contingency plan in case of influxes of migrants, including a clear chain of command and control.
3. Define and implement a clear migrant immunization policy.

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