

Chapter 38

No One Left Behind?

Migrant and Refugee Health in the COVID-19 Crisis in Greece

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ABSTRACT

Asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, who are living in RICs, are faced with multiple challenges and vulnerabilities that must be taken into consideration when responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic concerns over increasing cases recorded in the RICs in Greece. The impact of migration on public health is of particular concern to Greek migration policy, as migrants in the country have a completely different epidemiological profile and higher risks to public health due to the poor living conditions in their countries of origin and during their stay. They live mostly in overcrowded reception and identification centers and accommodation centers under deplorable conditions, lack of proper shelter, extremely unhygienic living conditions. The urgent decongestion of the overcrowded RICs and accommodation centers is required to avoid the risk of rapid spread of the infection.

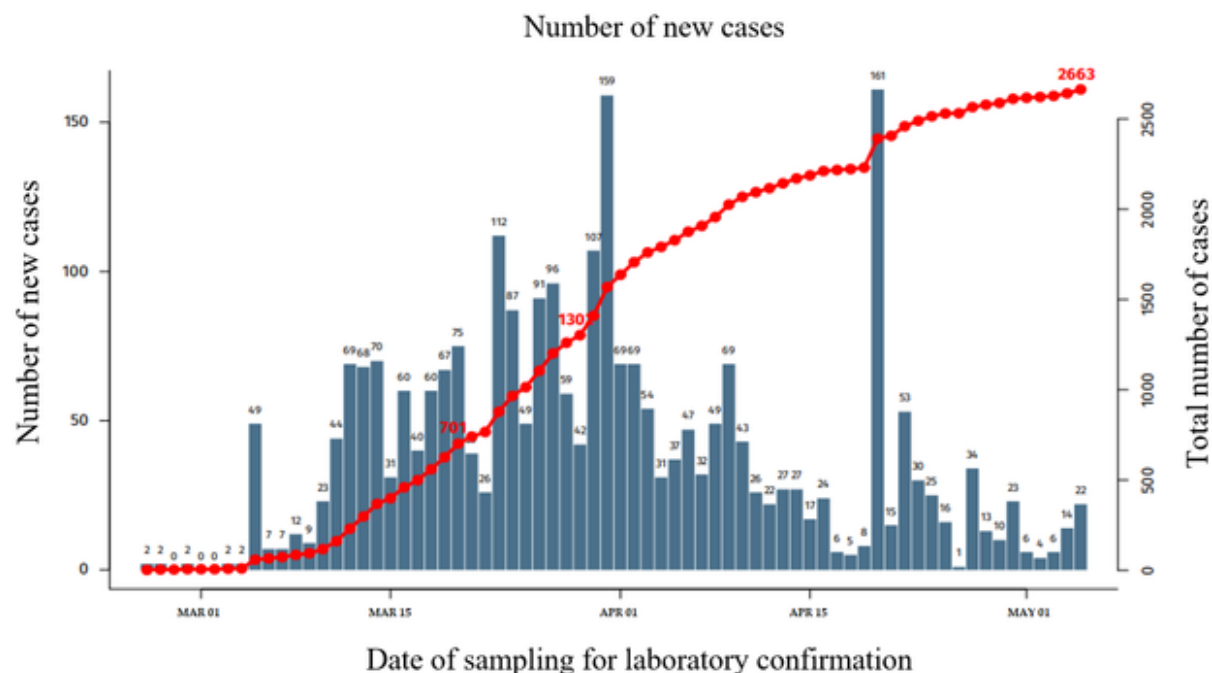
INTRODUCTION

The first COVID-19 case was diagnosed in Greece on February 26th 2020 (National Public Health Organization, 2020e). As subsequent cases in late February and early March were confirmed. Between March 10-18 educational institutions of all levels nationwide and stores suspended the operation of educational institutions of all levels nationwide, as well as, movie theaters, gyms and courtrooms, shop-

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ping malls, cafés, restaurants, bars, beauty parlors, museums and archaeological sites, organized beaches and ski resorts and all stores nationwide. On March 23rd, with 695 confirmed cases and 17 deaths, a nation-wide restriction of movement is enforced, whereby citizens can leave their house only for specific reasons and with a special permit (National Public Health Organization, 2020e). In the Reception and Identification Centers (RICs), medical doctors, members of NGOs and asylum seekers, refugees and migrants considered that measures against the spread of the coronavirus are lacking as they live in overcrowded spaces with little access to proper healthcare services. The data presented concern cases from the epidemiological surveillance of the disease by the new coronavirus (COVID-19), based on the data that have been declared to National Public Health Organization and recorded until May 6, 2020 show the following (see Figure 1): The new confirmed laboratory cases of the disease are 21. The total number of cases is 26,631 (daily change + 0.8%), of which 55,5% are men. The new deaths of COVID-19 patients are 1, while a total of 147 deaths have been reported since the outbreak began. The average age of patients who have died is 75 years. The number of patients hospitalized intubated are 36 (77,8% men) (National Public Health Organization, 2020f).

Figure 1. Laboratory number of laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases in Greece by May 6, 2020
Source: National Public Health Organization, 2020f.



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