

“Between Protection and Exclusion: The Bureaucratisation of Refugee Vulnerability in Greece”

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Fafo-webinar

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Vulnerability
Revisited: Refugee
Resettlement in Policy
and Practice



Overview

Goal:

Examine the evolving role of vulnerability in the Greek asylum system following two major turning points: the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement and the post-2019 legal reforms introduced by the Greek government.

Research questions:

- How is “vulnerability” defined, interpreted, and applied
- How have bureaucratic practices of vulnerability assessment evolved
- What are the wider implications of using vulnerability as a screening tool



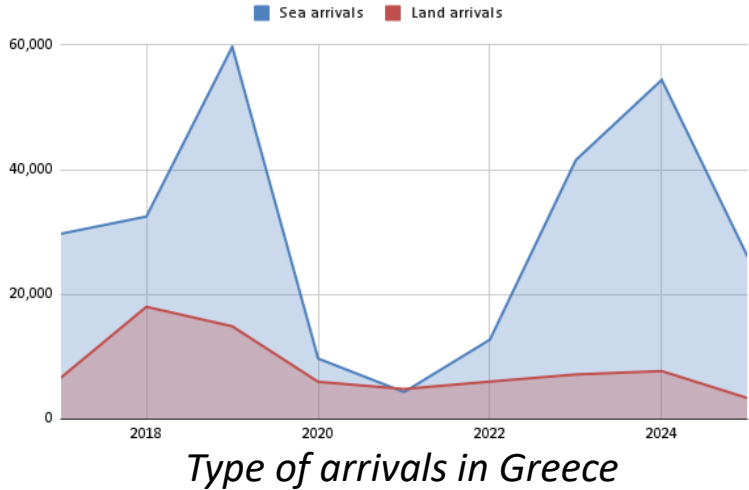
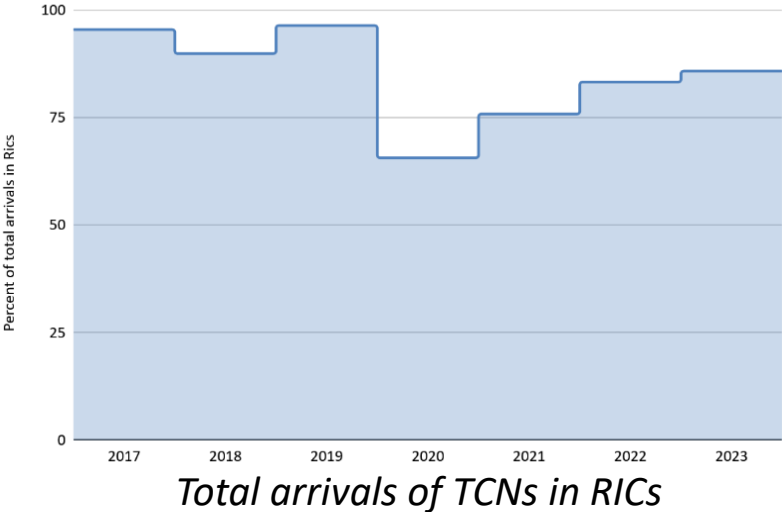
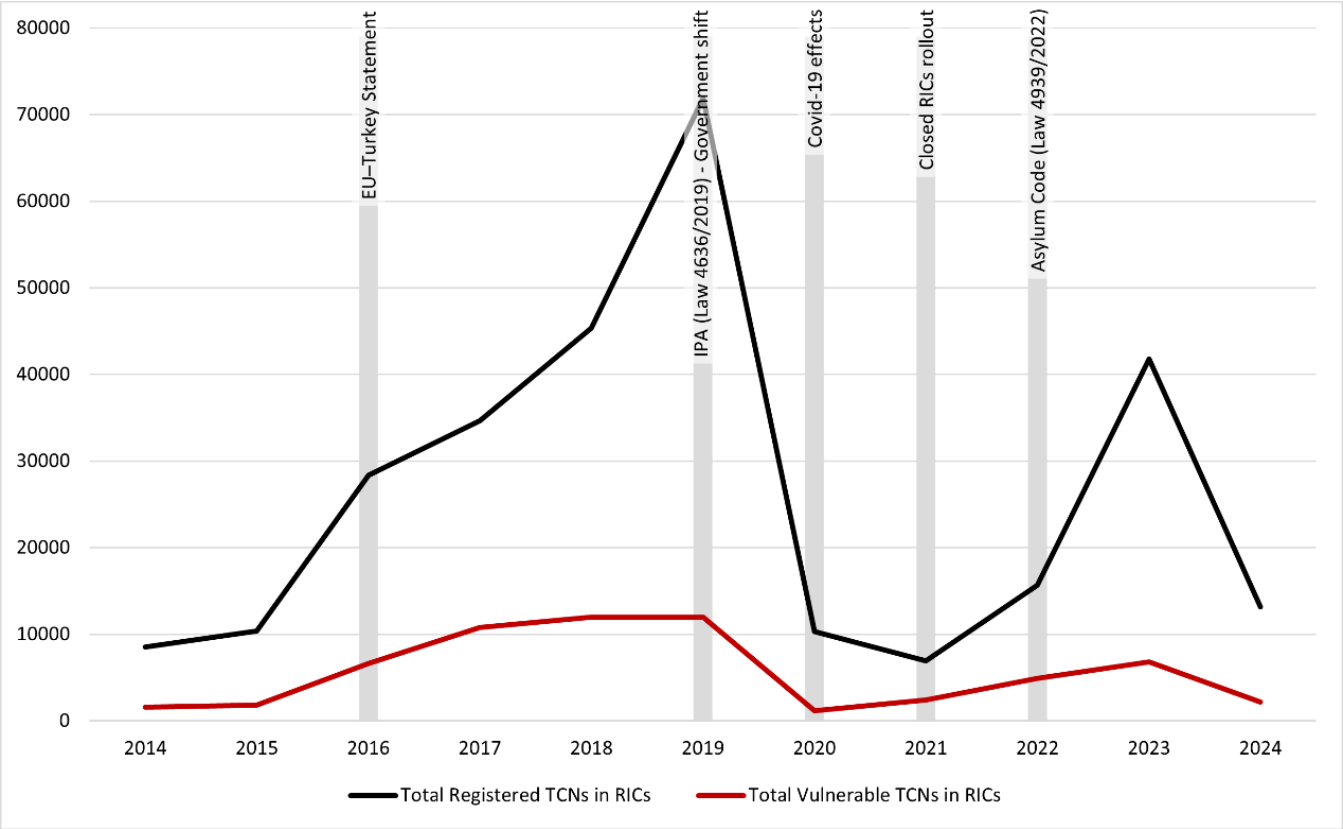
Key Findings: Shifting Definition of Vulnerability

