

Community Rights in Greece

Activity code 1.3.18

Activity conducted by **Community Rights in Greece** in collaboration with **Open Paths Athens**.

Executive Summary of our close door meeting on 26/04/2025.

This report examines the mental health impacts faced by undocumented migrants in Greece, based on a series of community meetings where participants shared their personal lived experiences. The findings highlight significant mental health challenges, including anxiety, fear, discrimination, and the lack of access to culturally sensitive mental health care. Through personal narratives, the report sheds light on the psychological toll of living without legal documentation and outlines key recommendations for improving the support system for this vulnerable group.

Introduction

Undocumented migrants in Greece face unique mental health challenges exacerbated by legal insecurity, fear of deportation, and social exclusion. Despite growing recognition of the psychological impacts of migration, the specific mental health needs of undocumented migrants have been underexplored in Greece. This report uses a narrative approach to document the lived experiences of undocumented migrants, captured during community meetings in Athens. The aim is to understand how their legal status affects their mental health, identify barriers to accessing mental health care, and provide actionable recommendations for policy and service improvements.

The Greek Legal Framework

Before we dive in the specifics of our meeting there is a need to form a basis on the Greek legal framework regarding the access of undocumented migrants to health services (mental health services included). In Greece, access to mental health services for undocumented migrants is governed by a combination of domestic laws, international obligations, and EU directives. The following are the key laws regarding their rights and access:

- Greek Constitution (Article 21) – Guarantees the right to health for all individuals, including undocumented migrants, though implementation can vary.
- Law 4368/2016 (National Health System Reform) – Explicitly states that undocumented migrants have the right to access emergency and essential healthcare, including mental health services, under the same conditions as Greek citizens.
- Presidential Decree 106/2012 – Implements EU Directive 2011/95/EU (Qualification Directive) and ensures access to healthcare for asylum seekers, including mental health support.

- Law 4636/2019 (International Protection Act) – Strengthens healthcare access for asylum seekers, including psychological and psychiatric care.

Regarding the access to Mental Health Services the following points depict what undocumented individuals should expect:

- Undocumented migrants can receive emergency mental healthcare (e.g., crisis intervention, acute psychiatric care) in public hospitals.
- Non-emergency mental health services (e.g., therapy, counseling) are theoretically available but often face barriers due to administrative hurdles, lack of insurance, and limited resources.
- Some NGOs and humanitarian organizations (e.g., Médecins Sans Frontières, Praksis) provide free mental health support to undocumented migrants.

While Greek law guarantees theoretical access to mental health services for undocumented migrants, practical barriers (administrative, financial, and fear of deportation) often limit real-world access. NGOs play a crucial role in filling gaps, but systemic challenges remain.

In Athens, specifically, undocumented migrants face significant challenges in accessing mental health services, but several public facilities, NGOs, and humanitarian organizations provide some support. The barriers that prohibit access to mental health services are the following:

- Lack of Health Insurance (AMKA) – Undocumented migrants often struggle to register for a Social Security Number (AMKA), which is typically required for accessing public healthcare.
- Fear of Deportation – Many avoid seeking help due to concerns about being reported to authorities.
- Limited Resources – Public mental health services are often overstretched, leading to long waiting times.
- Language barriers – Few public services have interpreters (NGOs are better equipped).
- Long waiting lists – High demand and limited resources delay care.
- Stigma – Mental health taboos in some communities prevent seeking help.

Methodology

This report is based on qualitative data gathered during community meetings held in Athens, Greece. The meetings were facilitated by a licensed therapist and attended by undocumented migrants who shared their personal experiences. The discussions were structured around open-ended questions focusing on the emotional and psychological challenges faced by participants due to their undocumented status. The data was analyzed thematically, identifying key patterns and recurring themes in the narratives. Ethical considerations were prioritized, including informed consent and maintaining confidentiality.

Participant Reflections on Mental Health

The meeting began with a discussion on mental health, focusing on human emotions and experiences rather than medical pathology. The aim was to de-stigmatize mental health and encourage participants to express their feelings freely. Many participants described their emotions and bodily reactions to the statements shared, which allowed them to reflect on their mental states in a safe and non-judgmental space. As one participant shared, “This was the first time I didn’t feel like I was a problem, just a human.” The opportunity to voice their feelings was a powerful moment for many. It was not about their problems, but about how they felt, which helped shift the conversation from stigma to understanding.