- **Laws 4636/2019, 4686/2020, 4825/2021, 4939/2022**
- **Narrowing of categories:**
 - Removed:
 - postpartum women
 - PTSD → replaced with “cognitive/mental disability”
- **Being classified as vulnerable no longer ensures transfer to mainland**
- Vulnerable asylum seekers often navigate a “bureaucratic hell” (Expert #4, 2023)

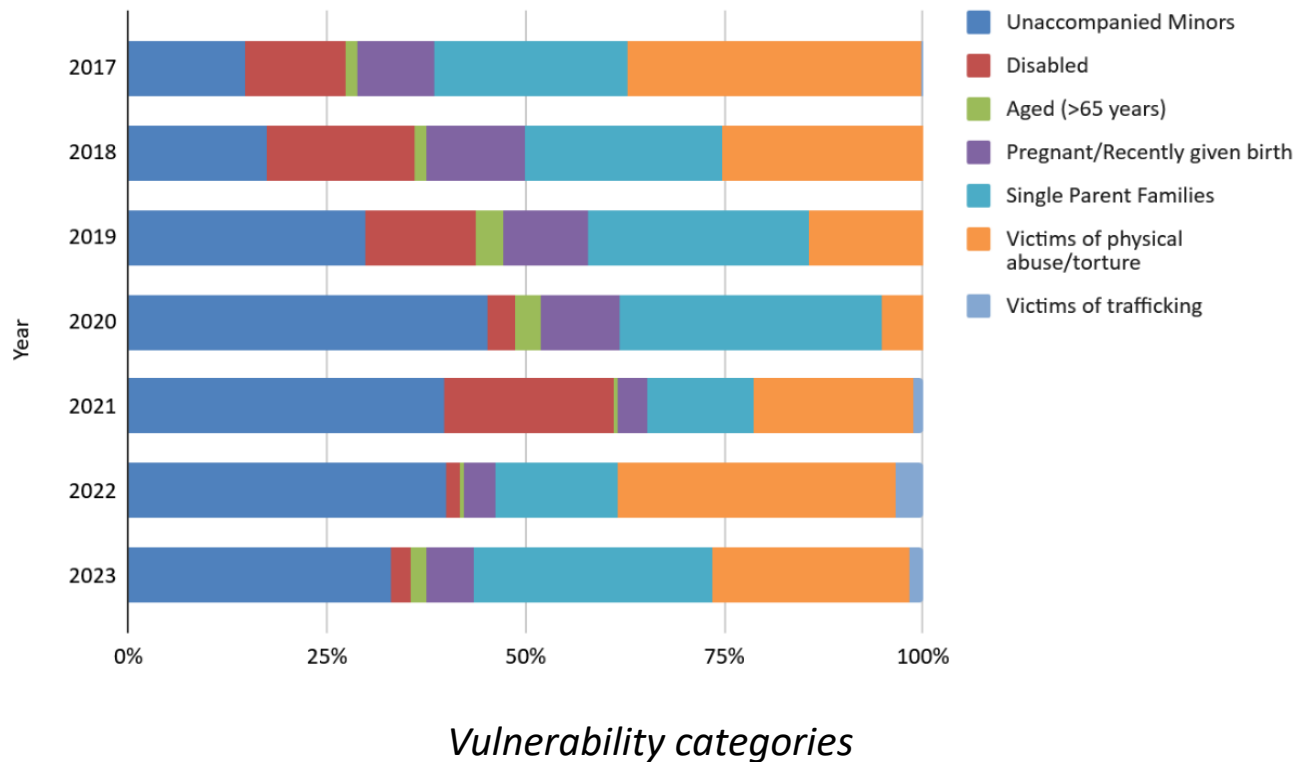


*“The difference with the categories in the 2016 law is that people who were classified as vulnerable were transported in mainland facilities. It was very important to be vulnerable. Later, with the 2019 law, it became more difficult to be classified as vulnerable, resulting in many being trapped on Lesbos. **Whether vulnerable or not, they were trapped**” (Expert #1, 2022)*

Key Findings: Arrival and Vulnerability Trends



Key Findings: Vulnerability Trends



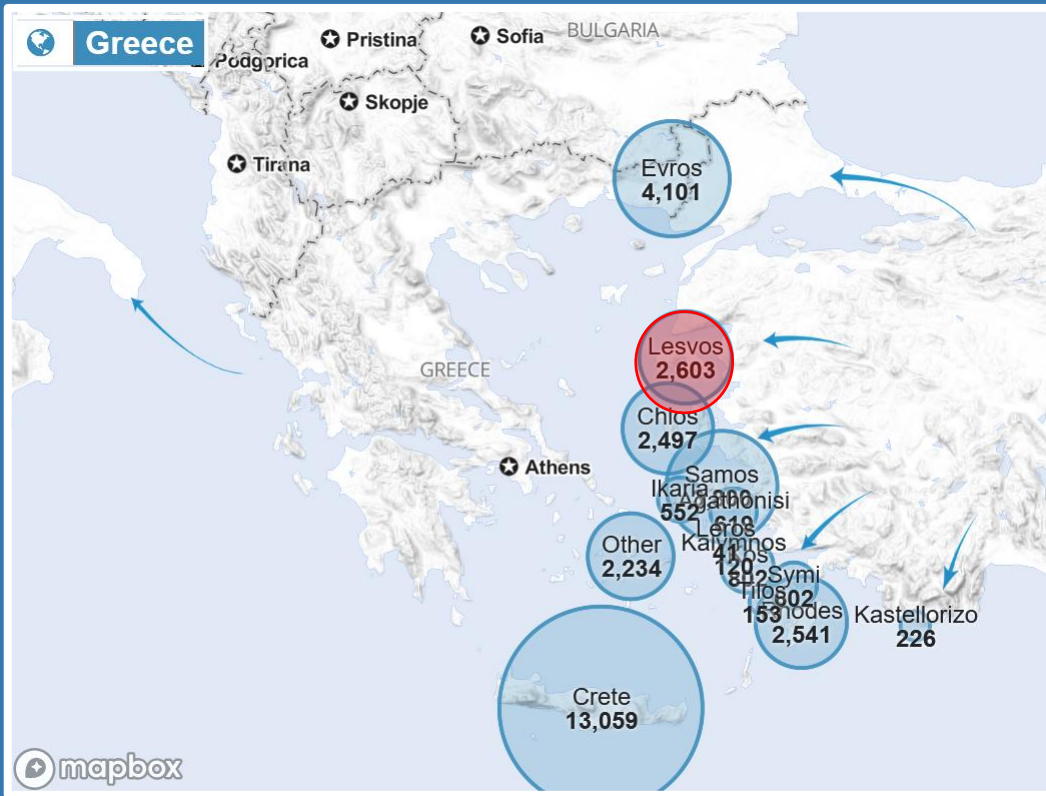
Data sources: MoMA

Key Findings: Operational Challenges

- **Multiple actors**
- **Staff shortages, insufficient training, lack of interpreters (esp. female)**
- **COVID-19 restrictions & inadequate CCAC infrastructure**
- **Rigid, reductionist assessment frameworks exacerbate trauma**



Lesvos Case Study



- **Dual reality:** pathway to support vs. bureaucratic hurdle
- **Misclassification**
- **Vulnerability used mainly to argue against detention**, not guarantee protection
- **Refugee coping strategies** (self-harm, strategic presentation of vulnerability)
- Implications for EU and international obligations

Discussion / Conclusions

- Inadequate (or lack of) vulnerability assessments
- Failure to implement special procedural guarantees
- Vulnerability as a **gatekeeping mechanism** in the borders of EU - instrumentalised as a **migration management tool**
- Effects: narrowed categories, weakened guarantees, inconsistent outcomes



Thank you!

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Resources

- <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/europe-sea-arrivals/location/24489>
- <https://migration.gov.gr/en/>