Lived Experiences: Key Themes

Fear and Anxiety

One of the central themes discussed during the meeting was the overwhelming fear and anxiety that permeates participants’ daily lives due to their undocumented status. The fear of deportation was particularly pronounced. One participant shared, “I’m scared without papers because the police can catch me and send me back... now I’m afraid they will deport me, they’ve done it to me twice.” Another participant reflected on how this fear had eroded their mental health: “I’ve reached a point where I constantly question my self-worth. Now I don’t sleep much.”

This constant state of fear significantly impacts the emotional and psychological well-being of participants, leading to chronic anxiety, sleep disturbances, and heightened stress.

Experiences of Discrimination and Racism

Racism and discrimination were recurring themes in the participants’ narratives. Many spoke of feeling dehumanized in their daily interactions, particularly in the workplace and in public services. One participant expressed, “I carry the pain of racism every day, even when I go home, it affects my relationships with my children.” Another shared the toll of internalized racism: “They treat us like we are less than human, and it makes you start believing it too.”

These experiences lead to diminished self-worth, internalized shame, and difficulty maintaining relationships. The discrimination faced by participants often exacerbates feelings of isolation and contributes to the erosion of mental health.

Healthcare and Public Services

Access to healthcare is a significant issue for undocumented migrants, who often face discrimination or outright refusal of services. One participant shared their experience in a hospital, saying, “I went to the hospital for help but ended up being dismissed like I wasn’t even human.” Language barriers also posed significant challenges: “When I needed help, the language barrier made it impossible to communicate effectively. I felt lost.”

The lack of culturally competent care in public services leads to further isolation and a deep sense of frustration, particularly when medical needs are dismissed or ignored.

Impact on Families and Children

The emotional toll of being undocumented extends beyond the individual to their families. One participant shared the traumatic experience of having their child removed by authorities, stating, “They took my child from me. They said I was unfit, without even trying to understand my situation.” This highlights the additional layer of stress that undocumented parents experience—fear for their children’s safety and well-being, often compounded by legal insecurities. Moreover, children of undocumented migrants, particularly those born in Greece, face unique challenges. One participant’s child had been subjected to bullying at school: “My child doesn’t feel like they belong here. They’re constantly being told they’re not from here.” This contributes to emotional distress not only for the children but also for parents who feel powerless to protect their children from discrimination.

Religious Discrimination

Religious discrimination also surfaced during the meeting, with participants sharing that their religious practices were often stigmatized. One participant stated, “When we pray or perform our rituals, we are often looked at as strange or unwanted. It’s just another way to isolate us.”

This discrimination, along with the challenges of being undocumented, further alienates migrants from the host society.

Summary of Findings

The lived experiences of undocumented migrants reveal a complex web of mental health challenges, including constant fear, anxiety, discrimination, and lack of access to healthcare. These challenges are compounded by the uncertainty and isolation that come with undocumented status. The following themes emerged as key issues:

- **Fear and anxiety** related to the constant threat of deportation.
- **Discrimination and racism**, which contribute to mental health struggles and a sense of dehumanization.

- **Barriers to accessing healthcare** and public services due to discrimination and language barriers.
- **The impact of undocumented status on families**, particularly on children and parents.

Participants expressed a deep need for improved mental health support and more accessible services that acknowledge and address the specific needs of undocumented migrants.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were proposed to improve the mental health and well-being of undocumented migrants:

1. Culturally Sensitive Mental Health Services

Develop trauma-informed, culturally competent mental health services that cater to the unique experiences of undocumented migrants, addressing both emotional and psychological needs.

2. Improved Reporting Mechanisms for Discrimination

Establish accessible and confidential reporting systems for incidents of discrimination and racism, with clear paths to legal support and redress.

3. Public Awareness Campaigns

Launch campaigns to raise awareness about the mental health challenges faced by undocumented migrants, aiming to reduce stigma and promote empathy within the broader society.

4. Standardization of Public Services

Ensure that all public services, including healthcare, adopt standardized protocols to treat undocumented migrants with respect and dignity, offering equitable services regardless of legal status.

Conclusion

The mental health of undocumented migrants in Greece is profoundly impacted by fear, anxiety, and systemic discrimination. This report has documented the voices of those who face these challenges daily, providing a clear picture of the psychological toll of living in legal limbo. The findings highlight the urgent need for tailored mental health services, better reporting mechanisms for discrimination, and public awareness initiatives to reduce stigma. It is clear that undocumented migrants require better support systems to address their mental health needs and ensure they are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Next Steps

The findings from this report will be used to inform further advocacy and policy recommendations aimed at improving the mental health care and support systems for undocumented migrants in Greece. The voices of the participants will continue to guide this work, ensuring that their experiences are central to any changes in policy or practice.

Sources

1. Greek Legal Framework

- **Greek Constitution (Article 21 - Right to Health)**
<https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/001-156%20aggliko.pdf>
- **Law 4368/2016 (Access to Healthcare for Undocumented Migrants)**
[Official Gazette \(Issue 21/A/12-02-2016\)](#)
- **Presidential Decree 106/2012 (Implementation of EU Directive 2011/95/EU)**
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32011L0095>
- **Law 4636/2019 (International Protection & Healthcare Rights)**
[Official Gazette \(Issue 169/A/01-11-2019\)](#)

2. Reports & NGO Documentation

- **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) - Mental Health Programs in Athens**
<https://www.msf.org/greece>
Reports: "Invisible Suffering" (2021)
- **Praksis - Free Medical & Psychological Services**
<https://www.praksis.gr/en/activities/medical-and-social-support/>
- **Babel Day Center - Mental Health Services**
<https://www.babeldc.gr/en/>
- **SolidarityNow - Blue Refugee Center**
<https://solidaritynow.org/en/blue-center/>
- **ARSIS - Support for Unaccompanied Minors**
<https://arsis.gr/en/what-we-do/>

3. European & International Obligations

- **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) - Article 3 (Prohibition of Inhuman Treatment)**
https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf
- **UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) - Greece Reports**
<https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/>

4. Academic & Policy Studies

- **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) - Healthcare Access for Migrants in Greece**
<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/migration-fundamental-rights-2021>
- **Greek Ombudsman - Reports on Migrant Healthcare Barriers**
<https://www.synigoros.gr/en/resources/docs/immigration-healthcare-2020.pdf>

Public Mental Health Services for Undocumented Migrants

Emergency Care

- Public Hospitals with Psychiatric Wards
 - Undocumented migrants can access emergency psychiatric care (e.g., suicidal crises, psychotic episodes) in hospitals like:
 - "Attikon" General Hospital (Psychiatric Department)
 - "Sotiria" Hospital (specializes in psychiatric and pulmonary diseases)
 - "Dromokaiteio" Psychiatric Hospital (one of the largest in Greece)
 - No AMKA (Social Security Number) required for emergency cases.
 -

Non-Emergency Care (Limited Access)

- Community Mental Health Centers (Κ.Υ.Ψ.Υ.)
 - Some centers provide free consultations, but many require AMKA or legal residency.
 - Exceptions may be made for vulnerable cases (e.g., victims of torture, unaccompanied minors).
- Open Care Centers for Migrants (KSPM)
 - Run by municipalities, offering psychosocial support, but capacity is limited.

NGOs & Free Clinics Providing Mental Health Support

Several organizations in Athens offer free psychological and psychiatric care without requiring legal status:

Major NGOs & Services

- Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) / Doctors Without Borders
 - Runs a mental health clinic in Athens, offering psychotherapy, psychiatric care, and psychosocial support.
 - Focuses on asylum seekers, torture survivors, and vulnerable groups.
 - Location: Central Athens (check their website for exact address).
- Praxis
 - Provides free medical and psychological services through its Polyclinic in Exarchia.
 - Offers counseling, psychiatric evaluations, and referrals.
 - No AMKA required.
- Babel Day Center
 - Specializes in mental health for refugees and migrants, including trauma therapy.

- Multilingual staff (Arabic, Farsi, French, etc.).
- ARSIS (Association for the Social Support of Youth)
 - Focuses on unaccompanied minors and young refugees, offering psychological support.
- SolidarityNow
 - Runs "Blue Refugee Center" in Athens, providing mental health services alongside legal aid.
- Khora Community Center (volunteer-run)
 - Informal mental health support, group therapy, and referrals.

Key Contacts in Athens

- MSF Greece: www.msf.gr
- Praksis Polyclinic: www.praksis.gr
- Babel Day Center: www.babeldc.gr
- ARSIS: www.arsis.gr

Prepared by:

Robert Ian Kibet Ouko Babu: **Open Paths Athens**

George Stefanopoulos: **Community Rights in Greece**

Done 02/05/2025

For further information, please contact:

NO ONE IS ILLEGAL - MIGRATION IS HUMAN

Address: Ioannou Drosopoulou 229, 112 55 Athens, Greece.

Office: +302111823481

Mobile: +306946500347

E-mail: info@community-rg.org

Website: www.community-rg.org

Activity supported by PICUM - Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants