



# STUDY ON ADEQUATE URBAN HOUSING FOR REFUGEES

Thessaloniki, Greece



NORWEGIAN  
REFUGEE COUNCIL



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**Avertissement**

In this proposition we use « refugee » as the generic term to describe the people fleeing to Greece, whether or not they had completed the legal process of claiming asylum. The vast majority of people arriving in Greece are fleeing countries in war and therefore are « internationally recognized as "refugees" with access to assistance from States, UNHCR, and other organizations ». However, a smaller proportion is from elsewhere and for many of these individuals, the term 'migrant' would be more appropriate.

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## Abbreviations

ARSIS	Association for the Social Support of Youth
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
EU	European Union
GAS	Greek Asylum Service
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MoMP	Ministry of Migration Policy
MdM	Médecins du Monde
NFI	Non Food Items
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OEK	Autonomous Workers' Housing Organization
OSM	Open Street Map
POC	Person of Concern
PRAXIS	Programs Of Development, Social Support And Medical Cooperation
RHU	Refugee Housing Unit
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WAHA	Woman And Health Alliance International

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# Executive Summary

This study responds to NRC's request to review possible housing alternatives to camps in Thessaloniki and its surrounding region (Greece). The report is divided into three parts: a context analysis, an urban study and study of the housing market, and recommendations for implementing the "urban housing" component of the NRC project.

**The context analysis (Part I)** first highlights the lack of data and information available on the refugee population in Greece, about 13,000 of whom live in camps in the northern regions of the country. For instance, information on aspects such as the refugees' estimated length of stay in Greece and the specific percentages of different refugee status, etc. remains unknown. These unknowns are consequently hampering international aid organizations' efforts to move refugees out of the camps and into alternative accommodation. Furthermore, this housing solution itself remains a short-term response that currently mainly focuses on those applying for relocation to Europe, who are predominantly fully-registered refugees.

Since the border was closed in March 2016, the main housing program in Thessaloniki is funded by the UNHCR. There is a wide range of housing solutions being proposed under this program: hotel rooms (UNHCR), hosting in Greek families (Solidarity Now), rental of individual apartments in the city (PRAXIS, ARSIS), or collective apartment buildings (Solidarity Now, CRS). By November 2016, this entire program has accommodated about 1,600 people. In addition to being provided with housing solutions, refugees are supported through close follow-up and service provision, either in the form of individual assistance or provided within dedicated centers (day-center, drop-in center, etc.).

At the same time, other smaller-scale programs have been providing alternative housing solutions within the same range of accommodation typologies, with these programs differing from the UNHCR-funded program in terms of the actors involved (especially volunteers), the types of service provided (recreation, education, training) or the population targeted (open to vulnerable Greeks and refugees regardless of their status).

There are a number of gaps and shortcomings in the current response, particularly as programs do not take into account the refugees not registered, applying for family reunification or those who have applied for asylum in Greece. Regional level planning is also poor as there has been no analysis to determine the capacities of cities and villages (including public services) to absorb additional populations and there has been duplication of effort by programs in their searches for empty apartments. This property search has focused only on the existing market and has not looked to create additional housing supply.

**The urban study of Thessaloniki (Part II)** reveals a city in crisis. As in the rest of the country, Thessaloniki has been deeply marked by the recession triggered by the 2009 economic crisis and by the austerity measures imposed by the EU that followed. The country now has the highest unemployment rates in Europe, there has been large-scale impoverishment of the population, and the only public housing agency was closed in 2012. An estimated 35% of Greek households are now at risk of falling into poverty. At the urban level, the housing and construction market has been paralyzed (private building activity fell by -93% between 2007 and 2016), and the development of certain areas of the city has ground to a halt. As a result, newly built housing units in poorly

connected neighborhoods on the city's outskirts remain unoccupied (Evosmos, New Politeia), industrial areas have been hit by factory closures (Sindos, Kalochori) and major public projects lie unfinished and abandoned (metro).

Yet Thessaloniki remains a relatively mixed city without great social fragmentation that, throughout history, has managed to accommodate several major waves of migration, some even greater than the one taking place today (such as the "population exchange" of the 1920s and taking in migrants from the Balkans and the former USSR in the 1990s).

The study of different neighborhoods reveals the demographic dynamism of the city's vast suburbs that contain relatively new housing stock (30% of the total stock built between 1980 and 1995), which is primarily intended for sale (Evosmos, Themi). However, the study also shows that the eastern districts have more rental stock (up to five times more, as in Pilea), while all development on the urban fringes has been frozen (Nea Politeia) and there are lots of vacant buildings. The various maps presented in this chapter provide information on individual neighborhoods, including data on house prices (sales and rentals), the average surface area of apartments or heights of buildings. The study also include an interactive map showing the density of urban services within the metropolitan area and in secondary cities.

Combining this data reveals a number of potential locations in which to rehouse refugees (Evosmos, Sindos, Toumba, Pilea). However, due to the typology of the housing in these areas (large empty buildings on the outskirts of the city, student halls of residence, independent and scattered apartments), there are challenges associated with all of these that will need to be considered by the project. Other identified housing opportunities (industrial buildings, tourist resorts) were discarded as being incompatible with the constraints and objectives of the NRC project.

The last part of the study presents **recommendations for implementing the NRC housing project (Part III)**, and details four possible scenarios based on the housing opportunities identified in Part II:

- Empty residential buildings;
- Clusters of apartments;
- Independent urban apartments;
- Emergency shelter.

For each, a workflow has been produced to show the risks and opportunities associated with five key phases of the project: identification of housing, selection and referral of beneficiaries, follow-up activities, services, and exit strategy.

Finally, a number of cross-cutting issues have been identified and recommendations made on the following topics:

- the harmonization required to extend the beneficiary selection and referral process to all refugees, regardless of their status, which is currently a major gap;
- the importance of monitoring and service provision, which should be the same or better than that provided to refugees in the camps;
- streamlining and harmonizing the different organizations' search for accommodation and housing;
- developing incentives for property owners to overcome their reluctance to rent;
- aligning the housing solutions to the refugees' length of stay, including the need to develop long-term solutions;
- the need to plan integration strategies on a regional and urban scale and to identify synergies between the refugee crisis and the Greek crisis.

# Methodology

## Study objectives

The plight of refugees in Greece living in undignified camps has led several humanitarian agencies to advocate for alternatives to these camps to ensure refugees, and especially the most vulnerable, are provided with safe and dignified housing options.

In northern Greece, where there are more than 13,000 people living in such camps, NRC is taking part in this effort to develop better accommodation solutions for refugees that meet accepted standards, provide them with proper protection and assistance and foster their integration.

The aim of this study is to support and guide the development, launch and future direction of the urban housing component of the “adequate housing for refugees” project.

## Methodologies

The study was conducted in Thessaloniki from the 3rd to the 28th of November 2016. Several sources of information and data were assessed and reviewed to create specific analysis or decision-support tools for each thematic area.

For example, the data provided by UNHCR (camp profiles), Ministry of Migration Policy, and NRC was used to produce diagrams on the current population and estimated projections.

Existing housing projects were mainly reviewed through interviews<sup>1</sup> with local (PRAXIS, ARSIS, Solidarity Now, Filoxenia, Housing Project, Elpida, Oikopolis,) and international organizations (CRS, UNHCR, Housing Europe), public authorities (Municipality of Thessaloniki), and civil society (architects, journalists, etc.). Visits to three camps (Cherso, Veria, Deverni) and two accommodation sites (one hotel and one individual apartment) provided valuable information on people’s experiences of living in the camps or being accommodated. All the data collected on existing housing projects or services opened for refugees has been collated to compile an online interactive map.

The review of the urban and social history of Thessaloniki was predominantly carried out through a literature review that covered various sources (academic articles, reports, books, etc.)<sup>2</sup>. A specific study was conducted into the impact of the crisis on the national and local housing market and a selection of key data is presented throughout the document.

The housing market analysis was undertaken during several visits to different neighborhoods within the Thessaloniki metropolitan area and also involved reviewing available data (2011

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<sup>1</sup> See the List of People Met in the Annex A

<sup>2</sup> See the Bibliography in the Annex B



Population-Housing Census), such as that held by OSM, and examining more than 2,600 advertisements for sale and rental listings. These analyses were used to produce numerous regional and metropolitan scale maps and to develop a checklist for selecting appropriate buildings.

## Limitations

The study was faced with a number of limitations, mostly due to the lack of background data.

### Lack of data on refugees and housing

The data required to effectively carry out the study is very limited, particularly on two key thematic areas, namely the number of refugees currently living in Greece and the housing market. In terms of population, the main limitations include the fact that:

- The current available data does not show the number of people living outside the camps;
- The data does not provide a breakdown by status (types of application, steps taken);
- There is no medium or long term population forecast and too little data to make projections. For example, there is currently no information of the rate of success of applications for relocation or reunification.

For the housing market, existing data is limited or being affected by the current situation:

- There is no inventory or mapping of empty buildings;
- Price trends and the number of transactions are being highly influenced by the crisis;
- There is little data on spatial analysis (e.g. land use) and this is limited to the Municipality of Thessaloniki.

### Limited social analysis

Current available data on the refugee population is very limited and gives no information on refugees' intentions (no data on asylum applications in Greece), the number of people living outside camps or the success rate of asylum applications, for example. To address this lack of data, two sets of interviews were planned, the first with people living in camps and the second with refugees who had been moved to alternative accommodation in recent months. However, issues were ultimately encountered when attempting to implement those interviews. Within the camps, it proved too difficult, and sometimes inappropriate, to ask asylum seekers about their future due to the high expectations and needs of all those currently living in the camps and to the limited information they have on their own status.

In addition, it was not possible to conduct interviews with people who had recently been accommodated in dwellings. Despite the need to build on the lessons learned from the current housing approach (particularly on continuation of assistance, access to services, social relationships, integration, isolation, etc.) the various organizations implementing accommodation projects would not authorize, with one exception, such interviews. Thus, the only contact with accommodated families was restricted to informal chats with several people accommodated in a hotel and one meeting with a family housed in a private apartment.

This reluctance to share information also applied to housing location, with some organizations refusing to share (even the approximate, neighborhood level) locations of the apartments they

used to house refugees citing confidentiality concerns. This substantially inhibited the evaluation of suitable accommodation areas as we were unable to establish an overview of the number of people already housed in each neighborhood and the potential impacts on local services.

#### Housing solutions informed by project constraints

The study of alternative housing solutions has been influenced by the framework of the NRC project (currently in its start-up phase), and thus the analysis of alternative solutions has focused on the types of housing that are consistent with the project's constraints (i.e. rental of existing dwellings). Consequently, other possible alternatives (housing rehabilitation, building conversion, free hosting, etc.) have not been developed.

# PART. I

## CONTEXT ANALYSIS



# 1. Refugee situation in North Greece

## 1.1. Context

Since the early 2000s, Greece has been the major gateway into the European Union for migrants and asylum seekers, mostly from the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2016, the sudden closure of the Greece-Macedonia border on March 8<sup>th</sup> and the agreement reached between EU and Turkey on March 20<sup>th</sup> led to a considerable drop in the number of refugee arrivals in Greece and also limited their ability to continue their journey through the EU. Whereas it previously served as a transit country, Greece has thus now become a home for thousands of refugees.

The Greek Government estimates that 13,333 people are currently hosted in temporary sites set up by the Greek government in Northern Greece<sup>1</sup>. Others are currently living in accommodation established mainly for relocation applicants by UNHCR and its partners (in the North and in Thessaloniki, 1,597 people are accommodated to date)<sup>2</sup>. There is also an unknown number of people living outside the camps and official accommodation sites, either in rented accommodation, squats or in the streets (see Figures I to IV in annex E).

## 1.2. Situation in the camps

While waiting for their applications to be assessed, the majority of people are living in camps, which were hastily set up by the MoMP from March 2016, and are currently managed by the Greek army. The opinion shared by humanitarian agencies after the first few months of operation is that most of these camps do not meet minimum living standards (safe accommodation, especially for women, sufficient number of toilets and showers, access to services, health and education, electricity, etc.). The situation varies from one site to another: sometimes the camp consists of tents or RHU aligned on a plot (Cherso camp), sometimes tents have been set up inside large halls (Deverni camp), and sometimes the camp occupies existing military buildings (Veria camp).

Starting in October 2016, a national winterization plan was due to be implemented in camps to ensure minimum protection against the onset of winter, including installing containers, distributing heating systems, and even distributing additional tarpaulins and wooden pallets to keep out the cold and rain. In early November 2016, however, the plan was still not operational, leaving the majority of the camps' residents increasingly vulnerable.

To cope with this situation, a recent report<sup>3</sup> drafted by 12 organizations emphasizes the urgent need to open new alternative housing solutions to the camps.

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<sup>1</sup> As at the 1st of November <http://geochoros.survey.ntua.gr/ekey/>

<sup>2</sup> 60% of available places currently being in hotels and 35% in apartments.

<sup>3</sup> For more details see: *More than Six Months Stranded – What Now? A Joint Policy Brief on the Situation for Displaced Persons in Greece, October 2016.*

## 2. Existing housing strategies in Thessaloniki and the surrounding area

### 2.1. UNHCR and partners

#### 2.1.1. UNHCR

***The lead agency for accommodation, managing the largest stock of short-term accommodation in hotels around Thessaloniki, and in charge of referrals for other agencies***

UNHCR is the lead agency in charge of refugee accommodation outside the camps, which they carry out both by funding five partners (3 Greek NGOs, the Municipality of Thessaloniki and the international NGO CRS, whose activities are presented below<sup>1</sup>) and by renting accommodation. For all of these activities, beneficiaries are refugees who have applied for relocation within Europe. All families housed by the organizations presented in this section have almost exclusively fully-registered refugee status.

The project component directly implemented by the UNHCR mainly consists of renting out entire hotels so as to house a large number of families in the same location (up to 700 people on some sites). While this type of accommodation provides greater comfort compared to the camps, it is not without its limitations. In particular, access to services can sometimes be poorer than the assistance provided in the camps (medical, psycho-social, legal, etc.): isolated from urban centers, these hotels can create an autarkic life that reproduces the isolation and dependency of life in the camps. A major criticism from residents is that they are not able to cook for themselves: the quality of the food, the amount of food, and the monotonous menus are the subjects of ongoing conflicts between hotel managers and residents. Boredom is also a negative factor as residents have access to less support and to fewer activities than the beneficiaries of the projects outlined below.

The hotel is therefore a temporary solution, making it possible to complete medical check-ups (upon leaving the camps, each person often needs medical treatment and examinations that require several visits to hospital for an average of 2 to 3 weeks), and conduct interviews to establish people's needs and direct them to appropriate housing solutions, either in independent apartments, with host families or in collective buildings.

#### 2.1.2. PRAXIS

***Major socio-medical organization that has the largest apartment stock for refugees in Thessaloniki***

PRAXIS is a Greek organization that specializes in providing social and medical support to vulnerable people. Within the UNHCR program, it is the organization that manages the largest number of apartments. PRAXIS is well-established in Athens, since the organization already rents 800 apartments there. In Thessaloniki, PRAXIS works in three hotels rented by the UNHCR, ensuring social monitoring, and has also helped relocate and support sixty families living in

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<sup>1</sup> Two others local partners Iliaktida and Iliachtida (religious organizations) will join the program by the end of 2016. No interviews were conducted with them.

independent apartments in the city. Both activities are linked as PRAXIS uses hotels as a platform for assessing the needs of families. The most vulnerable or those in need of major medical care stay in hotels, while the more independent families are allocated apartments.

For PRAXIS, it is important to find city apartments with access to urban services and transport links in order to promote families' independence and autonomy. The families remain closely monitored: a technician visits families every week to carry out routine maintenance and receive bills, while a psycho-social worker visits them once or twice a week. On average, there is 1 technical worker for 21 apartments and 1 social worker for 10 apartments. However, follow-up remains a challenge for the organization because the 60 apartments are spread throughout the city. As their accommodation capacity has also gradually increased, the recruitment and ongoing training of new employees (technical and social workers) throughout the project has also posed a challenge.

Finding apartments became easier following the launch of a radio and television media campaign, which led to many property owners contacting PRAXIS. While little attention has been paid to finding apartments, much more time and effort has been spent on visiting the apartments available to check they are fit for occupation and on conducting negotiations (rents, contracts).

Alongside the housing project, PRAXIS runs many other programs for vulnerable Greek families, including access to health, and some of these are also open to refugees, such as the polyclinic located in the city center. As a major national social actor, PRAXIS is networking with other Greek organizations with complementary skills (legal counseling, translation, non-formal education, etc.).

### 2.1.3. ARSIS

#### ***Expert in psycho-social support and runs a wide range of assistance centers for vulnerable and excluded population groups***

ARSIS is another major organization in Greece and provides psycho-social support for vulnerable population groups. Most notably, ARSIS plays a key role in Thessaloniki receiving unaccompanied minors, with two centers and a third being opened, each with a capacity of 20 to 50 residents. The organization also specializes in assisting homeless people, running programs that were initially open to Greeks and which have been extended to refugees in recent years. The organization manages several centers with different specific purposes: a day center (offering showers, food, information, counseling, psychosocial support, etc.), a homeless shelter (for stays of up to 6 months), a community center (courses and activities for adults and children), etc. In partnership with the municipality, ARSIS also rents 45 apartments in Thessaloniki for homeless people and provides assistance of 200 euros per person per month.

One of the projects implemented to support refugees involved the opening of a center providing psycho-social support in the district of Ano Toumba in Thessaloniki, in partnership with the Municipality of Thessaloniki. The center has an accommodation capacity of 7 families, and each of them have one or more members deemed to have high (medical, psycho-social) vulnerability and dependence. The cases are directly referred by EKKA and each family's stay is limited to 6 months (with a possible renewal), until their relocation to another European country. The center aims to offer psychosocial support to families and also to help them adapt to European ways of life (training, language courses, compulsory schooling, etc.), while maintaining their specific cultural roots (Arabic and religious courses for young people provided by the adults).

In addition to these many activities, ARSIS is part of UNHCR's program, renting 25 apartments in Thessaloniki and the surrounding neighborhoods. The profile of the families housed in these apartments is identical to those housed by PRAXIS: autonomous, not too dependent, and with no major medical needs. There is close follow-up, especially over the first few weeks after moving: families require strong support with all daily activities and help identifying amenities within the neighborhood and in the city (supermarket, medical center, children's park, public transport, etc.). 3 social workers (including 2 psychologists) and 2 technicians are in charge of the 25 families. In addition to weekly home visits, Arsis office is an important meeting place for families who go there by appointment, whether for clothes, to meet with lawyers, or seek medical help.

According to ARSIS, it is essential to find something to occupy the families' time as they often have no work and may be isolated, even when living in an urban neighborhood. The biggest obstacle is the language barrier, along with the families' psychological fragility due to uncertainty over their futures. The ARSIS teams inform the families whenever other refugees are housed in the neighborhood in order to encourage them to meet and thus feel less isolated. A project to create additional activities for adults and children is being developed in partnership with Caritas. Moreover, ARSIS are particularly focusing on ensuring the children of refugee families can go to school and has set this as a prerequisite for moving families into an area.

#### 2.1.4.Solidarity Now

***Provides a wide range of accommodation to address different needs, vulnerabilities and autonomy levels, and extensive social support***

Solidarity Now (a Greek NGO) is different from other actors in that it offers a diverse range of housing solutions to meet various refugee needs and levels of vulnerability.

The first component of Solidarity Now's project consists of providing accommodation in over 100 places in private homes through a hosting project. As a result of an internet advertising campaign, this project has very quickly become a success. The aim of the project is to provide the 'right match', and promotes the mutual benefits for hosted and hosting families. UNHCR is in charge of selecting refugee families and Solidarity Now selects the Greek hosts and ensures the combination is "successful". This project is highly cost-effective as the hosts receive only 75 euros per person per month, barely enough to cover the cost of electricity and gas bills, showing that the hosts are not motivated by financial gain. One limitation of this system is the length of stay: the contract template includes a minimum two month period with the average duration being four months; however, it seems difficult to imagine this option offering a long-term solution, except when hosts provide an independent floor or studio flat adjacent to their homes. Another limitation concerns the autonomy of the guests: this type of accommodation is not suited to people with serious medical conditions or high dependency levels, as they place too much responsibility on the hosts. As the project has met with great success, Solidarity Now plans to expand it to target 100 further beneficiaries for next year.

A second project component has involved renting student hall of residence in Sindos Municipality. This "community building" now hosts 27 families (130 people), in 30m<sup>2</sup> studios with kitchenette and bathroom. In this four story building, one studio per floor has been reserved for community activities, which have been determined collectively. Thus, there is a TV room, a nursery and an area for pre-school activities, a school for adults, and a shared kitchen and laundry. Residents are mostly vulnerable families, one of whose members has medical problems. Five social workers ensure there is close follow-up, and daily life is semi-collective.

Solidarity Now also rents 10 apartments for independent families and 4 for LGBT beneficiaries.

Finally, the organization is in the process of opening an emergency center with 30 places for the most vulnerable refugees who need to leave the camp immediately, and which will also include a day center.

### 2.1.5. CRS

#### ***Experience of rehabilitating buildings in Athens, new UNHCR partner in Thessaloniki***

At the time of the study, CRS is the only international NGO working in partnership with the UNHCR in Thessaloniki on housing refugees. They have extensive experience of working in Athens as they have rehabilitated seven buildings, with work ranging from minor improvements to heavy structural renovations. Each building houses 50 to 100 people. Their goal is to double their capacity in Athens by December 2016. CRS conducted a research on housing opportunities in Athens and summarized the results in a report<sup>1</sup>. Experience has taught them that it is easier to work with one owner rather than multiplying negotiations with several: for this reason, they have preferred to take on empty buildings owned by one person. In addition, because the official authorization required to change the use of a building takes a long time to obtain, office buildings or empty industrial buildings have been discounted, even though there were many of these available. In each of the renovated buildings, they have provided access to several services, but note that this solution is not suitable for the most dependent, especially those with significant medical needs.

Based on this experience, CRS has chosen to continue working on buildings in Thessaloniki using a "settlement approach", which also enables easier follow-up. They are hoping to take over the use of a tourist compound<sup>2</sup> 30 km in the south of the city that can accommodate 250 people. CRS is working with Caritas, who is in charge of SMS activities and will ensure cash distribution.

### 2.1.6. Municipality of Thessaloniki

#### ***Develops legal procedures and takes care not to inflate rents***

The Municipality of Thessaloniki has implemented several projects to support refugees in recent years. These have essentially been set up by ARSIS and PRAXIS and include the psycho-social shelter for asylum seekers mentioned above and a project to manage 30 emergency hotel rooms for vulnerable cases (ended in July for lack of funding). The municipality works closely with local organizations and local NGOs to implement social programs and jointly develop their response to the refugee crisis.

In parallel, the municipality responded to the UNHCR tender and became a UNHCR partner, just like any other organization. It has set up a unit dedicated to finding apartments and ensures the follow-up of housed families through a partnership with the municipalities of Neapolis-Sikies and Kalamaria. The initial project target was high (660 places) and had to be readjusted in light of the problems encountered in finding apartments (42 to date). As a public body with greater administrative and legal constraints, the municipality cannot compete with the flexibility of NGOs, but has nevertheless developed very interesting tools.

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<sup>1</sup> CRS, *Refugee & Migrant Emergency in Europe, City of Athens Shelter Analysis*, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Negotiations were not completed at the time of our interview, in late October 2016.



For instance, having launched an information and communication campaign targeting property owners, it has created an application platform that lists the documents required (tax clearance certificate, energy certificate, etc.) and sets out housing quality criteria (minimum surface area of 60m<sup>2</sup>, heating, kitchen, etc.). To overcome the barriers caused by the cumbersome nature of this process, and the cost of certain documents required, the application process has been broken down into two phases: the owner offers his/her apartment by submitting the minimum number of documents (housing plan and property deeds) and a team of technicians then visits the apartment, draws up a list of repairs to be undertaken by the owner and a special committee determines a rental price. If the owner accepts the rental conditions (and agrees to carry out the work), he/she provides the municipality with the rest of the documents and the contract is then signed.

The innovative feature of this process is the establishment of an independent committee responsible for determining the rent based on the apartment's location and its quality, and in line with the market index. The municipality's main concern is to ensure that it does not contribute to rent increases and thus it focuses on renting each apartment at a fair price. The committee is also careful not to promote only a few wealthy owners.

In return, the municipality guarantees that the apartment will be returned to the owners in the same condition as at the start of the contract, and keeps meticulous photographic records in the contract file. Similarly, gas and electricity bills are transferred into the municipality's name. The guarantee that there will be neither debt nor damage is an important incentive for owners and is something that they cannot get with any other tenant.

## 2.2. Other Housing Projects

### 2.2.1. The Elpida project

#### ***A community shelter, unique for its funding (private) and management (volunteers), built by rehabilitating an old factory on the outskirts of Thessaloniki***

The project financed by the Radcliffe Foundation is unique in Thessaloniki as it is financed by two wealthy philanthropists, Amed Khan and Frank Giustra, and is the only local example of rehabilitation of an industrial building. This former linen factory, located in the northern suburbs, was rehabilitated in 6 weeks by volunteers and now houses about 30 families<sup>1</sup>. Officially, the site is considered a camp: the rent and utility bills are paid by the MoMP, while construction costs and operating costs are covered by the association. Official government support has been crucial as it also helped to bypass the law for the building's change of use, a legal procedure that takes normally at least 3 months. Family referrals are also the responsibility of the Ministry.

Inside the building, the families have access to relatively small individual rooms. The kitchen, toilets and bathrooms are shared. These constraints are partly offset by generously-sized common areas: a room for women, a space for men, a games room for children, classrooms, a vegetable garden and a courtyard that contains a large tent used for multiple activities. The building remains isolated from the city, hemmed in between a number of highways. Residents have access to all services: partnerships with several organizations, NGOs or volunteer associations mean that services (including medical services provided by the MdM) and activities (from English lessons to

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<sup>1</sup> The initial rehabilitation cost of the factory is about 1 Million USD.

yoga classes) are constantly available. There is a team of 8 people overseeing the day-to-day management of the center.

Although implementation of the Elpida project was made possible by a set of non-replicable and exceptional circumstances, the project demonstrates the dynamism of voluntary organizations, their rapidity and flexibility, their ability to invent and inspire people to galvanize around a project. While Elpida is in many ways similar to a camp (autonomous and closed management, little private space, community life), the project nevertheless managed to attract and channel the energy of volunteers from all over Europe and Thessaloniki. This project has turned the image of the depressing and distressing camp on its head: the community created here is attractive, cheerful and people are lining up to come and entertain the children, learn to cook Syrian food, or teach English. However, the project's limitations are the same as those of a camp: the place is not suitable for long stays, does not enable independent living, nor does it foster integration into either the city or Greek society.

### 2.2.2. Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki / Oikopolis

#### ***A small-scale project based on the conversion of office space into housing***

This small scale project illustrates the many initiatives implemented by civil society organizations. The organization, partly funded by the Greek Green party and various European environmental foundations, worked before the refugee crisis supporting vulnerable Greeks (running a soup kitchen, distributing clothing, etc.) and hosting various associations' activities in their office / **day center** in the heart of the city. In recent years, the organization has extended its support to refugees, with volunteers firstly making apartments available for a few families before the organization rented three spaces close to its premises. These are **office spaces that have been remodeled into apartments** shared by families, especially single women with children. There is no kitchen in the apartments and the hosted families therefore visit the day-center to cook and eat twice a day (breakfast and lunch) and take back food for dinner. Family selection and referrals have been carried out by other Greek NGOs: after approaching the UNHCR and the Ministry of Migration, Oikopolis found that direct referral from other NGOs was faster, more flexible, and more suited to the small number of people they could take care of<sup>1</sup>.

For small organizations staffed mainly with volunteers, the administrative procedures can create significant headaches, particularly the contract negotiations with owners, obtaining the change of use permit from the municipality, completing the renovations, following up with families, etc. The organization has been unable to increase its accommodation capacity; however, the day center offers an inspiring model, providing an everyday meeting place for Greek people and refugees to come together over a coffee, an English class, or for a hot meal, which are equally distributed to all those in need.

### 2.2.3. Housing Project

#### ***Local grassroots project in a secondary city, focusing on the economic opportunities created by the presence of refugees***

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<sup>1</sup> Oikopolis is not using the UNHCR referrals due to time constraints and the scale of the project: having rented 3 apartments, they wanted to be able to move families into these quickly and they considered the UNHCR timescale to be too long. They thus opted to work with other organizations, including Solidarity Now, who refers cases to them that are not part of the program conducted with UNHCR.

This project is unique in two aspects: firstly, it demonstrates the growing importance of voluntary organizations and, secondly, it highlights the value of working in secondary cities and having very good local knowledge.

A volunteer organization based in Kilkis, a small city 40 kilometers north of Thessaloniki, set up a accommodation project that enabled 75 families to leave the Cherso camp for 1 month at a time when living conditions were difficult there. The success of this experiment, in a very right-wing area where the inhabitants initially appeared hostile to the presence of refugees, has led the organization to improve its structure and become integrated into the UNHCR program. It is now setting up a project to rent apartments in Kilkis for families only (150 people) from Cherso camp, located a few kilometers away. To encourage inhabitants' acceptance of the refugees, the organization's communications focus on the economic benefits of having refugees in the town. For example, negotiations were held to ensure food vouchers can be used not in the supermarket chains but in local shops. Focusing on the source of funds (EU only with no Greek funding), and on the temporary presence of refugees, they lead ongoing field work to promote this small town's inhabitants' acceptance of refugee families. Their analysis shows the limitations of welcoming people in need during an acute crisis: the local hospital is saturated, many Greek families cannot pay their electricity and gas bills, local businesses are struggling to survive. According to Housing Project, the response to the refugee crisis should also help the Greek people by helping to improve public hospitals and boosting the economy of small towns and villages through the arrival of new residents. They argue that a national or regional plan should be developed to fairly distribute refugees across the country based on the absorption capacities of each community.

The people accommodated are independent families. However, they nonetheless benefit from close follow-up as, in addition to being seen by social workers (1 social worker for 25 people, which is considered to be inadequate as ideally 1 for 10 people would be better), families are also in contact with volunteers (1 volunteer to 3 families) who run all sorts of daily activities: walks, discussions, etc.

#### 2.2.4. Philoxenia

##### ***An apartment building run by volunteers***

Philoxenia is another example of work being carried out by volunteers. The organization, which was founded by two British people and is led by a team of 5 volunteers, was formalized in Greece and operates through donations. At the time of our interview, the organization had rented a group of 30 apartments in a large empty (never occupied) housing block located in the western district of the city (Evosmos) beyond the ring road. The organization encountered many difficulties before they were able to sign the contract for the apartments. Being a small organization (e.g. unable to pay several rents in advance to convince a landlord to rent to refugee families), this search for apartments took several months and they suffered several setbacks. Today, Philoxenia's goal is to offer families independent living in furnished apartments (kitchen, living room, two bedrooms, bathroom) while providing certain services, mainly a community store on the ground floor and transportation for medical or other urgent needs.

The challenge for this project is to address the isolation of the site, which consists of several empty blocks of housing with poor public transport links. Another challenge involves integrating the few neighbors to the project (around ten people) so as not to create a ghetto and anticipate the changes induced by the arrival of refugee families. Consideration also needs to be given to the

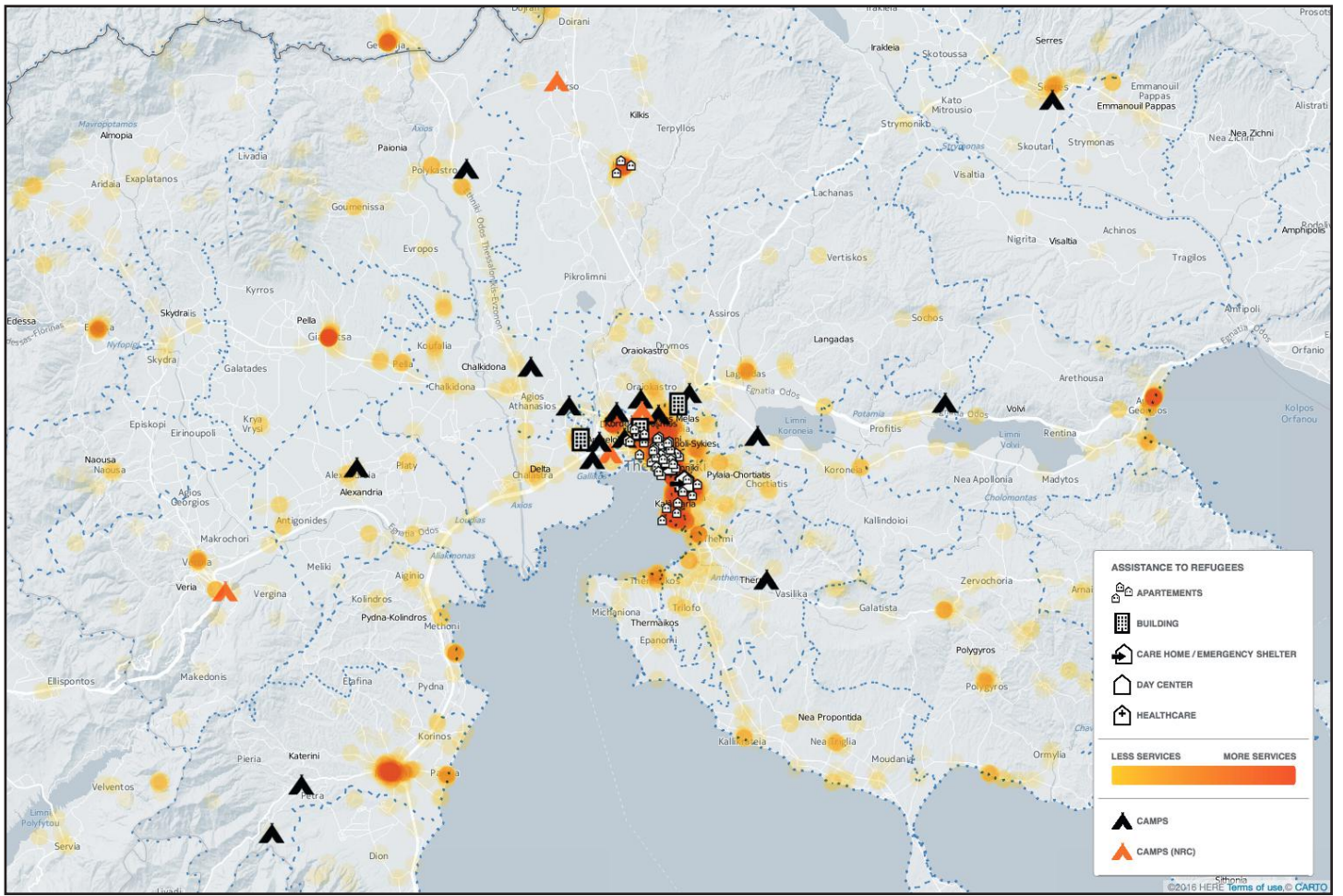
selection of future occupants. As Philoxenia had worked in some of the camps, they initially established a shortlist of vulnerable people<sup>1</sup>, prioritizing families who had submitted a reunification application (induced to stay longer in Greece). The recent connections made with the UNHCR (in particular through the inaugural Urban Working Group) would seem to have opened up more formal referral and selection process opportunities.

*Summary table of accommodation spaces per actor (opening projects are in yellow), November 2016.*

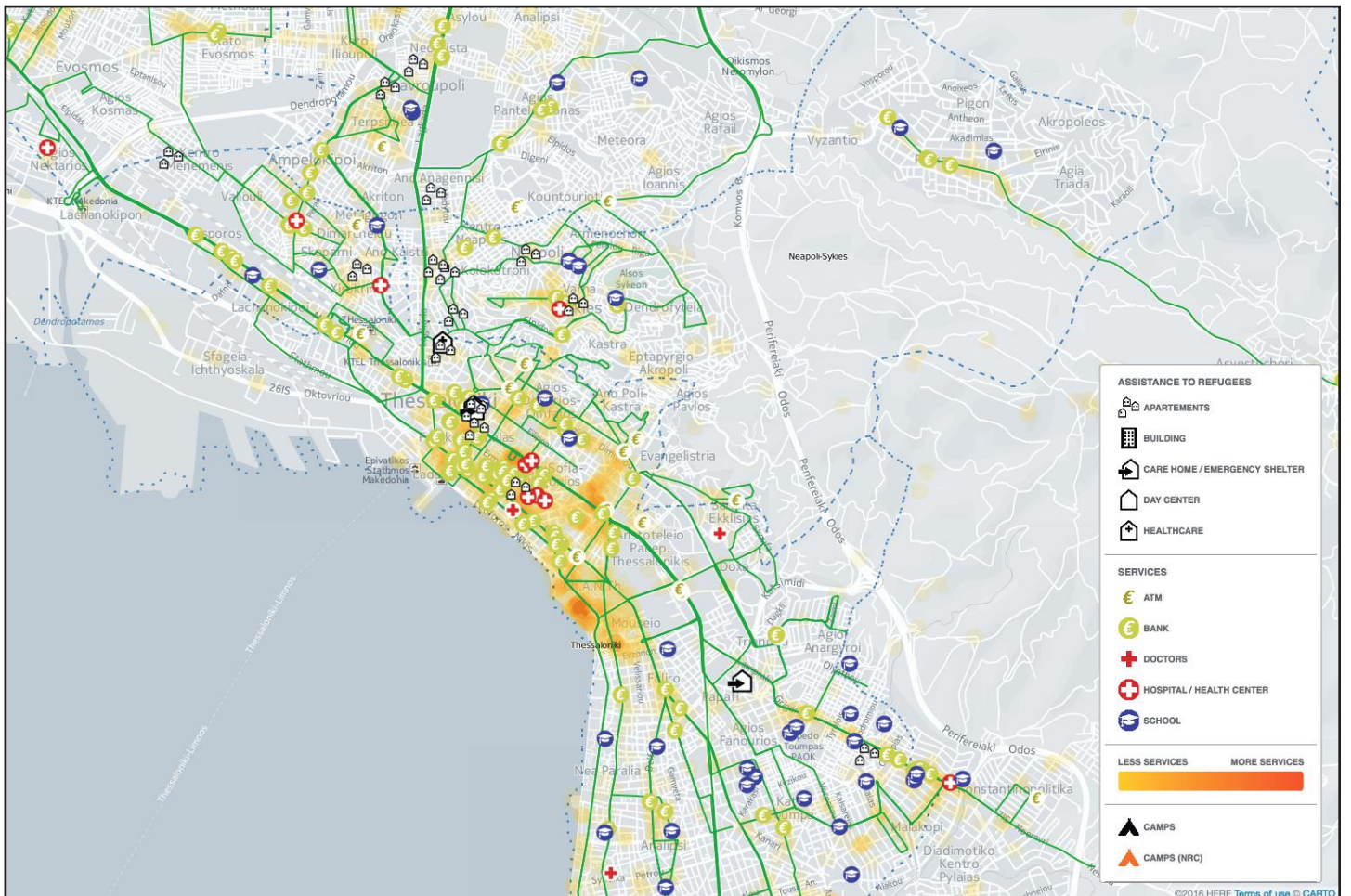
ORGANIZATIONS	Type of accommodation	Number of places	Number of Families	Other services
UNHCR*	Hotels	923		
Solidarity Now*	Community Building	58		Day Center
	Host Families	110		
	Apartments		11	
	Emergency Shelter	30	11	
ARSIS*	Apartments	129	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shelter for Unaccompanied Minors</li> <li>- Homeless Shelter</li> <li>- Asylum Seeker Shelter</li> <li>- ...</li> </ul>
PRAXIS*	Apartments	267	60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Polyclinic</li> <li>- Day Center</li> <li>- ...</li> </ul>
Municipality of Thessaloniki*	Host Families	15	4	
	Apartments	235	42	
	Community Building	28	7	
CRS*	Buildings	250		
Iliaktida*	Appartements	250	60	
Iliachtida*	Appartements	600	190	
Actual UNHCR Accommodation Program Capacity		1765		
Housing Project	Apartments	150		
Elpida	Community Building	127		Lots of activities inside the building
Oikopolis	Rehabilitated Apartments	38		Day Center
Filoxenia	Community Building		30	Community Shop

*\*Partner of the UNHCR accommodation program*

<sup>1</sup> But it seems without coordinating with others agencies working in camps.



Services, camps and refugee housing projects in Central Macedonia (online interactive map).



Services, camps and refugee housing projects in Thessaloniki Metropolitan Area (online interactive map).

**FIGURES V AND VI**

## **2.3. International Experiences**

### **2.3.1. Alternative Housing Solutions for Asylum Seekers**

In Europe, asylum seekers are generally entitled to food (or cash/vouchers), plus shelter and medical attention, schooling for their children and access to interpreters and lawyers. Accommodation may vary but, in most cases, is provided by governments, often being permanent or temporary reception and transit centers and hostels.

When reception centers for asylum seekers are saturated, authorities and local organizations can implement or support different types of alternative housing solutions:

- Available social housing
- Rental subsidies
- Renovation or rehabilitation of old or sub-standard residential buildings
- Conversion of industrial or office buildings for residential use
- Hosting
- Squats

### **2.3.2. Rehabilitation of sub-standard buildings in Lebanon**

In Lebanon, the influx of Syrian refugees has put additional pressure on an already insufficient and poor quality housing market. The work of Solidarités International in the northern regions of the country has consisted of rehabilitating many apartments or commercial spaces leased by refugee families to ensure minimum standards of habitability (doors, windows, bathroom and toilet, safe electrical installation, separate rooms, etc.). This approach has improved the existing supply of housing stock and supported small property owners. The project has also enabled the housing of poor Lebanese families, thus increasing the positive impacts on local society and improving acceptance. As with other similar projects (DRC), major limitations to this approach include the cost and time needed to complete the specific work required on each unit and guaranteeing access to urban services, education, health and economic opportunities, in addition to habitability standards.

### **2.3.3. Hosting platforms in Europe**

The refugee crisis led to outpourings of solidarity among Europeans and many people, either spontaneously or following information campaigns, were eager to offer the use of housing they occupy or own to asylum seekers. To coordinate these efforts, French, Swiss and Belgian organizations offer mediation between hosts and refugees. This support is important as it helps to keep track of the people accommodated so that they continue to be in contact with the authorities or service providers (health, legal aid, etc.), and it also guarantees adequate housing and compliance with certain criteria for successful hosting (e.g. common languages). The Belgian Fedasil (Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) and partner organizations require that housing be independent (no home stays), be available for at least six months, has its own address and has toilets and a kitchen. In some cases, charges and rent are supported wholly or in part by organizations or the authorities.

#### 2.3.4. Paris Municipal Transit Center

It is estimated that 60 to 80 asylum seekers arrive in Paris every day. Most of them sleep in the streets while they wait for a place in a refugee hostel. To deal with this situation and help get these people off the streets, the Municipality of Paris has decided to build two transit centers, one for men and the other for women and children (families are usually covered by other programs). The transit center for men is currently under construction and will provide adequate, short-term accommodation, for 6 to 10 days, to 400 to 600 men. The facility will be managed by Emmaüs Solidarité. The center will temporarily occupy a brownfield site previously used by SNCF, the French National Railway Company. The facility is due to remain open for a period of 18 months before being dismantled and made part of a new university campus. The center will include accommodation, a reception and health center (medical and psychological care provided by the Samu Social and MdM). This temporary accommodation center demonstrates that it is possible to temporarily use industrial sites to provide decent housing. However, a solution needs to be found to provide long-term accommodation and a system needs to be set up to refer and transfer cases to other facilities, which are spread across mainland France.

## 3. Findings and gap analysis

### 3.1. Protection and vulnerability

#### 3.1.1. Selection of beneficiaries and referrals

Visits and meetings with the organizations implementing housing projects have highlighted the need to develop an harmonized, inclusive and transparent referral system.

The majority of actors met<sup>1</sup> are working with the UNHCR, which provides them with a list of vulnerable people to accommodate. A few organizations work outside this partnership, but always with external referrals, whether directly from the MoMP (Elpida), another public body (EKKA for one of ARSIS' project) or from other organizations (Oikopolis). None of the organizations we met selects beneficiaries internally.

With more actors starting new accommodation projects<sup>2</sup>, the need to work under a common referral system become more crucial, as it is important to be able to track the movements of refugees, ensure that all vulnerable families can be supported and there is no overlap through targeting the same families. It is also necessary to facilitate the follow-up of cases referred to other organizations (unaccompanied minors, for example), and to ensure consistency in the selection criteria used and information disseminated in the camps.

Establishing another selection system to run parallel to the system already in use would be extremely time-consuming and require considerable coordination. It thus seems more practical to integrate and adapt to the current system in order to improve and help jointly harmonize this. By agreeing a working arrangement in which organizations have a say on the beneficiaries selected, regardless of their status, and the vulnerability criteria used, the housing allocation process would gain more clarity and transparency.

#### 3.1.2. Vulnerabilities: gaps and needs

Harmonizing the selection and referral process will still require certain gaps and needs to be addressed.

First, until November 2016, UNHCR partners worked almost exclusively with fully-registered refugees, and this excluded many of those currently in Greece, namely pre-registered and unregistered refugees. Thus, the main accommodation program was mostly based on status consideration than on vulnerabilities criteria.

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<sup>1</sup> Solidarity Now, ARSIS, PRAXIS, Housing Project, CRS.

<sup>2</sup> During a visit of Derveni camp, the WAHA coordinator (who runs a clinic in the camp), highlighted that they had witnessed refugees leaving the camp after being offered all types of hosting arrangements by a wide range of actors, including unknown volunteer organizations. In this case, the contact with refugees is lost, and there is no guarantee that families will receive appropriate medical follow-up or that protection will be guaranteed.



Consequently, people who applied for family reunification (through the Dublin Regulation), currently have less access to alternative housing and are more likely to remain in the camps until the final decision is handed down<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, all the actors met highlighted the lack of accommodation facilities suitable for people with severe medical conditions. Medical care homes should be able to accommodate refugees in need of constant supervision, while ensuring access to specific needs: legal information, translation, protection, etc.

Finally, there could be as many as 5% unregistered refugees in the north; however, these estimates must be treated with caution as they are based on very incomplete data. People outside the scope of legal registration are also difficult to target and are not covered by any program. Since all squats in Thessaloniki were closed down by the police last June, some people and families appear to be congregating around the train station and receive no support, except for ad hoc assistance occasionally provided by volunteers. There may also be other areas like this within Thessaloniki that are yet to be identified.

### 3.2. Other social issues

Two major issues emerged out of the interviews with the various stakeholders. The first is the fact that vulnerable Greeks are not included in the assistance projects. Only a few long-established services managed by Greek organizations (like the PRAXIS Polyclinic, the ARSIS homeless shelter, or the Oikopolis soup kitchens and clothing distribution services) for vulnerable Greek people have been expanded to include refugees, providing services or assistance regardless of status or nationality. As discussed in Part II of this document, the economic situation of many Greeks has worsened since the 2009 crisis, and this can give rise to issues of acceptance and perceived fairness when providing housing assistance (rental subsidies and cash distribution) to refugees. In other areas outside Europe, in Lebanon for example, up to 50% of beneficiaries of (ECHO-funded) assistance programs are vulnerable members of the local population. However, because of current ECHO rules and regulations regarding the target group of the intervention, this does not seem a feasible option for the moment. Nevertheless, further consideration needs to be given to this aspect, especially to encourage local authorities' involvement and to promote acceptance by the neighborhoods' inhabitants of locally housed refugees.

Meanwhile, as outlined in Section I above, refugees continue to live in limbo as they wait for their applications to be processed. Boredom and isolation (in distant hotels, as well as in individual apartments in the heart of the city) lead to psychological fragility, anger, confusion and frustration. Far from being secondary to humanitarian basics needs (food, housing, health), psychological well-being, access to activities for adults and children, meeting spaces, information points, etc. have proven essential for supporting refugees through these uncertain times.

### 3.3. Urban issues

Relocating more than 13,000 people living in camps to the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki and to secondary cities in the region is a complex challenge that requires the right tools. Yet so far, no overall spatial mapping has been carried out. Stakeholder and agency coordination is still taking shape, which no doubt explains this delay. However, it is vital that mapping and spatial analysis

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<sup>1</sup> More than Six Months Stranded – What Now? A Joint Policy Brief on the Situation for Displaced Persons in Greece, October 2016.

tools are made available as soon as possible in order to properly assess the capacities of cities, neighborhoods and towns to absorb this population influx, both in terms of accommodation and public services (health, education). At the moment, rather than forming part of an informed plan supported by national and local authorities, the accommodation places available to refugees mainly depend on the available supply of housing and on the willingness of owners to rent out their properties.

Similarly, under the main ongoing project, the Municipality of Thessaloniki is currently conducting a similar program to other organizations, although it has developed tailored tools to reflect the specific concerns of its mandate. The municipality does not yet have a coordinating role, neither the other municipalities of the region, in the response to find alternative housing for refugees. However, many past examples of urban crises have shown that it is crucial to work early with local authorities, in line with their mandate, to ensure the success, efficiency and sustainability of programs.

Finally, after having mapped the current accommodation areas<sup>1</sup>, it appears that only a minority of refugees have been accommodated in urban areas that have access to services and transport links. The majority still lives isolated from urban systems, in remote hotels or on the outskirts of cities, in unserved or underserved areas, with poor infrastructure and services. To promote the integration of refugees, and reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance, it is crucial to give them access to the city and to public services, particularly those people who are likely to stay in Greece over the medium to long-term.

### 3.4. Housing issues

A number of limitations were observed with regard to housing. First, and resulting from the limitations outlined above, no long-term solution has yet been developed. The duration of the lease is determined by the funding and rarely exceeds one year. In addition, and as discussed in Part II, there is relatively limited housing stock available, which suggests that increasing the scale of accommodations may prove difficult.

The search for available housing is currently focused on the existing housing supply, not on creating an alternative offer. For reasons of speed and cost, and to avoid complicating the implementation of housing projects, (major or minor) rehabilitation solutions have not been fully explored. With longer-term projects, it may be worth considering buildings closed due to the economic crisis (closed factories, abandoned office buildings, unused public buildings, etc.) in order to develop other options. Finding synergies between the two crises would help channel investment toward buildings that could be adapted for other uses after hosting refugees, particularly public buildings. This solution is supported by the Municipality of Thessaloniki, who wants to take part in discussions on allocating these funds, and wishes to forge partnerships with organizations, providing right of use for public buildings (requiring prior rehabilitation work) to house refugees. Suitable buildings and land are currently being identified by the municipality.

At the same time, the fact that several organizations are all searching for housing and apartments has duplicated research efforts and created a kind of inefficient competition. To simplify the research process, more coordination and market regulation tools need to be developed and implemented, perhaps based on the mechanisms already set up by the Municipality of Thessaloniki. In addition, a common campaign communication and application platform for owners,

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<sup>1</sup> The mapping is limited by the fact that information shared by other actors are partial.

common minimum habitability standards and harmonized rent scales, etc. should be part of future discussions.

Finally, the money currently being invested in the local economy is essentially in the form of rent paid to the owners of apartments and hotels that host refugees. It seems important to develop monitoring and supervisory tools to ensure that this money is equally and fairly distributed. Currently, if European aid can not be extended to vulnerable Greek families, it nevertheless directly benefits certain categories of the population. Therefore, it is vital that there is transparency in the way these funds are used and allocated.

# PART. II

# URBAN ANALYSIS



# 1. Context: a review of the city's history and of the Greek crisis

## 1.1. Thessaloniki: a long history of migration

According to the projections made in 2015<sup>1</sup>, only 7% of Greece's population is made up of foreigners and 92% of the population is Orthodox Christian, creating an image of a country with a very homogeneous population.

Yet, Thessaloniki is a special case. It is essentially a multicultural city, situated at the crossroads linking the Mediterranean to the Balkans, Europe to Asia. Its history is linked to the arrival and departure of foreign populations that have left their mark on the city: Romans, Byzantines, Ottomans and Jews.

History reminds us that in 1913, when the city was annexed to Greece, 39% of the population were Jewish, 29% were Muslims (Turks) and 25% were Greek Orthodox, with the remainder being other nationalities. This population breakdown changed beyond recognition over the course of the following decades as the result of several dramatic episodes, including the deportation and extermination of the entire Jewish community of Thessaloniki by the Nazis during World War II (50,000 people).

Another key chapter in the history of the city was "the population exchange"<sup>2</sup> that followed the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. An agreement provided for the voluntary departure of the Slavic population and the mandatory departure of about 20,000 Muslims (Turks) who had to abandon their possessions in return for promises of equal value compensation in their future place of resettlement. The "exchange" was to the benefit of some 117,000 Orthodox Greeks from Anatolia and other Turkish-speaking provinces who settled in Thessaloniki and in the region<sup>3</sup>. Through the 'Commission for the Resettlement of the Refugees' (1923-1930), the government oversaw the settlement of migrants by providing land, housing and monetary grants. However, the violence of this forced migration, the significant cultural differences between groups of migrants and locals (who often did not speak the same language<sup>4</sup>), the post-war economic crisis and competition for the possessions and assets of the Turks expelled from the country destabilized the entire region for several decades. The population figures speak for themselves. The city of Kavala, for example, saw its population more than double between 1920 and 1928, from 22,939 to 49,980 inhabitants, whereas in the same period, the population of Thessaloniki grew from 170,321 to 236,524 inhabitants. The toponyms starting with "Nea" (New), such as Nea Karvali or Nea Malakopi, were created during that period as new settlements (often populated exclusively with migrants) were named after the newcomers' city of origin.

In the 1990s, the country experienced a new wave of migration, with the arrival of a million refugees, returnees and migrants displaced by the Balkan wars and the dismantling of the Soviet Union. 140,000 migrants settled in Thessaloniki during that period, 40% of whom were Albanians

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<sup>1</sup> Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Balta E., *The exchange of Populations. Historiography and Refugee Memory*, Istos, Istanbul, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> In the whole Greece, about 900,000 Orthodox Greeks has been relocated (20% of the population).

<sup>4</sup> A large majority of migrants / refugees considered to be 'Greek' spoke Turkish as their mother tongue.

and Georgians. Unlike the "population exchange", these arrivals were not accompanied or supervised by a national or a local plan, with the exception of some housing assistance programs (loans, access to land) for populations of Greek origin from the former Soviet Union (Neapoli neighborhood and Stavroupoli in Thessaloniki). The migrants' integration into the city and into society was facilitated by the strong need for cheap labor: without creating ghettos, they settled throughout the city, but in lower quality and smaller housing units than those occupied by the Greeks<sup>1</sup>.

Since 2016, the stay of 15,000 refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the region of Thessaloniki could be perceived as a continuity of the historical dynamics that have shaped the identity of the city. However, the acute economic crisis that has been affecting the country since 2009, accompanied by the rise of xenophobic political parties and the weak European response to the refugee crisis, mean that the region is finding it extremely challenging to host this population.

## 2. A crisis on top of a crisis: impoverished Greeks and the real estate crisis

### 2.1. A weakened and impoverished society

The Greek government-debt crisis that started in late 2009, followed by a succession of austerity measures imposed on Greece by the Troika<sup>2</sup>, has had severe repercussions for the population, resulting in large-scale impoverishment.

#### **Housing and tenure**

The Greeks were partially protected from the effects of the economic crisis due to the high property ownership rate (75%, the second highest in Europe after Spain), including among the poorest segments of the population. Moreover, a large part of these property owners (62%) have no outstanding loans. This form of protection was reinforced by a temporary measure taken at the beginning of the crisis that prohibited the seizure of people's primary residence. However, this measure expired in 2013 and Troika has demanded that it not be renewed. As its renewal was one of Syriza's campaign promises, it is presently the subject of intense political debate in the country.

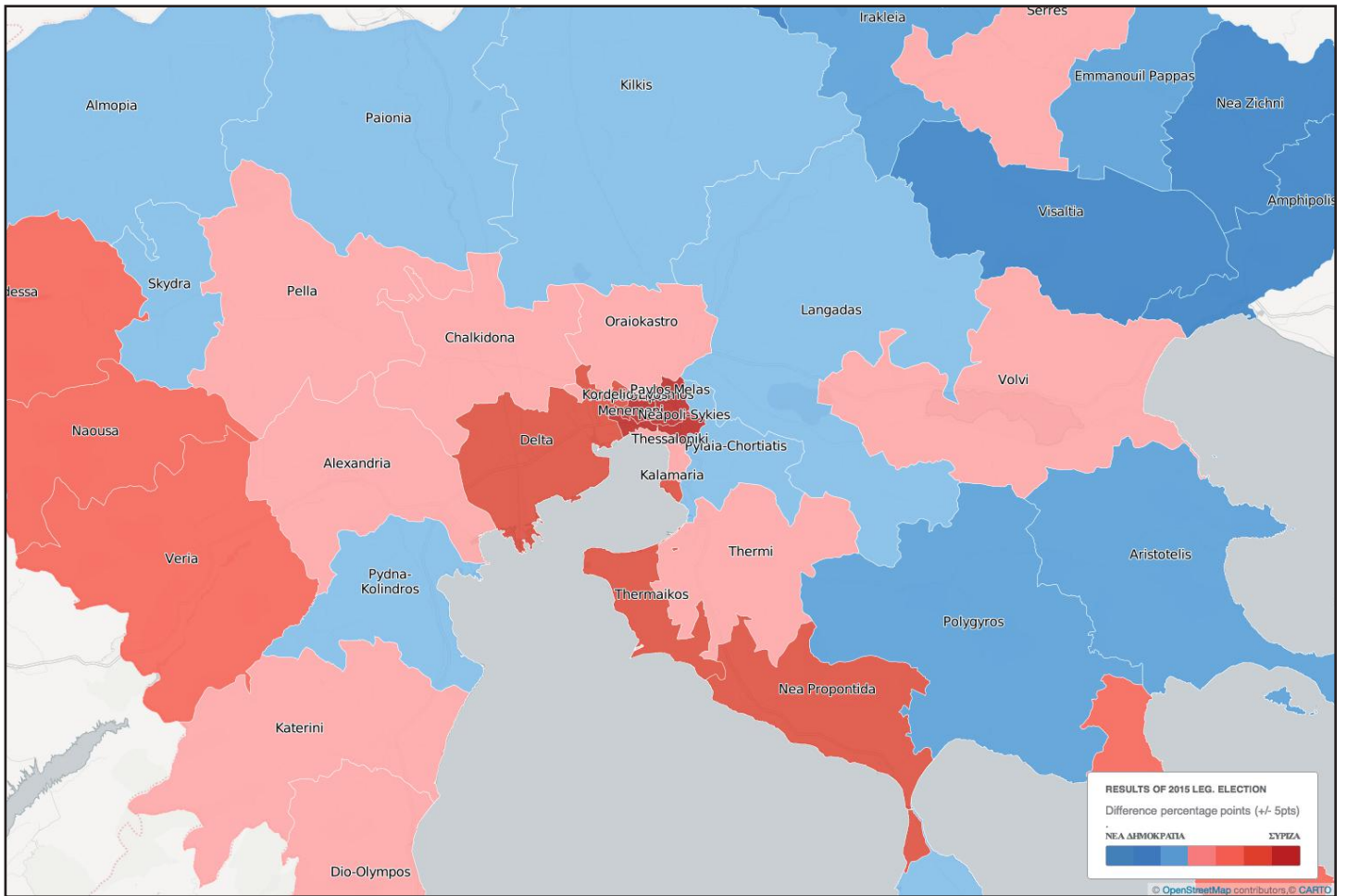
Since 2013, there have been no published national statistics on the number of housing foreclosures or evictions. Yet, since the beginning of the crisis, Greek organizations, especially the NGO Klimaka, have been highlighting the emergence of "neo-homelessness"<sup>3</sup> phenomena, which have particularly affected people with medium to high levels of education, leaving them brutally impoverished in just a few years (the only public program targeting the homeless covers only 1,100 people in the country, while the number of homeless people is estimated to be 20,000).

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<sup>1</sup> I. Kokkali, "Spatial proximity and social distance: Albanian immigration in Thessaloniki, Greece", 2007.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund

<sup>3</sup> O. Theodorikakou, A. Alamanou, K. Katsadoros, "Neo-homelessness' and the Greek Crisis", *European Journal of Homelessness*, Volume 7, No. 2, December 2013, pp. 203-210.



Results of the 2015 legislative election per Municipalities (Differences percentage points, 5 pts steps)

NB: The map of the last municipal élection results has not been realized because the winners are rarely affiliated with the traditional political parties and therefore difficult to associate with the right or the left.

**FIGURE VII**

Other large-scale and clear signs of impoverishment can also be seen:

- A greater proportion of households are considered to be living in a situation of "material deprivation", rising from 24.1% in 2010 to 39.9% in 2015 (the European average is 8%);
- During the same period, the share of the family budget allocated to paying rent has increased from 11.7% in 2010 to 13.4% in 2014;
- The proportion of households that can no longer pay household expenses (electricity bills, etc.) grew from 21.8% in 2009 to 40.7% in 2014;
- Finally, the proportion of households at risk of falling into poverty (earning less than 60% of Greek median income) increased from 27.7% in 2010 to 35.7% in 2015.

## **Social housing**

Greece's housing policies are characteristic of southern European countries with an indirect role of the state in housing issues, an under-developed social rented sector (Greece: 0%, Spain: 1%, Italy: 5%, Portugal 3% of the total housing stock), and a focus on construction and access to ownership.

Founded in 1954, the Autonomous Workers' Housing Organization (OEK) builds on previous public initiatives, such as the 'Foundation for the Aid of the Refugees' (1922 - 1924) or the 'Commission for the Resettlement of Refugees' (1923 - 1930) (as mentioned above), and its main aim was to provide housing to workers and employees. In 2011, construction work carried out by OEK accounted for about 95% of total public sector building activity, but only 3% of total annual construction.

In 2012, the OEK was abolished as, under 'structural reform' measures resulting from a memorandum signed by the Greek Parliament, the OEK was considered "non-priority social expenditure". The OEK was managing on funds built up from employee and employers' contributions (0.5% on the earnings of their employees) and on public funds (average 9.3%), supporting access to ownership by constructing new buildings, but also providing rent subsidies (for 50,000 beneficiaries).

The social housing stock built by OEK is today largely occupied, only an estimated 150 to 200 new apartments in the country were unallocated before the closure of the agency and are still left vacant.

## **Employment rates<sup>1</sup>**

The crisis has had a considerable impact on unemployment, which reached a record rate of 27.47% in 2013 and decreased to 24.9% in 2015, the highest rate in the OECD<sup>2</sup>. By comparison, it stood at only 7.76% in 2008.

The unemployment rate of young Greeks is the highest in Europe, with 58.3% of 15-29 year olds being unemployed in 2013; however, this has decreased slightly over the last two years (49.8% in 2015)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The figures presented below are extracted from Hellenic Statistical Authority and OCDE data.

<sup>2</sup> Average unemployment rate in the EU is 9.39%

<sup>3</sup> Average youth unemployment in the EU is 20.35%



The long-term unemployment rate is also the highest in Europe with 73.1% of the jobless population being unemployed for more than 12 months.

## 2.2. Impacts of the crisis on the housing market<sup>1</sup>

The crisis has had a significant impact on the property market. For decades, Greek banks supported the increasing demand for real estate, granting a significant number of long-term mortgage loans. In 2009, 82% of property transactions were carried out using partial mortgages. After the crisis hit, financial institutions reduced access to these loans (17% of transactions in 2013). At the same time, more and more Greeks are now in a situation where they are unable to repay their mortgages, with the proportion of people struggling to make payments rising from 3.4% in 2006 to 31.70% in 2016.

The market has thus been facing a severe recession and national real estate prices are the lowest of the last decade. For the seventh year in succession, house values in Greece have continued to fall, dropping by 41.7% overall and even further in **Thessaloniki, where they have fallen by 45.2%**. The decline is particularly marked for residential properties, with average values of -50.0% recorded in the country between 2008 and 2013. **In Thessaloniki, the average drop for the 2007-2016 period is -44.3%**, but is greater for older (more than 5 years old) than new properties, standing at 45.6% and 40.8% respectively.

Consequently, there has been a dramatic fall of 94% in investment in residential property construction (2007-2016<sup>2</sup>), which accounted for 9.9% of GDP in 2007 but only 0.70% in 2016. Furthermore, the number of real estate transactions have also dropped to -78.4% (2005 -2012). In addition, private construction activity has fallen by -93% (by volume) (2007 - 2016) and this has had a knock-on effect on employment in construction with, for instance, the number of self-employed people with employees falling by 70% (2007-2013). In contrast, more foreign buyers have chosen to invest in Greece and net capital inflows from abroad for property purchases in Greece have doubled since 2007.

As a reaction to the financial crisis, and in order to raise revenue for the Greek government, the traditionally low tax on property assets has been raised; thus, whereas it accounted for 1.3% of total taxation in 2010, this figure had grown to 4.2% by 2012.

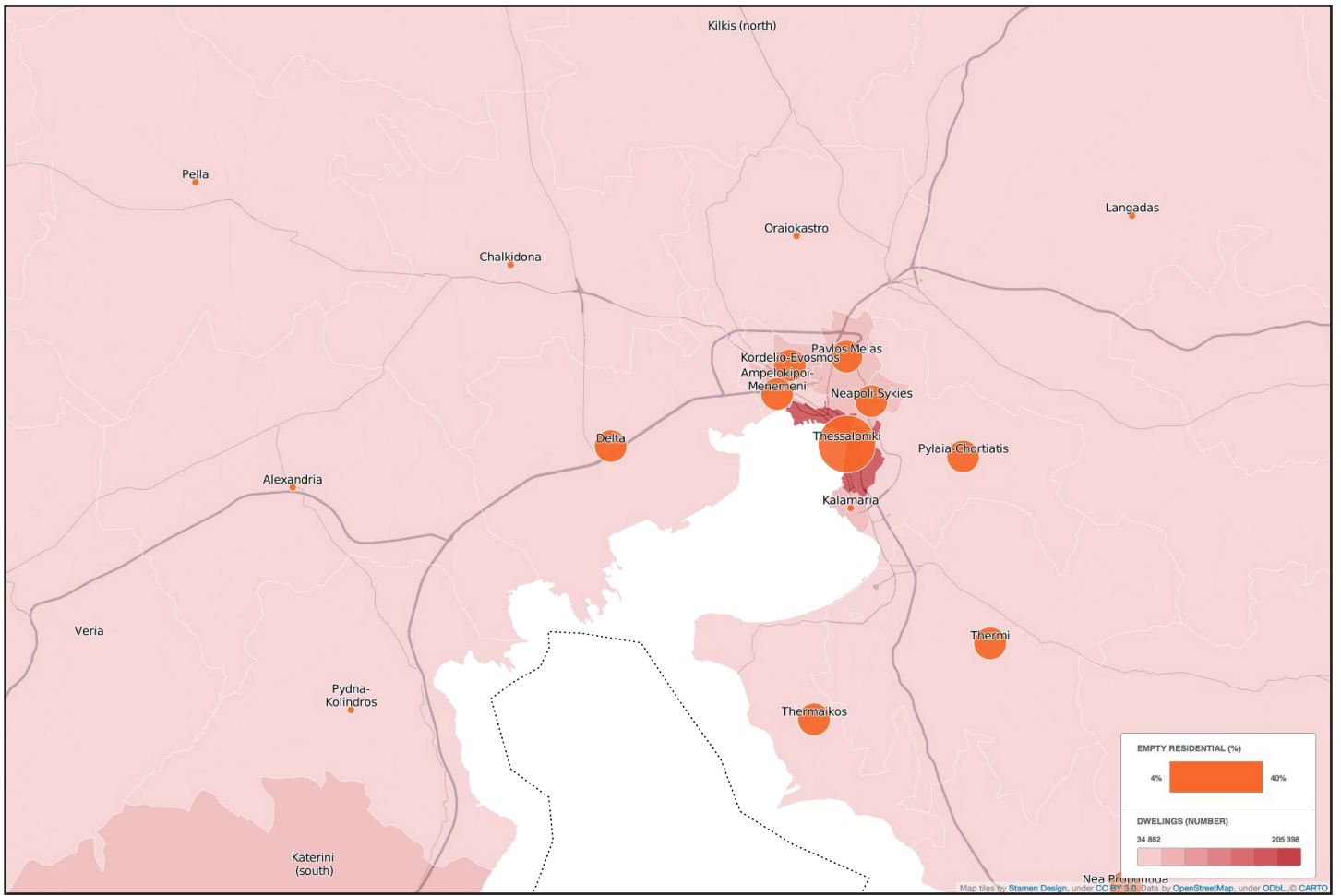
According to many experts, the fall in house prices and the poor state of the housing market will continue as its recovery is likely to be affected by the following factors:

- The rapid drop in Greek households' disposable income and rising unemployment;
- Potential buyers' expectation that market values will further decline;
- Lack of liquidity and the strict conditions imposed by the banking system;
- Heavily taxed property ownership;

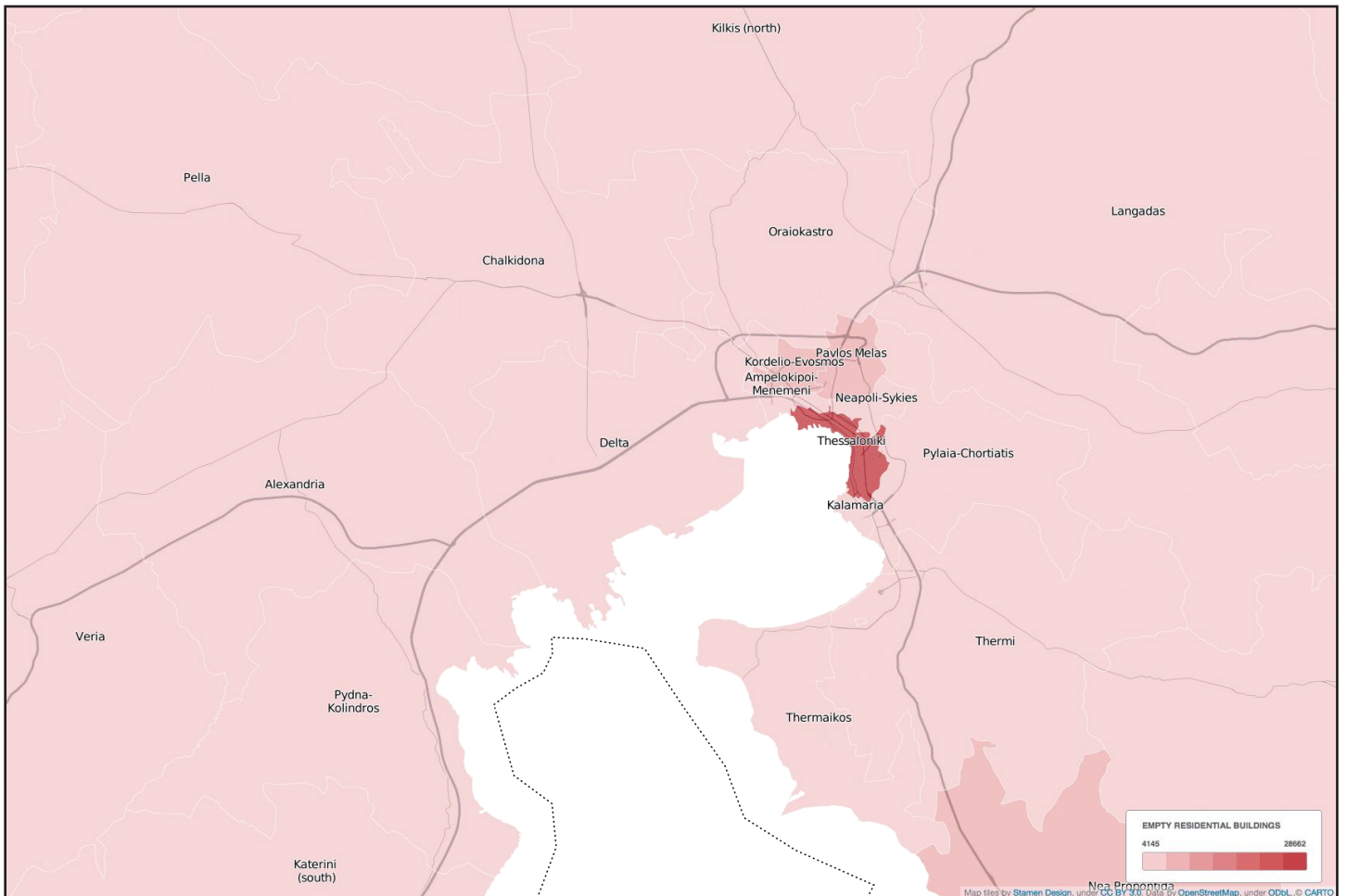
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<sup>1</sup> Figures presented below are extracted from Bank of Greece and Hellenic Statistical Authority data.

<sup>2</sup> All data for 2016 is based on first and second quarters.



Total number of dwellings and proportion of empty housings. ELSTAT 2011



Number of empty residential buildings. ELSTAT 2011

**FIGURES VIII AND IX**

## 3. Overview of the Thessaloniki Region and Neighborhoods

### 3.1. Region

Central Macedonia has a population of 1.9 million inhabitants and is the second most highly populated region in Greece after Attica. It is divided into 7 regional units and 38 municipalities.

Half of the region's population and much of its economic activity are concentrated in the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki, which is the financial and cultural center of northern Greece. This metropolitan area is composed of ten municipalities. The metropolitan area still lacks an organizational scheme: a body was set up to develop the Thessaloniki Metropolitan Area Master Plan, but was disbanded in 2013 before the plan was approved.

The outskirts of the metropolitan area contain dynamic suburbs that have the highest population growth, such as the neighborhoods of Thermi and Panorama in the east, for example, and Pefka and Oreokastro in the north.

Cities	Number of habitants
Thessaloniki	1,104,460
Serres	59,722
Katerini	59,603
Veria	43,158
Giannitsa	29,789
Kilkis	23,914

A cluster of activities and services are also located in a network of secondary cities, Serres, Katerini, Veria, Giannitsa, Kilkis, located between 45 and 70km from Thessaloniki. For example, these cities are all have a public hospital.

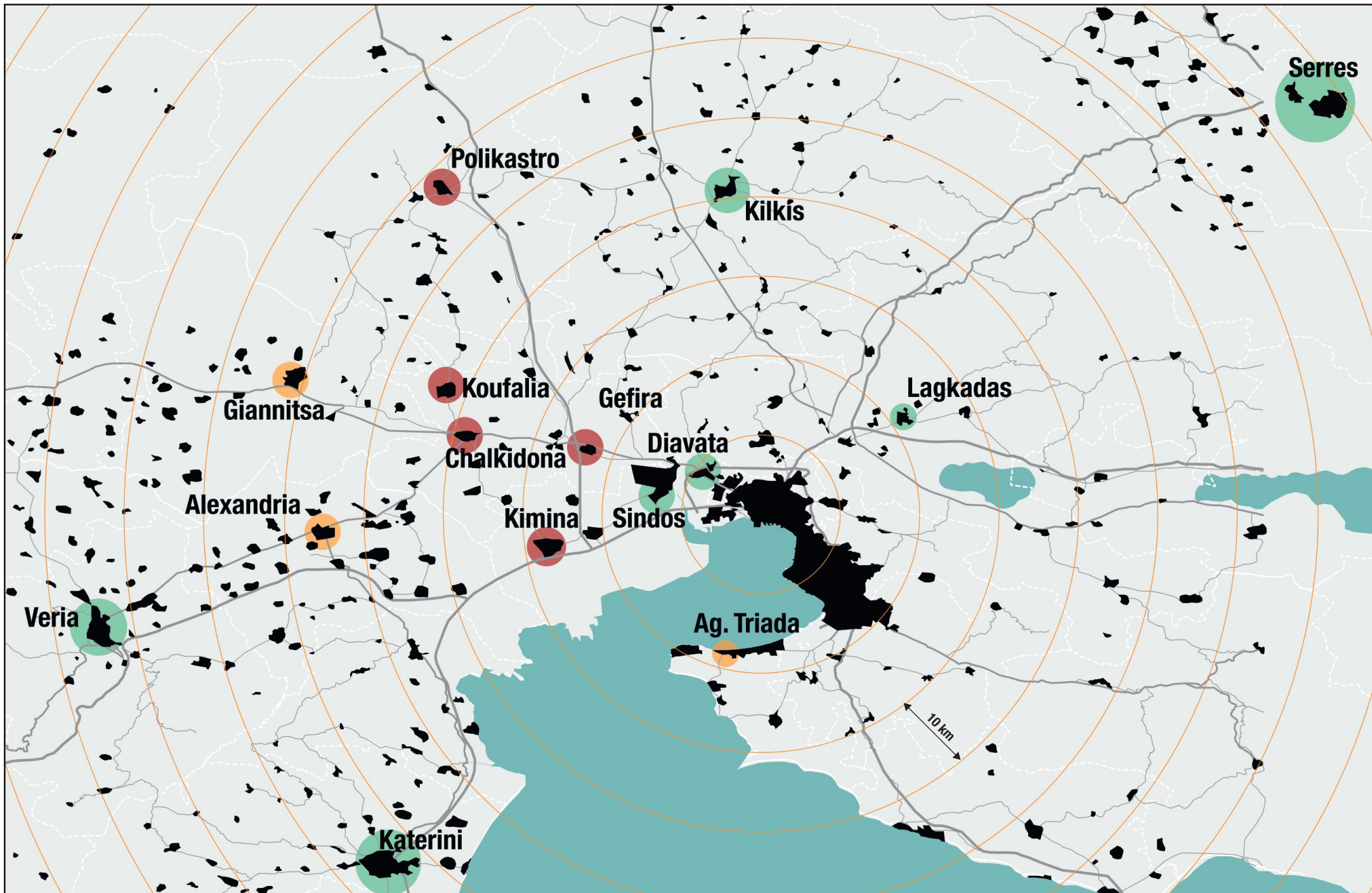
Between the metropolitan area and the secondary cities lies a network of smaller towns, which are poorly equipped with public services and have poor public transport links, meaning that they remain isolated from other major urban centers.

### 3.2. Thessaloniki Neighborhoods<sup>1</sup>

The city experienced rapid urban expansion from the 1950s onwards and, today, the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki is an urban conurbation that extends over 10 municipalities. Contained in the north by a mountain range and in the south by the Aegean Sea, the city has been expanding

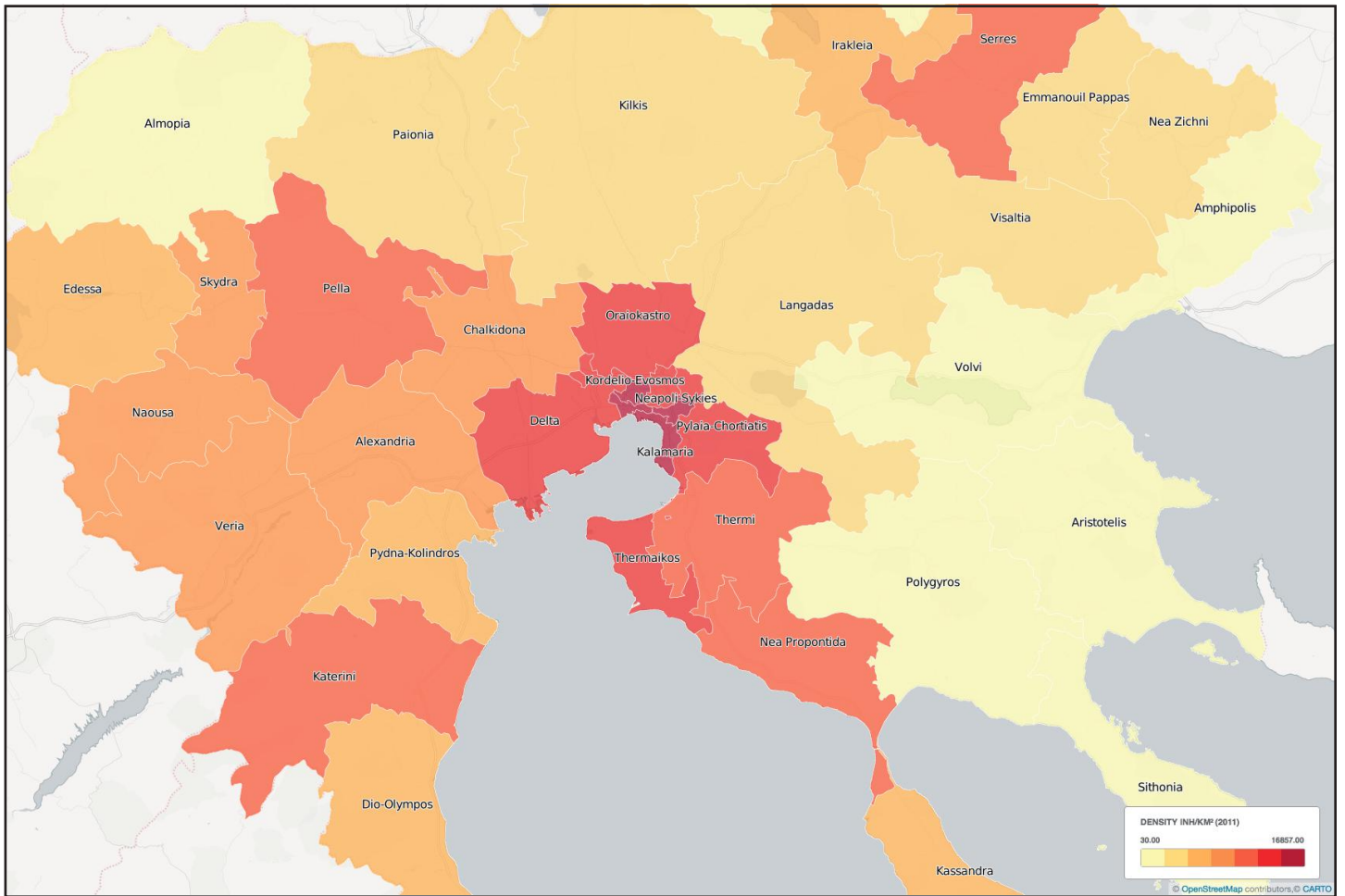
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<sup>1</sup> This section is based on the work of L. Labrianidis, P. Hatziprokopiou, M. Pratsinakis, and N. Vogiatzis and the report they produced on Thessaloniki as part of the European research project "Generating Interethnic Tolerance and Neighbourhood Integration in European Urban Spaces".

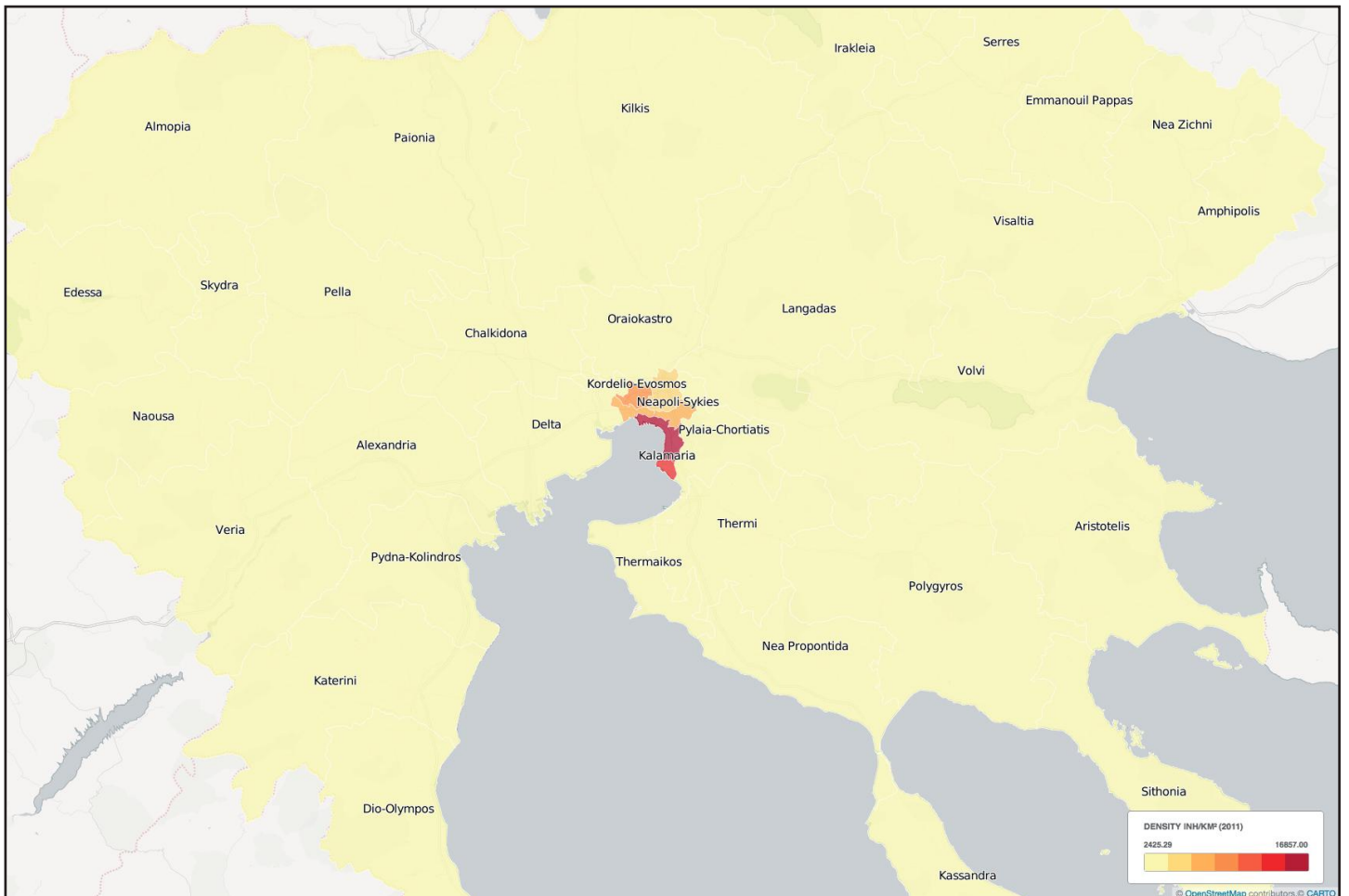


Secondary cities around Thessaloniki, with level of access to services (high:green, medium:yellow, low:red).

**FIGURE X**

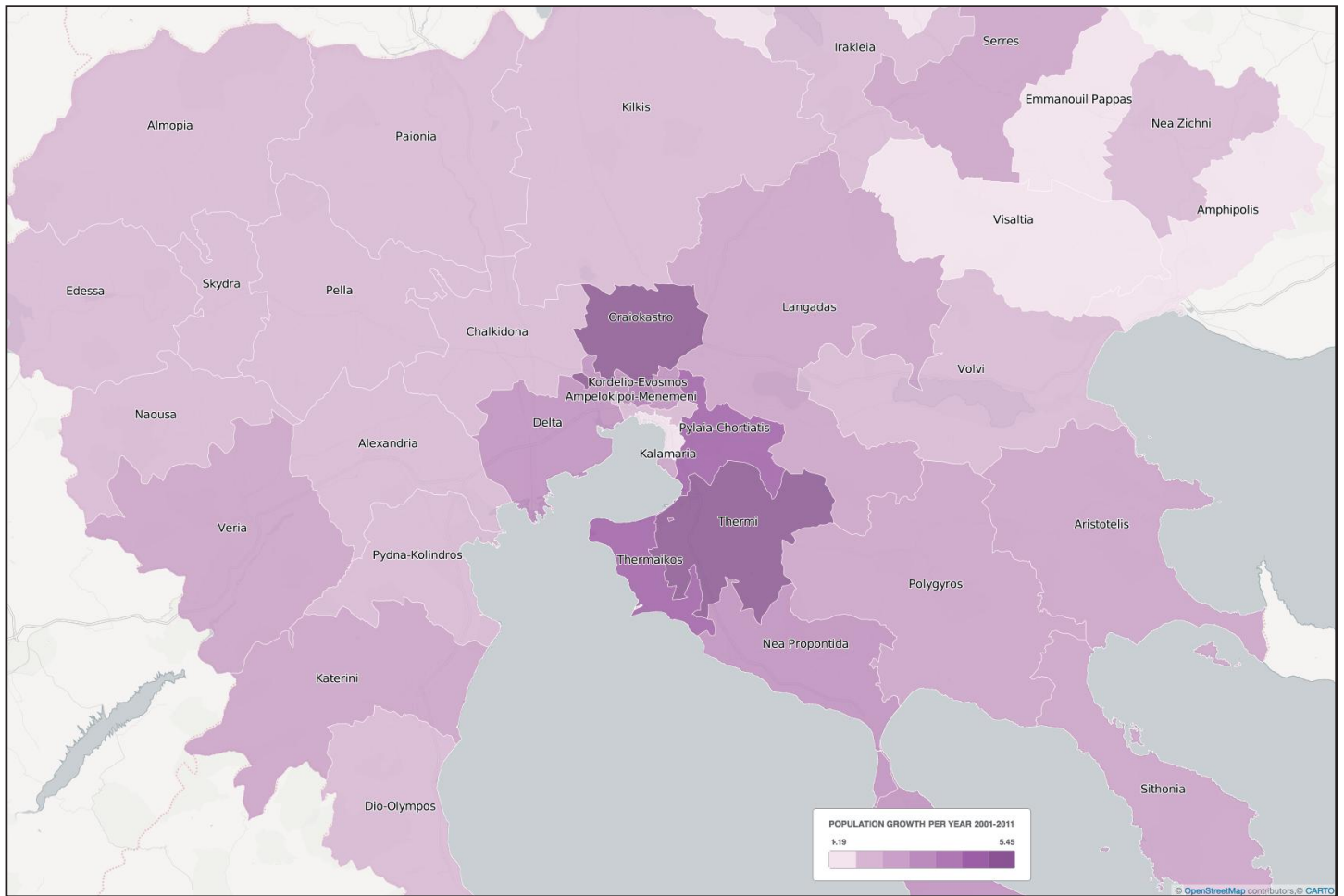


Inhabited density in each Central Macedonia Municipalities (quantiles). ELSTAT 2011

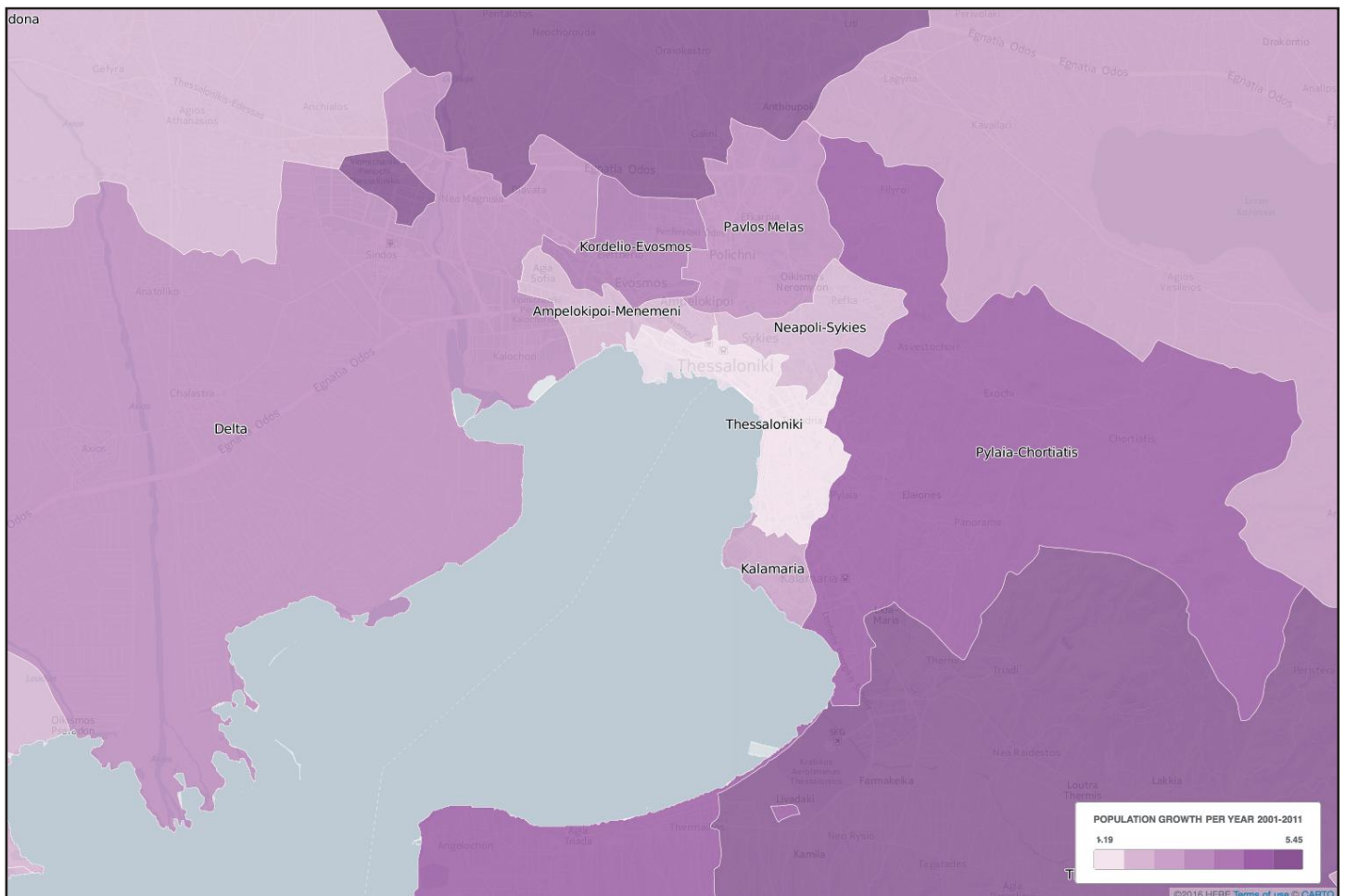


Inhabited density in each Central Macedonia Municipalities (equal intervals). ELSTAT 2011

**FIGURES XI AND XII**



Population growth in Central Macedonia Municipalities. ELSTAT 2011



Population growth in Thessaloniki Metropolitan Area Municipalities. ELSTAT 2011

**FIGURES XIII AND XIV**

eastwards and westwards. Thus, the buildings within the entire metropolitan area were mostly built between 1960 and 1980 (42% of the total stock built) and between 1980 and 1995 (30% of the total stock built).

More than 30% of the total surface area of the central area of Thessaloniki, which formed the city boundary for over 2,000 years, was rebuilt following the great fire of 1917. However, the city kept the social and urban diversity that continues to characterize it today. In this densely built-up area, social differentiation is predominantly "vertical" with different socio-economic categories often living in the same buildings (this typology is known as "polykatoikia"). The upper floors are occupied by the wealthiest, the semi-basement and the ground floor by the poorest. This social diversity has exceptions: the seafront consists of elegant upper class buildings, while the area from the north of St Dimitris Street onwards is inhabited by middle class and more disadvantaged population groups (students, immigrants, etc.). Some areas of the city are historically associated with their mainly migrant population, such as the railway station area and the port.

There is something of an east/west split in Thessaloniki, with the east traditionally being made up of the wealthier districts, inhabited by social categories with higher levels of education, and the west traditionally being home to the working class. Although this fragmentation may be visible in the housing typologies (quality, rent and sale prices) and in the quality of the urban fabric (green spaces, quality of urban planning), the dividing line is actually porous, with pockets of social housing in the privileged neighborhoods (Foinikas) and middle-class neighborhoods in lower-income areas (Evosmos).

Beyond these districts, residential suburbs extend over a large area and contain a wide range of socio-economic, urban and architectural characteristics; however, their common feature is that they are less well-integrated and connected to the urban center. Some areas are particularly dynamic, such as Themi in the east, which has attracted many middle-class families and is experiencing rapid growth; in contrast, others, including industrial areas hardest hit by the crisis, are in decline.

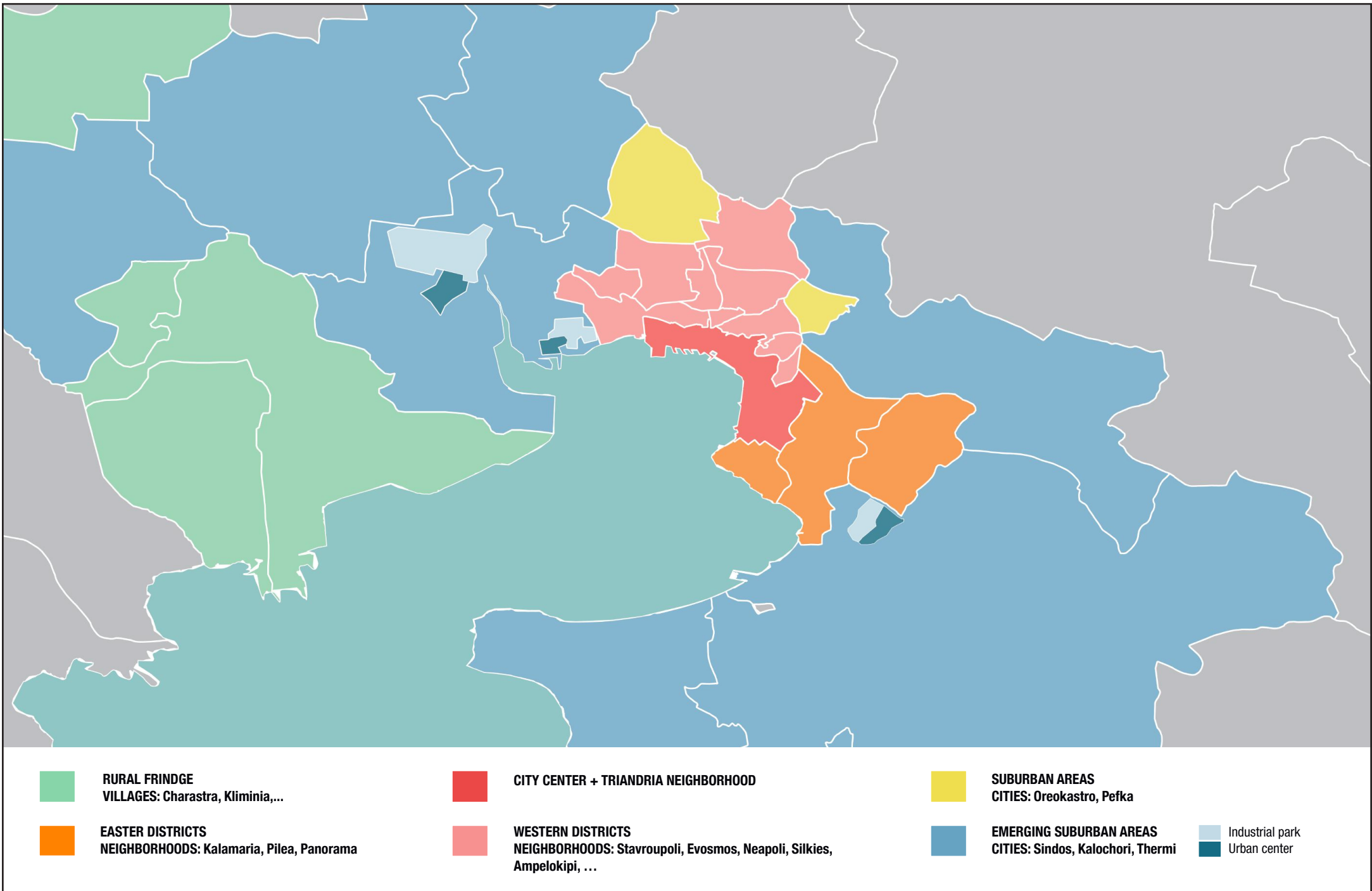
## 4. Analysis of the housing market in Thessaloniki

### 4.1. Thessaloniki, severely hit by the crisis

In Thessaloniki, trading in the housing market has traditionally focused almost exclusively (92%) on residential property, while commercial real estate accounted for just 3.8% of transactions, and land plot sales for around only 0.2%. The city of Thessaloniki has felt the impacts of the crisis more than elsewhere and the fall in property transactions due to the crisis has been particularly pronounced.

As in the rest of Greece, the local housing market has been in recession since the end of 2008. The city center has been particularly hard hit by the crisis. In 2012, 30% of businesses in the downtown area closed down and the subway project, which was abandoned in 2012, is just one of the many major public works programs that have been canceled as a result of the austerity measures imposed on Greece by the Troika.

Industry has also been affected. 30% of Sindos facilities have closed down since 2010, either because of insolvency or because activities have been relocated to countries with cheaper labor.



Main urban typologies in the Thessaloniki Region (map). Based on: Labrianidis L., Hatziprokopiou P., Pratsinakis M., and Vogiatzis N., *Thessaloniki, City report*, 2011.

**FIGURE XV**



## CITY CENTER + TRIANDRIA NEIGHBORHOOD

**Demographic:** decline since last decade but still very densely populated

**Functions:** residential, commercial and services

**Density of urban services and transport:** very high

**Socio-economic profile:** socially mixed: « vertical social differentiation » in one building. Triandra: students population due to the proximity of the university

**Quality of housing stock:** very diverse: luxury apartments along the seafont, and more downgrading accommodations in the north of St Dimitris street. The highest percentage of tenants

**Typical building:** 7 floors, first floor for commercial use / Triandra: 4 floors

**Availability of housing:** medium. Individual apartments, highly sought, greater availability at north of St Dimitris Street

## SUBURBAN AREAS

**CITIES:** Oreokastro, Pefka

**Demographic:** very dynamic, high population growth, especially attractive for youngest population.

**Functions:** residential

**Density of urban services and transport:** less connected to the city center

**Socio-economic profile:** middle upper class

**Quality of housing stock:** very good, partly new, especially in Pefka were half of housing stock were built after 1990's.

**Typical building:** 2 floors houses / 2 to 3 floors building

**Availability of housing:** high

## RURAL FRINDGE

**VILLAGES:** Charastra, Kliminia,...

**Demographic:** aging population

**Functions:** intensive agriculture and cattle breeding, small manufacturing units. Rural but linked to urban economy.

**Density of urban services and transport:** low population density, low connexion to the city

**Socio-economic profile:** working class

**Quality of housing stock:** medium

**Typical building:** 2 floors building / houses

**Availability of housing:** low

## EASTER DISTRICTS

**NEIGHBORHOODS:** Kalamaria, Pilea, Panorama

**Demographic:** densely populated, attractive neighborhoods, population growth

**Functions:** residential, commercial, services. One area dedicated to educational activities (private universities and schools) and to commercial and industrial activities.

**Density of urban services and transport:** high, except for Panorama (more isolated)

**Socio-economic profile:** upper-middle class to upper-class. High education profiles.

**Quality of housing stock:** high to luxury. Presence of social housing neighborhoods build by OEK in Foinikas (Kalamaria). City centers build in the 50's to 80's, recent urbanisation in the 90's to 00's.

**Typical building:** Kalamaria 6 floors / Pilea 4 floors / Foinikas 4 floors

**Availability of housing:** moderate in some area (Pilea), family apartments

## WESTERN DISTRICTS

**NEIGHBORHOODS:** Stavroupoli, Evosmos, Neapoli, Silkies, Ampelokipi, ...

**Demographic:** high population density, high population growth, attractive neighborhoods

**Functions:** residential, services

**Density of urban services and transport:** heterogenous, lack of connectivity with city center for most distant area, especially beyond ring road.

**Socio-economic profile:** working class to middle class (Evosmos)

**Quality of housing stock:** from cheap and low quality housing to middle quality housing. Buildings constructed after 1980's, lots of newly build buildings (2000's), mostly intended to middle class.

**Typical building:** 4 to 5 floors

**Availability of housing:** high. Family appartements and entire buildings available, especially beyond the ring road.

## EMERGING SUBURBAN AREAS

**CITIES:** Sindos, Kalochori, Thermi

**Demographic:** in transition

**Functions:** industrial, Kalochori : following the relocation of the old industries of city center / in part affected by the crisis (Sindos). Dynamic Thermi / Educational (Sindos) and residential.

**Density of urban services and transport:** low building density, low connectivity

**Socio-economic profile:** students population in Sindos. Upper middle class in Thermi. Working class in Kalochori

**Quality of housing stock:** medium to high. New development in southern Sindos. Urban sprawl around Thermi.

**Typical building:** 2 to 3 floors building

**Availability of housing:** high in Sindos: entire buildings or several apartments in the same building; 3 to 4 floors apartment buildings, mainly studio for students. Low availability of apartment in Kalochori. Medium in Thermi: family apartment.

In terms of residential buildings, one third of the total number of dwellings in Central Macedonia (33.6%<sup>1</sup> of 1,074,242 housing units) was vacant in 2011, of which 25% (92,134) were for sale and 5% (19,476) were available to rent, with the remainder mainly being for seasonal use or second homes<sup>2</sup>.

## 4.2. Vacant stock and accommodation for refugees

Within this context, renting housing to accommodate refugees is a growing phenomenon: the demand is already high for such housing from local organizations and City Hall. All the real estate agencies we met had already been in contact with other organizations (without being able to meet their demands). As new actors (NRC, CRS) continue to arrive on the scene, a new specific demand (dwellings for refugees) is being created, along with competition between these actors.

This relative lack of rental properties may seem strange given that there is no overall national housing shortage. Many homeowners approach local organizations themselves, or are contacted by agencies. However, a significant number of the negotiations are unsuccessful due to resistance from owners. In addition to being reluctant to accommodate refugees, they often fear that people will remain in their homes beyond the end of the contract, that organizations will not honor the rent, or that the property will be damaged<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, it is common for rental contracts in Greece to be agreed for a 3 year period; however, NGOs' poor budget visibility and financial limitations (eligibility of funds over the period of one year projects) prevent them from entering into contracts of this length, further reducing the scope for possible agreements.

Some organizations are now focusing more on entire vacant buildings to try to significantly increase the number of people they can relocate, while at the same time ensuring efficiency. However, there are currently few entire empty buildings available to rent as most have been put up for sale. Yet, this situation could soon change, as owners struggling to sell their properties may become more open to renting them out instead. Some realtors and owners are interested in this option as it means a larger number of housing units per transaction and large sums being invested by international NGOs. In this context, it remains very difficult to estimate the rental price for such buildings as they are few and far between and each has specific features.

## 4.3. Spatial analysis

The analysis of the local rental market consisted of collecting data and reviewing 2,600 adverts for apartments available to rent in the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki, which provided valuable information on average availability, areas, and (rent and sale) prices in each neighborhood. This data was collated in the form of an interactive map<sup>4</sup>. The main findings of this analysis were then confirmed during interviews with realtors and City Hall.

Housing supply in Thessaloniki mirrors its social mix, as the housing stock is homogeneous in the central, eastern, and western neighborhoods of the city. The dwellings are generally relatively large

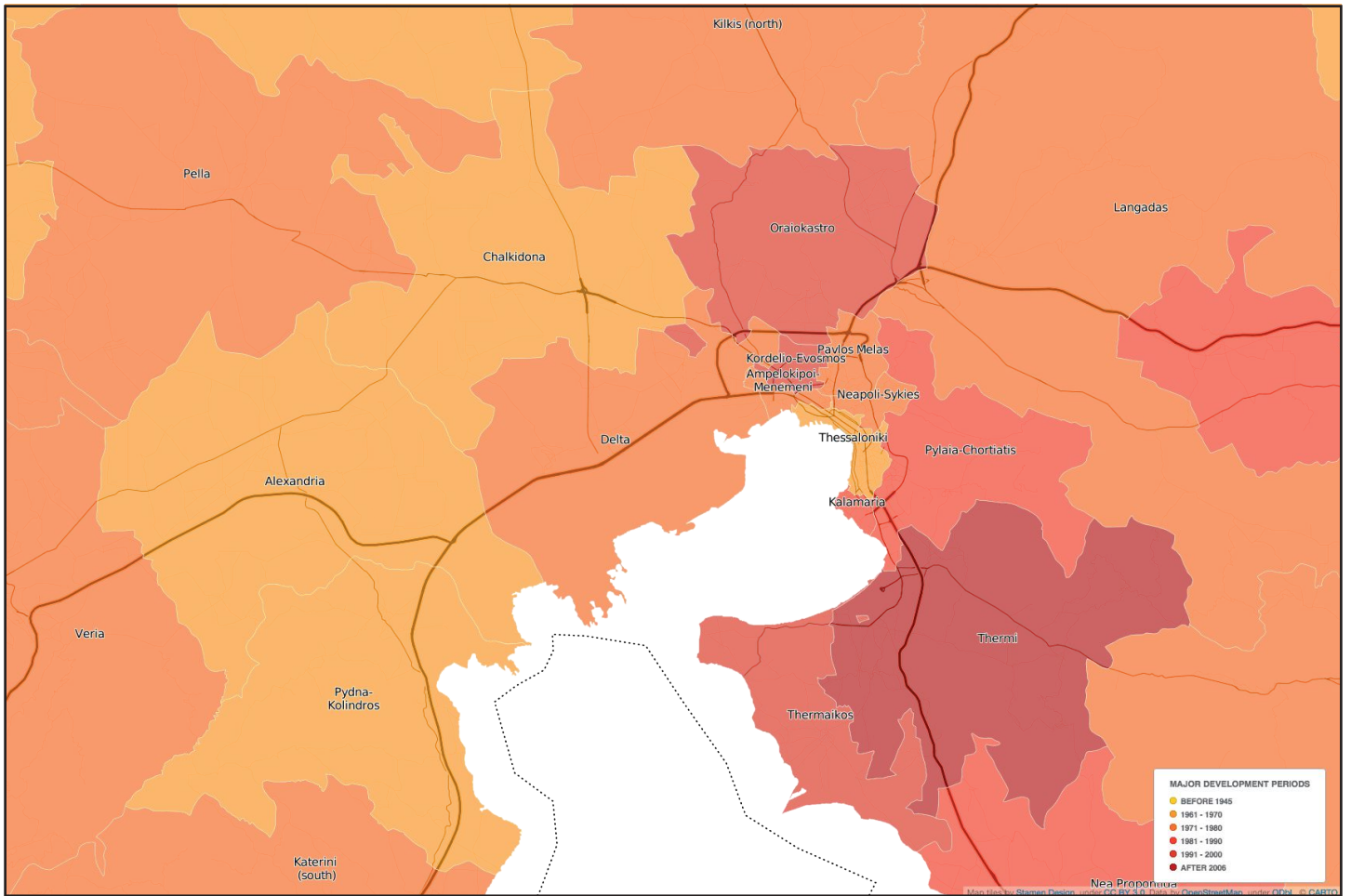
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<sup>1</sup> 2011 Population and Housing Census

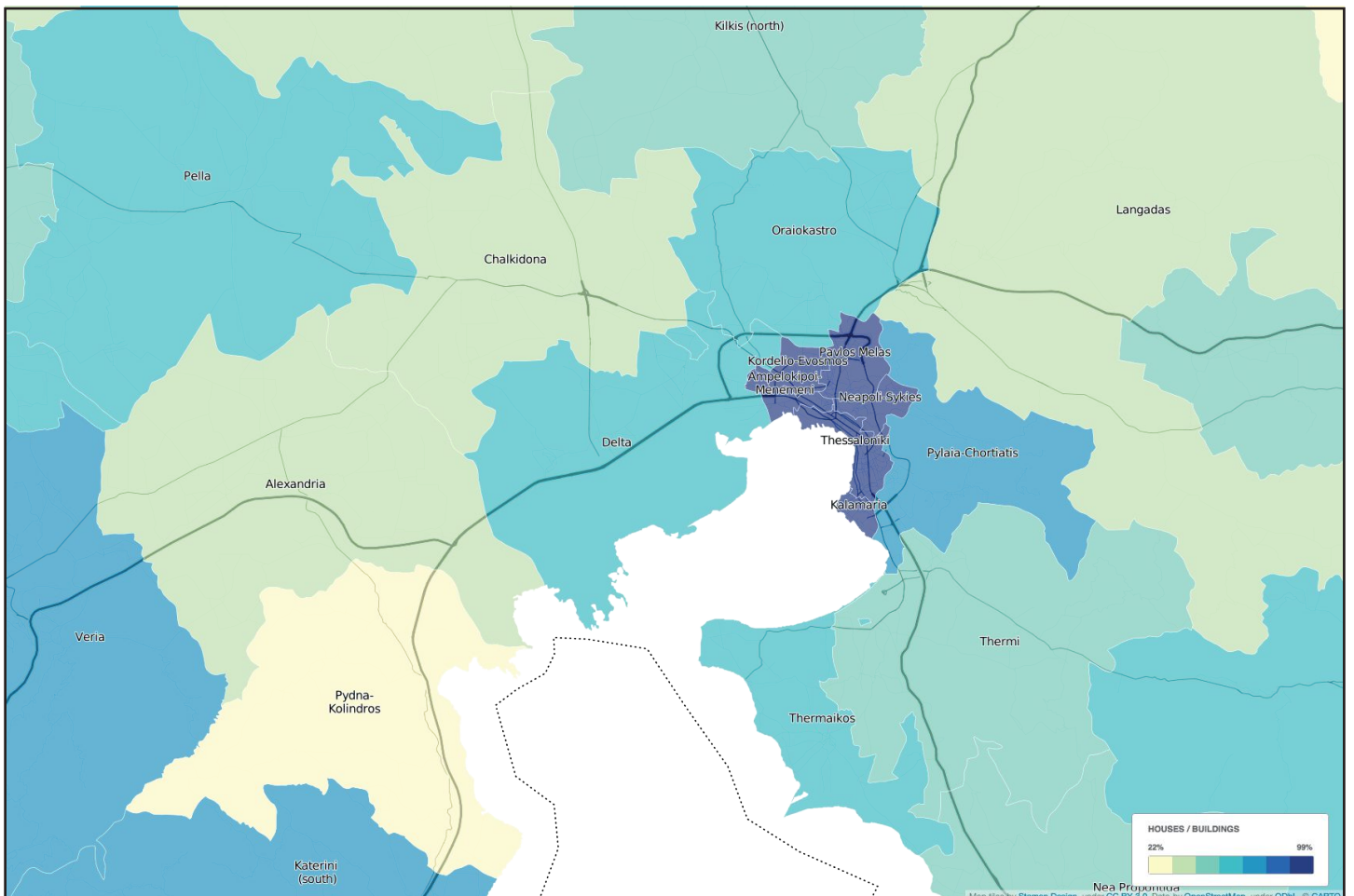
<sup>2</sup> A. Zamani, A. Grigoriadis & E. Safiolea, *The Retreat of the Social Housing Sector in Greece. A Review of Policies & Outcomes*, 2015, presentation.

<sup>3</sup> As mentioned below, taxes and formal contracts are also an obstacle.

<sup>4</sup> [https://lesimon.carto.com/viz/513e503c-961a-11e6-9281-0e3ebc282e83/public\\_map](https://lesimon.carto.com/viz/513e503c-961a-11e6-9281-0e3ebc282e83/public_map)

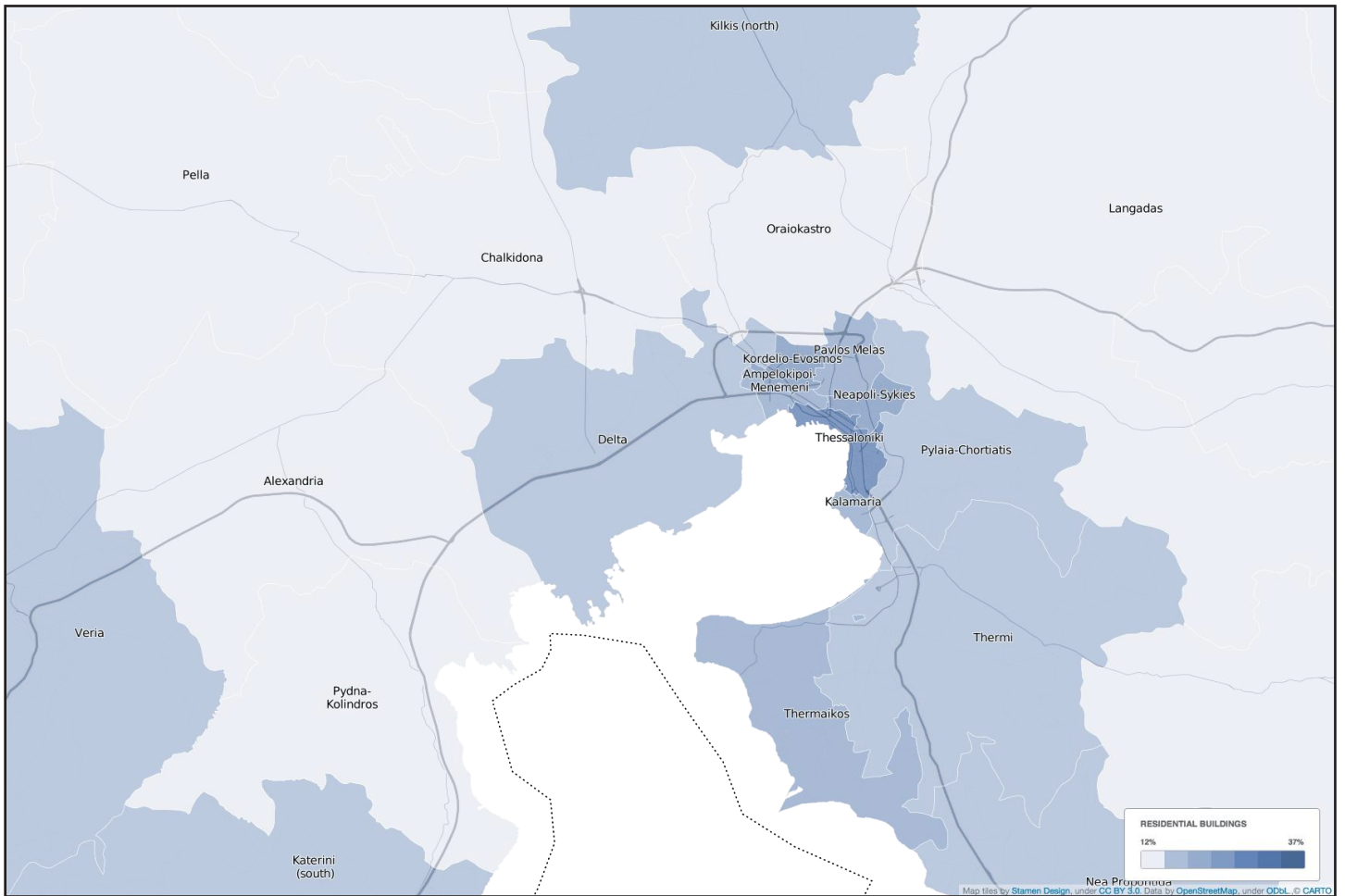


Major phases of development of Thessaloniki Region Municipalities (average buildings date of construction). ELSTAT 2011

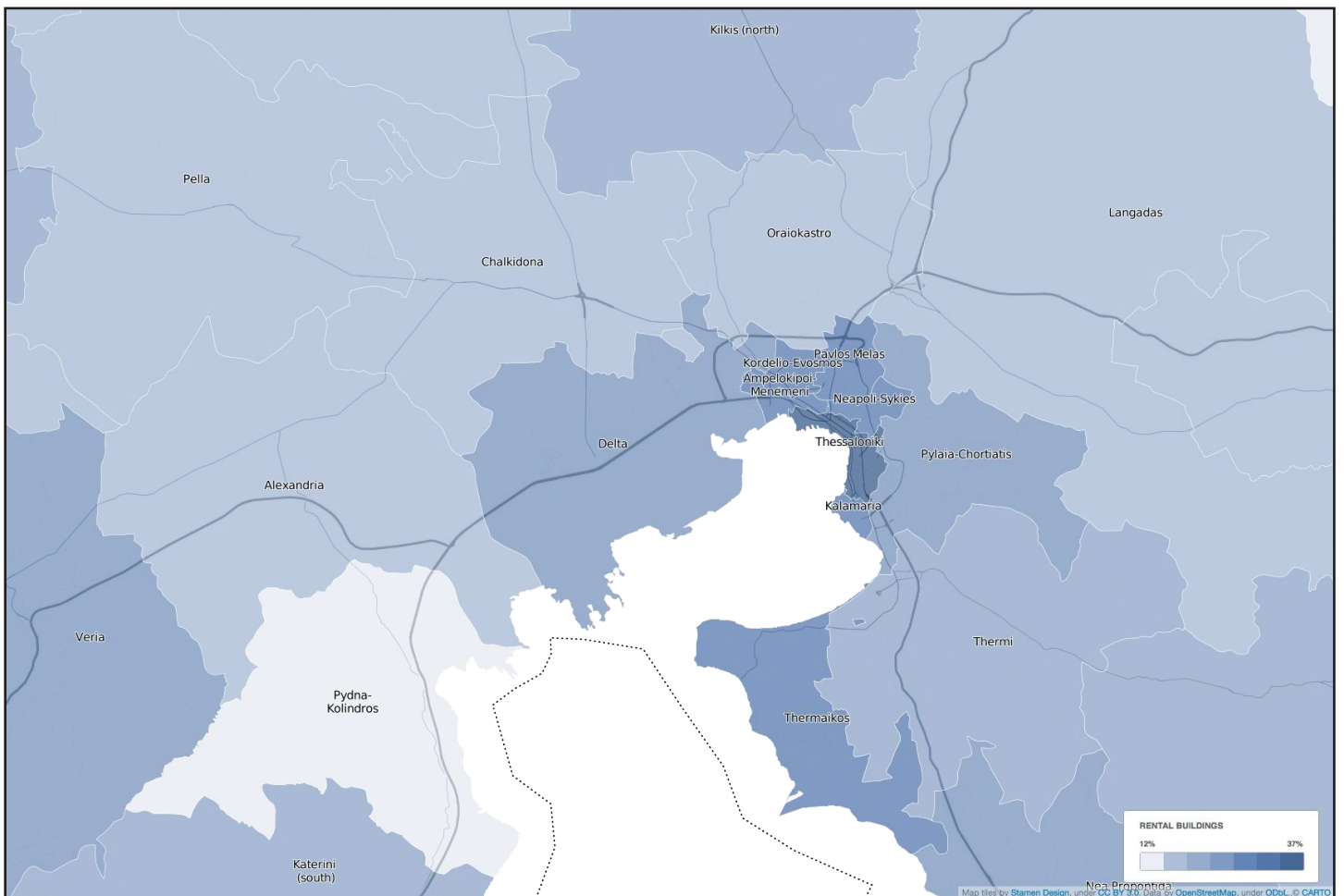


Single-family houses and residential buildings ratio per municipalities. ELSTAT 2011

**FIGURES XVII AND XVIII**



Proportion of principal residences



Proportion of rental housing. ELSTAT 2011

## FIGURES XIX AND XX

apartments (with an average size of 77m<sup>2</sup>) in buildings of about 8 floors high in the central area and of 4 to 5 floors in other areas, taking the classical form of *polykatoikias*<sup>1</sup>.

The city center is relatively expensive (€8.3 per m<sup>2</sup>) but has a high number of larger apartments (81m<sup>2</sup> on average). The surrounding historic neighborhoods located north of the center also have apartments with large surface areas, but these are fewer in number (30% of those available in the center<sup>2</sup>).

Most of the city's residential areas are in the western and eastern districts, which differ in a number of aspects. The eastern area contains traditionally middle to upper class neighborhoods, which are thus more expensive (€5.3 per m<sup>2</sup> compared to €3.8 in the west) and have bigger apartments available (27% of housing is over 100m<sup>2</sup> compared to 16% in the west). Yet, these are not the most striking differences. The most important factor is that there are eight times more rental properties in the east than in the west. In addition, the housing typologies are much more varied in the east than in the west, and the majority of these have medium to large surface areas (54% are 70-100m<sup>2</sup>).

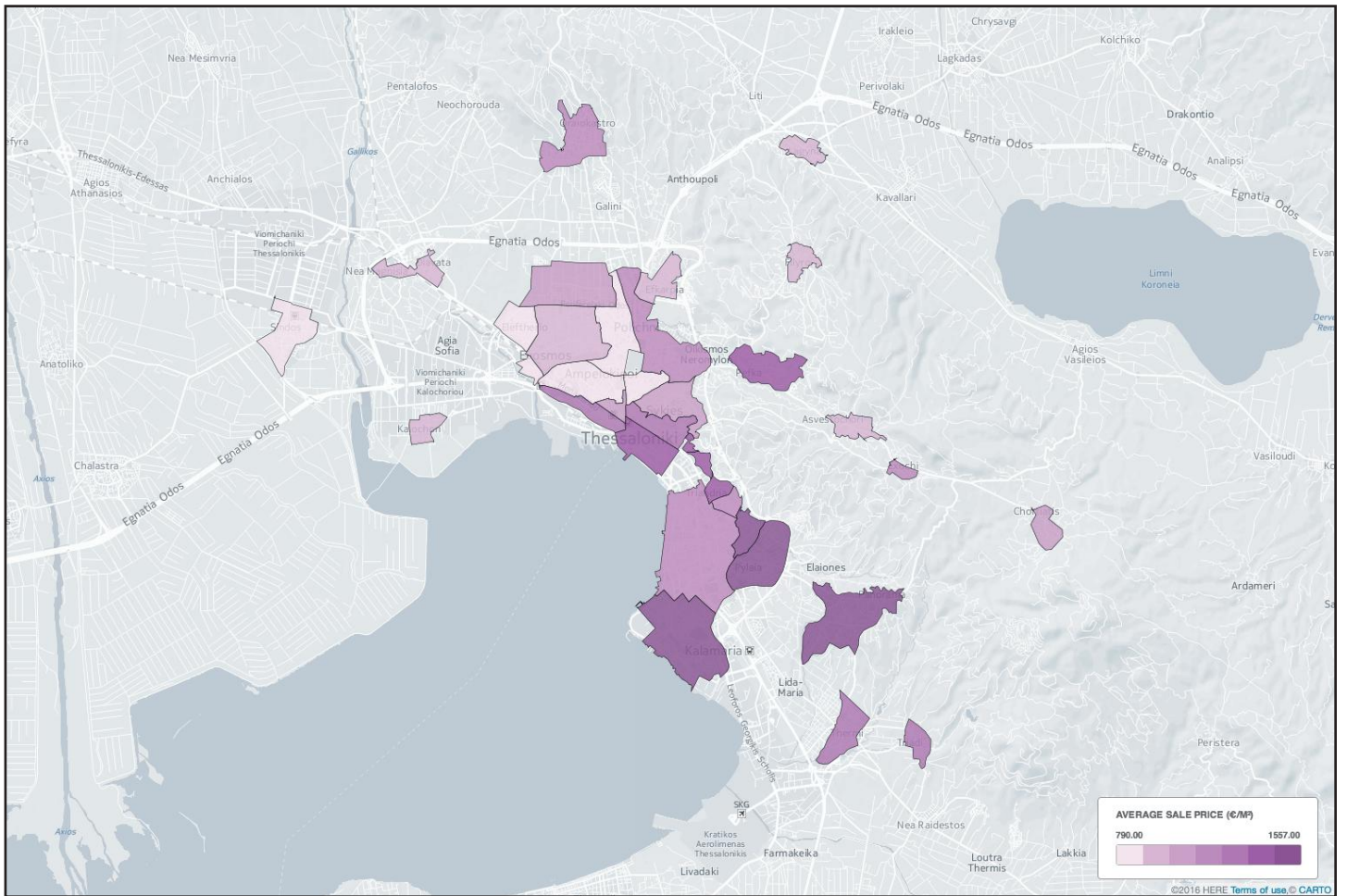
There are also two other interesting features worthy of note. Pileia neighborhood in the eastern part of the city contains a high number of apartments with smaller surface areas (52% are 30-50m<sup>2</sup>), which are therefore comparatively more expensive, on average, than those in the adjacent neighborhoods. Finally, in both the east and west, there are some areas with a large proportion of vacant buildings, mainly in areas which were still under development when the financial crisis hit, such as Nea Politeia (Evosmos) in the west or Pileia and Toumba in the east.

The residential areas of suburban neighborhoods generally share similar features, containing low-rise dwellings (houses or small buildings) with large surface areas (67% are 70-100m<sup>2</sup>) and there is a very limited supply (one-tenth of that of the city center). The notable exceptions to this are the Diavata and Sindos neighborhoods where supply is greater and the buildings higher (3 levels). Sindos also has a university and so there is a large amount of student housing (60% with surface areas of 30-50m<sup>2</sup>, 18% with less than 30m<sup>2</sup>).

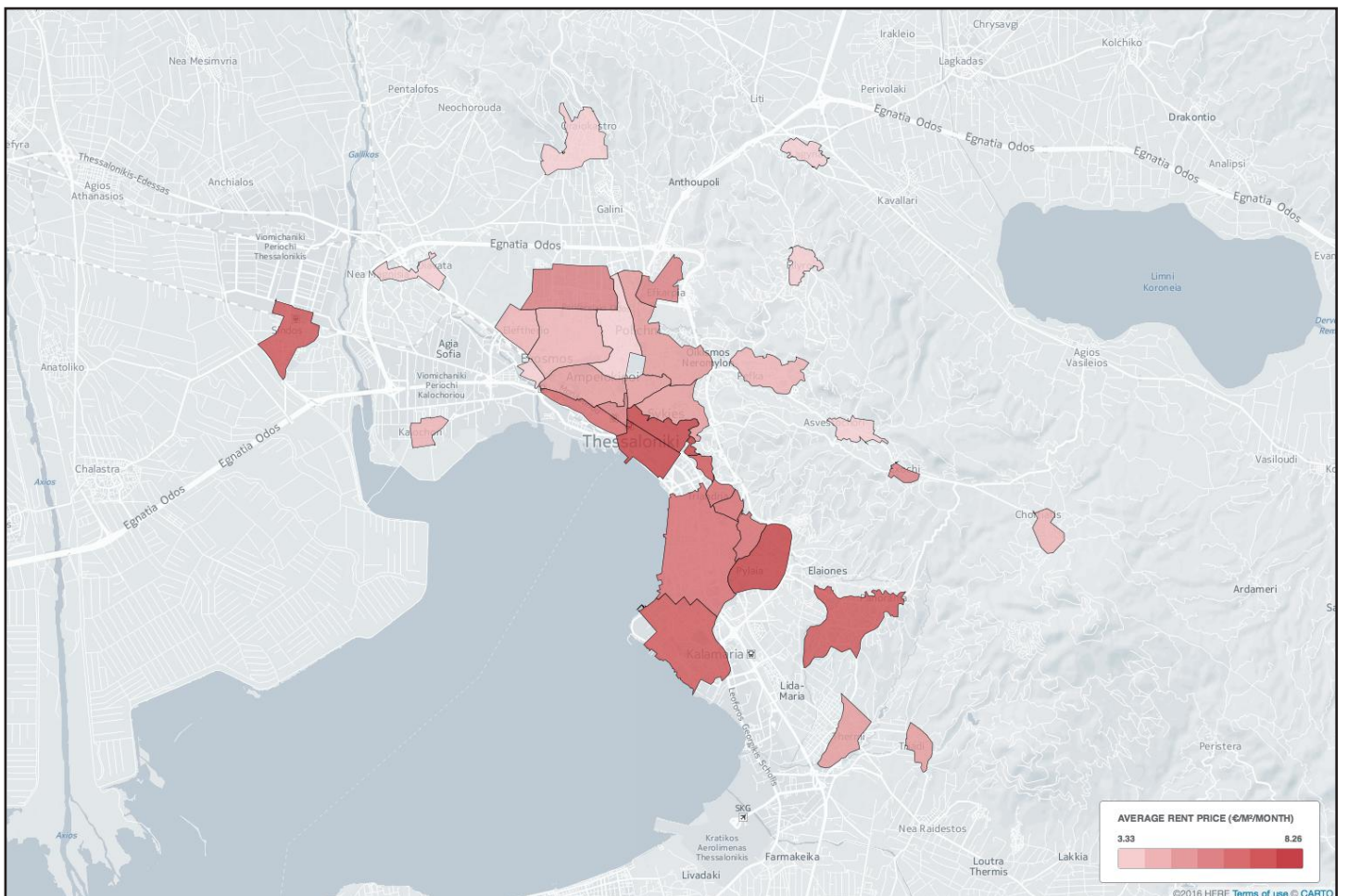
Size (sqm)	Historical neighborhoods	City center	Eastern neighborhoods	Western neighborhoods	Suburban areas
<30	4.74%	4.26%	8.75%	8.55%	9.86%
30-50	18.28%	2.13%	18.83%	14.34%	20.90%
50-70	29.81%	25.53%	18.21%	17.12%	9.36%
70-100	15.94%	42.55%	29.41%	51.76%	13.77%
>100	31.22%	25.53%	26.26%	17.11%	59.64%

<sup>1</sup> Pier Vittorio Aureli, Maria S. Giudici, Platon Issaias, From Domino to Polykatoikia, DOMUS 31 October 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Housing supply per neighborhood have been calculated by dividing the number of housing units available by the surface area of the neighborhood, and expressed in arbitrary units.

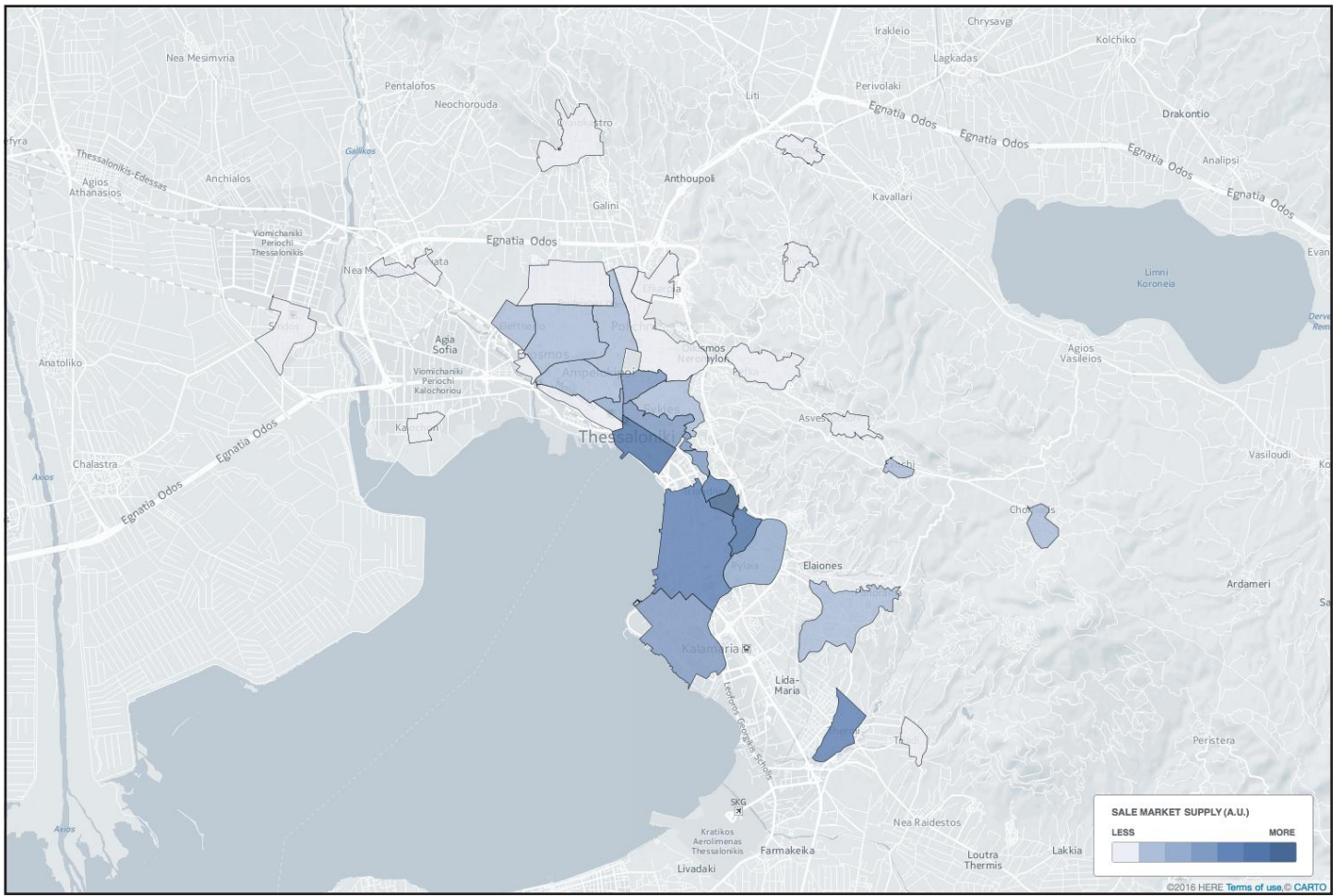


Average sale price per neighborhood.

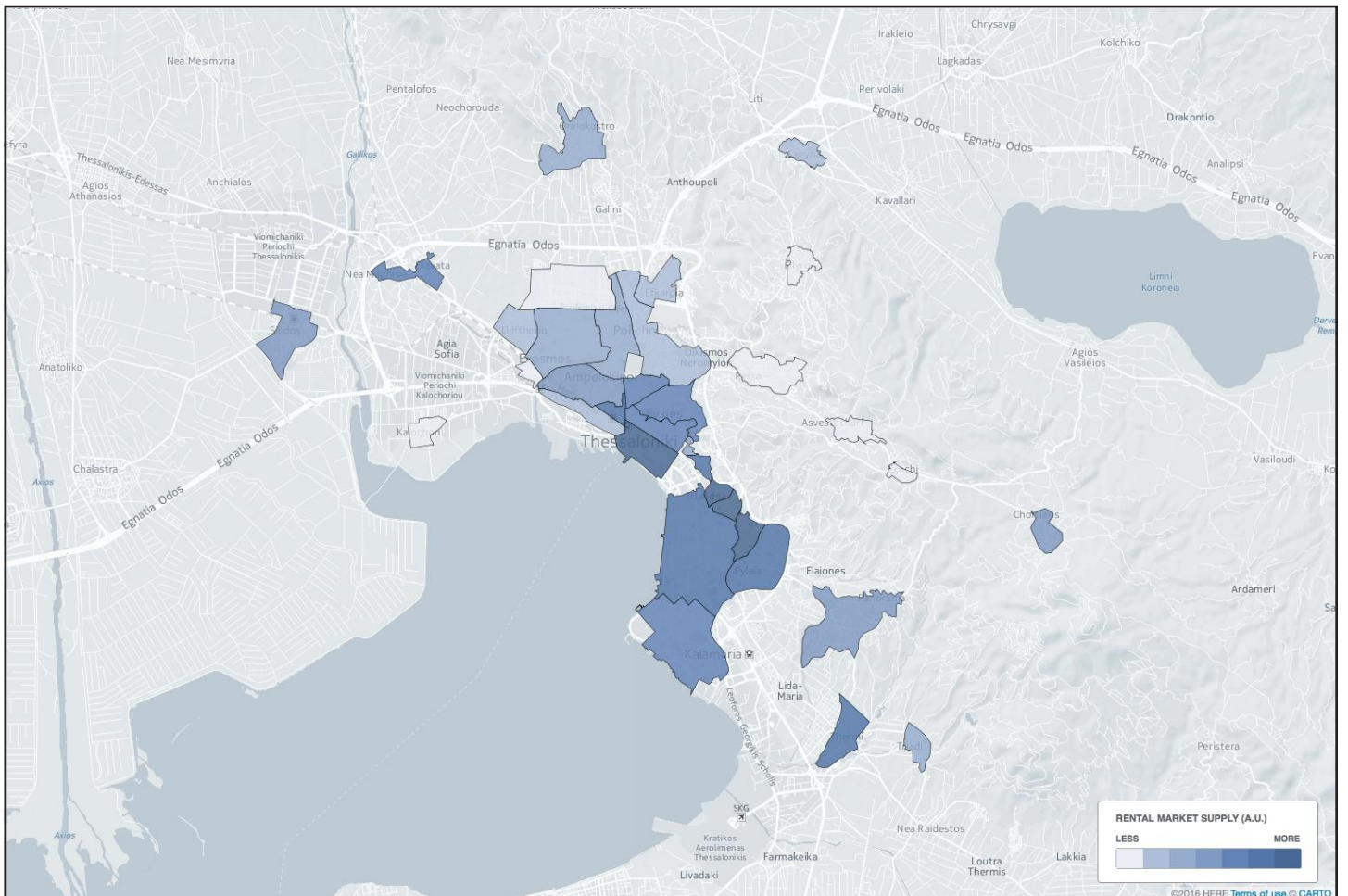


Average rent price per neighborhood.

## FIGURES XXI AND XXII



Average dwellings offer for sale per neighborhood.



Average dwellings offer for rent per neighborhood.

**FIGURES XXIII AND XXIV**

Metropolitan Areas	Average height (floors)	Average size per dwelling (sqm)	Offer for Rent(a.u.)	Offer for Sale (a.u.)	Average price for sale (€/sqm)	Average price for rent (€/sqm)
Historical neighborhoods	4	77,75	0,3	1,7	995	5,65
City center	8	80,9	1,0	7,0	1130	8,26
Eastern neighborhoods	4,62	73,01	0,8	4,0	1244	5,33
Western neighborhoods	4,1	78,47	0,1	0,5	820	3,83
Suburban areas	2,25	125,24	0,1	0,8	964	3,73

## 5. Accommodation opportunities

### 5.1. Housing availability

Within the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki, there are three main available housing typologies:

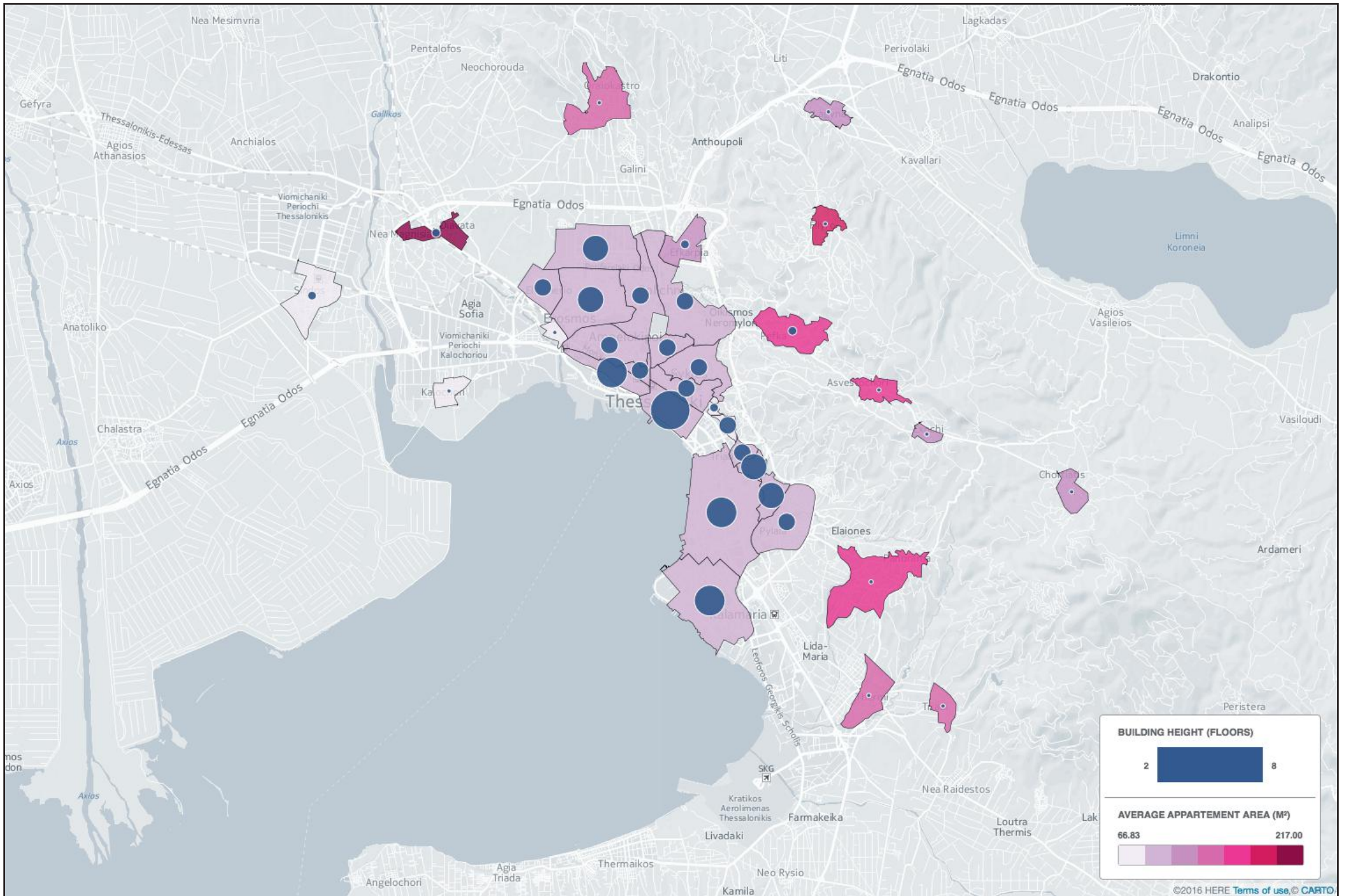
- Vacant buildings;
- Individual apartments already on the rental market;
- Groups or concentrations of apartments in certain neighborhoods.

The vacant buildings are located in areas that were undergoing urban development at the start of the crisis, so they are generally quite remote and have poor links to urban services. This isolation needs to be taken into account when considering this option for housing a large number of people (between 20 to 40 families per building or groups of buildings). Evosmos and Pileia urban fringes seem most conducive for housing families in this type of property. However, as stated above, these buildings are not yet part of the housing rental market and so it is difficult to determine their availability and rental price.

There are individual apartments available throughout the metropolitan area and suburban districts. As we have seen, supply is higher in some neighborhoods, such as in the center or the eastern parts of the city, which are also the areas best served by public transport and urban services. However, available housing supply is scattered throughout the urban fabric.

In some areas, where housing supply is particularly abundant, a high number of empty housing units, either in separate buildings or within the same building, can be seen (Southern Sindos). This concentration of accommodation may be worthy of further exploration by the project. However, it is important to note that some of these areas have poor links and access to services, either because their urban development was prematurely halted by the economic crisis or because they are situated on the urban fringes with few connections to the city center.





Average apartments size and buildings height per neighborhoods.

**FIGURE XXV**

In secondary cities, there is less available housing supply and units are mostly individual apartments. The typology of these secondary cities is relatively similar to those of the suburbs of Themi, Oreokastro and Diavata, as they contain low-rise residential buildings.

## **5.2. Other accommodation opportunities**

### **5.2.1. Hotels and compounds**

The region is a tourist area in relative decline because of the economic crisis and has many vacant hotels, resorts and second homes. These properties are often located in natural areas or along the coast (slopes of Mount Olympus, beaches, etc.) and are therefore often isolated from urban centers.

The option of using these types of accommodation was quickly taken up by humanitarian actors, and primarily by the UNHCR that, as in other parts of the country, relocates a large number of people in vacant hotels.

This solution has not been explored as part of this study because it does not correspond to the approach proposed by NRC. Although it helps get a large number of refugees out of the camps, accommodation in hotels or residences does not provide an adequate housing option for the medium and long term because these types of accommodation are isolated from urban services and lack individual equipment (kitchens). Consequently, they restrict the refugees' autonomy and exacerbate segregation between the refugees and the Greek population.

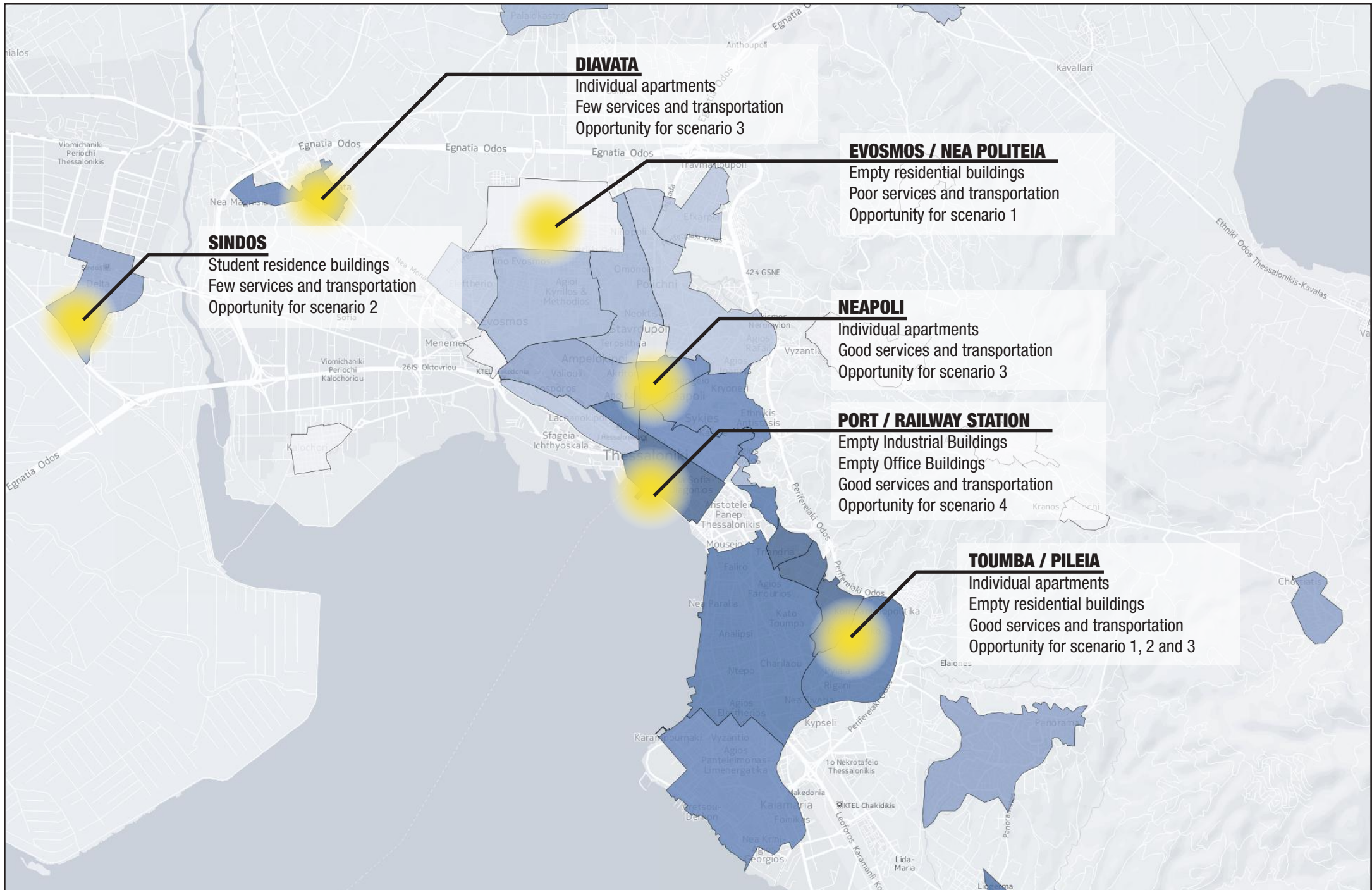
### **5.2.2. Brownfield sites and vacant non-residential spaces**

There are also other types of facilities that could be used for housing refugees. However, this study has not focused on these as they often require conversion and major rehabilitation work, which are difficult to implement in the framework of humanitarian housing projects. Nevertheless, it could be worthwhile considering some of these areas for long-term development in order to improve housing conditions and socio-spatial integration and help recover urban space.

The economic downturn, combined with the recent industrial crisis, has led to the emergence of a number of brownfield sites. These can take many forms, including large areas of land containing several buildings, buildings that are integrated into the urban fabric or smaller spaces, such as workshops on the ground floor of a property. For example, there are several brownfield sites visible around the port or the train station.

Some ex-military land has also been left vacant in Thessaloniki: Pavlou Mela and Kodra camps were transferred to the city after being dismantled several years ago. Despite some projects having been proposed and except for hosting rare events such as the "anti-racism festival" each summer, this land remains unused and undeveloped.

Moreover, due to the construction crisis, many building projects were halted and the city is punctuated by concrete skeletons that are often used as makeshift car parks. These unfinished buildings have the same constraints as the brownfield sites but have the advantage of being recent and securely-built structures, which would reduce development costs.

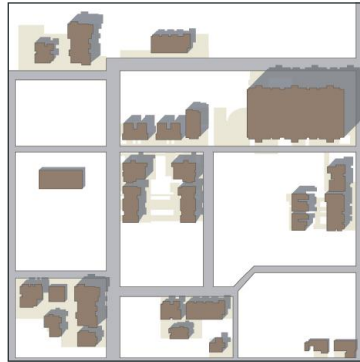


Main opportunities for a refugee housing relocation project.

**FIGURE XXVI**

CONCENTRATION OF AVAILABLE HOUSING

ACCESS TO URBAN SERVICES



### URBAN FRINGE

- Empty residential buildings
- Many empty commercial groundfloors
- Lack of infrastructure
- Poor access to urban services
- Isolation
- Risk of ghetto

ex: Nea Politeia, Toumba



### SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

- Lots of vacants apartments
- Mainly residential buildings
- Low infrastructure
- Poor access to urban services
- Risk of competition with Greeks for access to housing

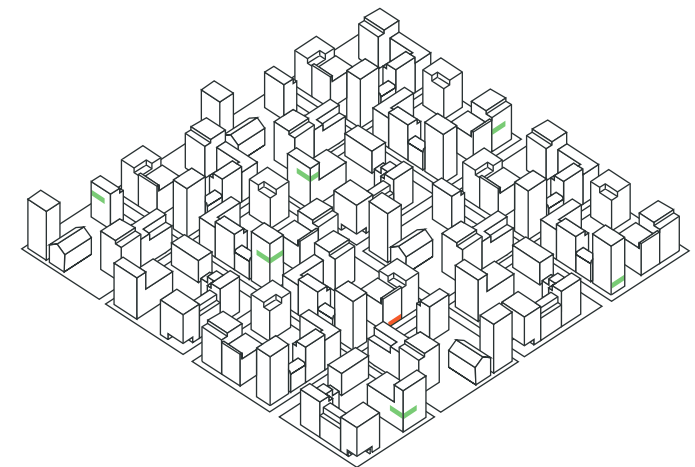
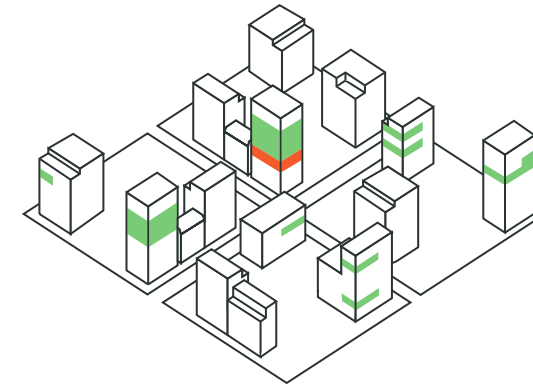
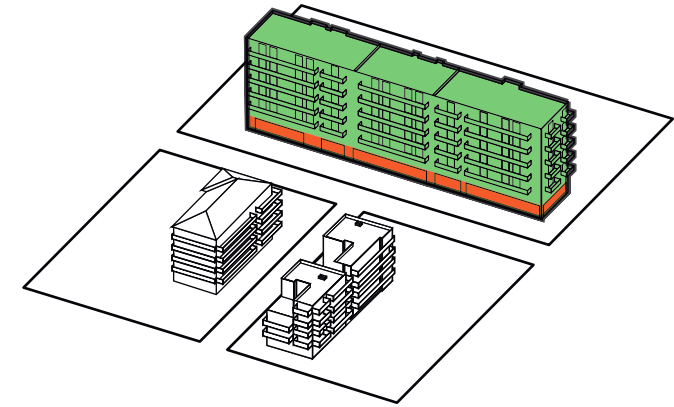
ex: Sindos, Kalochori



### URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

- Few vacant individual apartments
- Some empty shop or office spaces
- High infrastructure and access to urban services
- Risk of social isolation

ex: Pilea, Neapoli



■ Potential Refugee accomodation  
■ Potential NRC service center

Typologies of housing opportunities and urban fabric.

FIGURE XXVII

Similarly, in the center of Thessaloniki and the neighboring districts, it is possible to find empty office spaces that could be converted into housing. Again, major development work would be required to carry out this type of conversion to create adequate housing, even to the minimum standards.

Whether originally created for industrial, military, or educational (University of Thessaloniki) use, these sites often have the advantage of being located inside the city, with good access to urban services. Substantial (construction or major rehabilitation) work would probably be required to convert these sites to temporarily host refugees; however, this investment could be leveraged for long-term use or for joint use with the inhabitants of Thessaloniki. This investment and change in use would have a major impact on the neighborhood and the city and, consequently, should be considered only in partnership with the municipalities and in line with long-term public urban development plans.

### 5.2.3.Social housing

Another alternative housing solution would be to use vacant public housing to house a small number of refugees, as is the case in France and Belgium. In Greece, now OEK has been closed down, there is no public body, agency or mechanism within the public administration mandated to manage social housing. The former OEK executives have been allocated to other ministries, those of Labor or the Economy. According to Michalis Goudis, Communications Director of Housing Europe (the European Federation of Public, Cooperative & Social Housing), the current vacant stock available nationally amounts to 150 to 200 units and is made up of new social housing units not allocated before the OEK was disbanded. However, given that many Greeks are in urgent need of affordable housing, obtaining these units for housing refugees would be difficult.

### 5.3. Checklist for building visits

As highlighted above, the search for accommodation by all actors currently focuses on the existing supply of housing available to rent. This is because, to date, there have been sufficient rental properties to satisfy demand (although there is a risk that demand will soon start to outstrip supply) and because project constraints make rehabilitation or building conversion work unfeasible.

The NRC project has a similar approach and will seek to house refugees either in existing rental housing or in vacant new residential buildings. To support this search, the following tools have been developed as part of this study: a mapping of urban services<sup>1</sup> and of project assistance to refugees; and a checklist to help assess buildings during site visits<sup>2</sup>.

In order to guarantee access to adequate housing for refugees, it is crucial to ensure the different UN<sup>3</sup> criteria that define security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location and cultural adequacy are met. Although satisfying these criteria depends on several aspects, this checklist focuses on the quality of housing and on the building's location. Thus, the checklist helps to verify:

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<sup>1</sup> [https://lesimon.carto.com/viz/8bc6b63c-8624-11e6-b777-0ee66e2c9693/public\\_map](https://lesimon.carto.com/viz/8bc6b63c-8624-11e6-b777-0ee66e2c9693/public_map)

<sup>2</sup> See annex D.

<sup>3</sup> UN-Habitat, The Right to Adequate Housing, Fact Sheet No. 21/Rev.1.

- Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure: availability of safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, energy for cooking, heating, lighting, food storage or garbage disposal.
- Habitability: housing must guarantee physical safety and provide adequate space, as well as protection against the cold, damp, heat, rain, wind, other threats to health and structural hazards.
- Accessibility: housing must take into account disadvantaged and marginalized groups.
- Location: housing must give access to employment opportunities, health-care services, schools, childcare centers and other social facilities and must not be located in polluted or dangerous areas.

This tool also makes it possible to check the available living space, hallways and corridors, common areas, interior and exterior space. It also calculates the overall rental cost per family and, for non-residential buildings it helps estimate the costs of rehabilitation or change of use.

The main information about each building can then be collated and displayed on the interactive map.

**ΕΝΟΙΚΙΑΖΟΝΤΑΙ**  
**ΟΛΟΚΑΙΝΟΥΡΓΙΕΣ ΓΚΑΡΣΟΝΙΕΡΕΣ**  
ΣΕΒΗ & ΜΙΧΑΛΗΣ: Τηλ.: 6974 384435, 6944 368045

**PART. III**

**RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR PROJECT  
IMPLEMENTATION**

**ΕΝΟΙΚΙΑΖΟΝΤΑΙ**

**ΕΝΟΙΚΙΑΖΟΝΤΑΙ**  
**ΓΚΑΡΣΟΝΙΕΡΕΣ**  
6974 384435 - 6944 368045

This final part of the study focuses on the project implemented by NRC. Based on the findings of the review of existing programs and gap analysis (Part I), as well as the conclusions of the Thessaloniki urban study and housing market analysis (Part II), this third part provides recommendations to help launch the “urban housing” component of the project.

## 1. Project constraints

Between September 2016 and July 2017, the NRC project is being funded by ECHO. Funding for the « urban housing » sub-project comes to 2,3 Millions euros, including 935,000 for rents, with the aim to support 2,100 people (400 families). Based on the conclusions of Part I and Part II, it would appear that the project needs to redefine certain objectives and clarify its strategy to overcome the challenging time, budget and target constraints.

### 1.1. Timeframe

The refugees' length of stay in Greece depends on their status but cannot be precisely defined in the current context as there are still too many unknowns, especially for those refugees who are not fully-registered. The greatest need now seems to be for medium-term (6 months) or long-term (over one year) accommodation, which will be difficult to provide under the current project timeframe. Consequently, it may not be possible to reuse the same housing unit to house several families for successive short-term stays over the project period. Thus, NRC would need to prepare one of these two scenarios:

- Start to secure additional funding now to ensure housing for already accommodated families beyond July 2017 and anticipate any gaps and bridging between two funding schemes to ensure longer-term housing solutions;
- Rapidly prepare an exit strategy and stipulate that the families accommodated must have their cases dealt with during the project period (departure to another country in Europe), or be supported by other actors in Greece after July 2017.

The short timeframe of the project is also making setting up rental agreements with owners a challenge, as discussed below.

### 1.2. Budget

The analysis of the budget and beneficiary targets reveals two challenges. The first is the average length of stay per family allowed by the budget is 4,5 months (with rent of 500 euros per month per family) and which seems low compared to the average residence and waiting period in Greece. The second is the need to identify existing accommodation that meets housing standards because there are insufficient financial resources available to undertake rehabilitation work.

For example, minor rehabilitation (renovating water pipes and electricity wiring, joineries, non-structural masonry, insulation etc.) for a residential building able to accommodate 20 families (living space of 1,000m<sup>2</sup>) can cost up to 500,000 euros (500 euros/m<sup>2</sup>).



For industrial premises or unfinished buildings (basic structure only) with a similar surface area and accommodation capacity, rehabilitation costs can come to an average of 1,500,000 euros (1,500 euros/m<sup>2</sup>).

In addition, rehabilitating buildings would not be a cost-effective solution for such a short project as the major initial outlay could not be recovered over the accommodation rental period. For these reasons, the best option involves finding housing or blocks of housing of adequate standard in order to minimize investment. Only cosmetic repairs should be considered: painting, flooring, etc.

### 1.3. Target number of beneficiaries

The project has set a highly ambitious target as housing 2,100 people, or 420 families, in nine months seems a difficult challenge. In comparison, other actors have set targets to relocate a maximum of 350 people or 60 families (PRAXIS). The only exception to this is the UNHCR, whose strategy is to rehouse the highest number of people possible by renting out hotels.

Even if NRC would have the necessary resources to manage such housing stock and ensure proper follow-up of all these beneficiaries, achieving this objective is likely to be hampered by the limited supply of available housing stock, as we saw in Part II. To accommodate so many people, NRC should seek to rent hotels or tourist resorts, namely types of accommodation less suited to medium to long term stays.

One option would be to greatly reduce the target number and establish a qualitative not quantitative project. This would result in fewer people being accommodated but would ensure adequate services and the necessary monitoring (adapted to families' level of vulnerability and dependency) is provided to families, who are placed in housing units adapted to the duration of their stay in Greece. Moreover, the number of staff required to provide social follow-up must be revised as the current ratio of 1 social worker to 40 families is well below the average of other actors (1 to 25 in the projects implemented by UNHCR and 1 to 10 for other projects)<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Four scenarios

The study of the context constraints and opportunities, project framework and people's demands and needs has helped identify four different refugee housing project scenarios. These four scenarios are based on there being coherence between the available housing typologies, the status of the people to be accommodated, and the service-related assistance and type of follow-up required.

*These scenarios could be combined within a single housing project, but each scenario should thus be considered as a specific component as they all have specific objectives and methodologies.*

**The first scenario** is one in which the housing project would focus on identifying empty residential buildings to rehouse a relatively high number of refugees in the same location. As this typology is often found in under-served areas, on the urban fringes of the metropolitan area, an integrated approach for service provision would be required.

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<sup>1</sup> The number of social workers could be sufficient during the first months of the project when few people are accommodated, but should be gradually adapted according to the total number of people eventually housed.

**The second scenario** would focus on providing accommodation to people of different status using a wider range of accommodation types and, more specifically, groups of apartments located in areas with average access to public services and transport links. The relatively high concentration of people being accommodated would enable the creation of social relationships, facilitate close follow-up when needed, and also enable adapted service provision in line with families' vulnerability and dependency status.

**The third scenario** would provide individual apartments in well-served areas to more autonomous people. The main type of assistance provided would involve supporting access to services and ensuring regular follow-up.

**The fourth scenario** would focus on emergency cases in urgent need of housing out-of-camps and on homeless people. An appropriate solution would be to open an emergency center that has links to health services and that can be used to house people for short-term stays, before their referral to longer term housing solutions.

For each scenario, five phases have been identified as crucial steps for developing and implementing the project, these phases are:

- Selecting buildings according to their typology and location;
- Selecting beneficiaries based on their level of vulnerability, dependency level and the expected duration of their stay in Greece;
- Following-up each person accommodated;
- Providing the appropriate services to each person accommodated;
- Project end.

The following sections outline the specific objectives, appropriate methodologies and likely risks and challenges for each phase of each scenario.

# SCENARIO 1





## EMPTY RESIDENTIAL BUILDING

1

Empty residential buildings can be used to accommodate a relatively large number of families in one place. Due to this high concentration of people, there will be a heightened need for follow-up, management and service provision, which will mean that common facilities or a “community center” will need to be set up.

These empty residential buildings can be mainly found in different urban settings, but mostly in isolated areas. The appropriate length of stay will be based on the location of each building and its links to the city and urban services: isolated buildings would only be suitable for short-term accommodation, while those located in relatively well-served areas could be used for longer term stays.

For the duration of the project, continuous monitoring of the building shall be carried out to ensure proper management and maintenance (common areas, equipment, etc.).

Blocks of residential buildings usually have a capacity of 15 to 25 apartments; however, the largest may have up to 40 apartments. The higher the capacity, the larger the common areas will need to be and this must be taken into account when identifying buildings.

Several empty buildings could be obtained and managed under a single program. However, the more buildings used, the greater the impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods and services. In addition, the unique features of each building’s location will mean tailored management and support for people will be required, making every building a specific project (types of services, management model) and limiting the scope for simultaneously managing many buildings.



This set-up should be considered to be a short to medium-term solution, as the long-term stay of a homogeneous group of refugees may have adverse impacts. First, local people may be reticent to accept the project. Second, the relative isolation and high concentration of refugees could lead to stigmatization or self-segregation. Lastly, such set-ups within a neighborhood could have a long-term negative impact on the area’s image, future development or on the quality of its services.

There is a risk that a “camp setting” could be replicated in buildings in isolated areas, giving rise to similar issues, such as isolation, socially closed groups, bipartite social dialogue (NGO-refugees).



## MEDIUM-TERM STAY

In such a set-up, the accommodation should be used for medium-term stays only, before relocating people to a longer term accommodation solution in Greece or prior to their transfer to another country.

This solution can be used to house people with a wide range of vulnerabilities and dependencies as there would be a continuous staff presence and a high level of follow-up and service provision.

Beneficiaries should be selected in coordination with UNHCR and MoMP (the selection and prioritization process will need to be harmonized). As the appropriate length of stay may differ in accordance with each building's location, accommodation in each building should be allocated to people based on their expected length of stay.



As the waiting time for fully-registered refugees appears to be getting longer, the main challenge for the project would be to ensure people's stay in such buildings remains a short to medium term solution.



## HIGH LEVEL OF MONITORING

Due to the wide range of vulnerability and dependency levels, the people housed will need continuous support, not only individual follow-up (adapted to each case), but also community management (internal social relationships) and information (building management, activities, services, etc.).

Continuous follow-up will also be required with the neighbors in order to keep them informed of the project, to foster assistance and facilitate the integration of the refugee population.

As this set-up could lead to the creation of a closed community, the project should develop participatory management tools that involve appropriate and voluntary consultation, collaboration or self-management.

Since a high level of monitoring and management will be required, a dedicated team will need to be put in place in each building. Although this will involve significant human resources, it will also ensure quality support and service provision.



Due to the risk of replicating a “camp setting”, social follow-up, such as that conducted in the camps, will continue in order to identify protection issues, address any isolation and boredom, and ensure that the project supports everyone equally and equitably.



## FULL RANGE OF SERVICES

1

In terms of services, the project will need to guarantee the residents of buildings are provided with all necessary services despite the spatial isolation of the neighborhood (lack of transport links and access to public services).

All services will be similar to those provided in the camps. Service provision would be ensured in different ways and include permanent services on-site, regular services (on a fixed weekly basis), or by facilitating transport to services located outside the building (e.g. school).

The high concentration of people and need for basic services (health, education, etc.), as well as recreational and educational activities, will require local common areas (classrooms, consultation rooms, relaxation areas, etc.) and management areas (offices, stock rooms, etc.) to be created. These could occupy either existing ground floor spaces (shops) or apartments reserved for this purpose.



One of the major risks of the project is that it could prolong the dependency initially created in the camps, which would have an adverse effect on delivery of the project (particularly on the "service provider" and "client" relationship) and on the future of the people re-housed (dependency on aid providers).

Some services cannot be provided within the building, such as schools and health care; thus, managing the daily transportation of people to these external services could pose a huge logistical challenge (simultaneous daily transportation to several services).



## REVERT TO INITIAL USE

1

The main objective by the end of the project would be to ensure that all the people provided with accommodation are relocated to another EU country or are granted asylum in Greece.

Anybody who is not relocated should be transferred to another existing housing project in order to ensure they continue to be provided with adequate accommodation.

In the long term, residential buildings should revert to their initial (residential and commercial) use in order to ensure the social mix of each neighborhood.

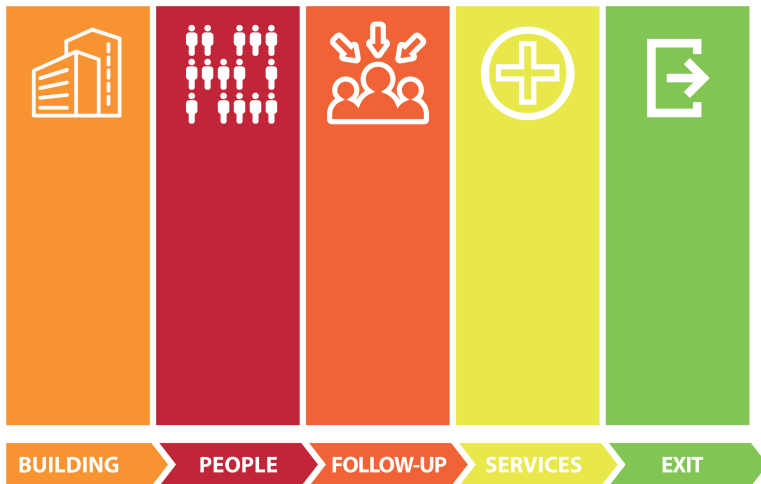
At the end of the project, finding adequate housing for the people not yet relocated is likely to remain a challenge and to mitigate this risk, the project should consider phasing out occupancy of the buildings over the last few months of the project.



Otherwise, there is a risk that the project may need to be extended in order to find housing solutions for those refugees who have not been relocated. However, the accommodation provided under this scenario would not be adequate for long-term stays and any project extension would have a significant impact on each respective neighborhood.



# SCENARIO 2





## CLUSTER OF APARTMENTS

2

In this scenario, refugees would be accommodated in individual apartments located in areas with high volumes of available housing, which would make it possible to find a large number of apartments within a concentrated area (several apartments in the same building or block) and facilitate various types of set-up.

Housing refugees in clusters of apartments would foster relationships and mutual assistance among the refugees, facilitate follow-up and social work activities, and also create the opportunity to develop common living spaces. Meanwhile, separate apartments located in the same block or neighborhood would provide their inhabitants with a more autonomous lifestyle.

The neighborhoods with high volumes of available housing are often located in areas with existing but limited access to services or transport links (on the urban fringe), which should be improved by the project. The apartments would be located in partly inhabited buildings, which could allow relationships to be forged between refugees and the local Greek people and foster integration.

Other neighborhoods may also be located near universities, as in Sindos, meaning that there may also be small apartments or even student halls of residence available to rent.

The average availability for such set-ups is about 20 to 50 apartments within the same neighborhood.

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The main risk is that the project creates competition for accommodation between refugees and Greeks as these neighborhoods are currently often inhabited by young families or students with few financial resources. It is therefore important that the project respect current market prices when renting out existing housing and does not take over too large a part of the accommodation available.



If too many refugees are housed within the same neighborhood, instead of fostering integration, this could lead to stigmatization or self-segregation. The apartments should be selected based on their location, with a view to finding a balance between the accommodation available and access to services (Very well served areas may have less housing options available, and an area with too few services would be unsuitable).



## MEDIUM TO LONG-TERM STAY

This relatively flexible set-up could provide medium to long-term accommodation. Due to the somewhat limited follow-up and access to services, short-term stays would not be appropriate.

The different types of apartment would also make it possible to house people with a relatively wide range of vulnerabilities and dependencies. Beneficiaries should be selected in coordination with UNHCR and MoMP (the selection and prioritization process will need to be harmonized). As each building may offer different types of assistance and mutual aid, each person's individual situation (vulnerability/dependency) should be taken into account during the selection and apartment allocation process.



The main challenge in terms of matching will be to adequately accommodate a wide range of cases and vulnerability levels. Thus, the project should simultaneously adapt the vulnerability/dependency levels of the selected beneficiaries and the range of housing available.



## TAILORED FOLLOW-UP

People's situations may be different and so the social assistance and follow-up should be adapted. Regular follow-up will always be needed, specifically during the first weeks of accommodation.

More intensive follow-up and assistance would be provided for the more vulnerable refugees housed in clusters of apartments while, for those living in separated apartments, follow-up would be less frequent (on a weekly basis).

The social work activities will also need to include mediation with the local population, such as the buildings' neighbors, local retailers or local service providers.

For clusters of apartments, community management processes could be developed to deal with issues within a specific building or housing block.



The main challenge will be to adapt the social assistance and follow-up provided to each individual situation and need.



## COMPLEMENTARY SERVICES

2

The project would have to compensate for the limited access to services and transport links: firstly, by providing specific and complementary services (non-formal education, legal, support, etc.); secondly, by supporting access to existing local services (schools, doctors, etc.); and thirdly, by supporting access (transport) to services (hospitals, schools) that are further away.

For more dependent families and clusters of apartments, it would be useful to create a common living space reserved for families living within the same building (e.g. one shared studio for several families).

As this set-up could be used to provide accommodation to more independent families, the project should consider fostering the integration of those most likely to remain in Greece.



In terms of service provision, the main challenge would be to provide different levels of service and assistance, which could create competition between refugees. Similarly, there is a risk that the services and assistance provided to refugees might be more extensive and generous than the assistance provided to the poor among the local population (e.g. cash assistance), which could lead to localized social issues.



The use of local services by the re-housed refugees could put a strain on schools and medical facilities, etc. Local service capacities should thus be taken into account or improved. However, in contrast, the influx of this new population could also help boost the development or revitalization of a neighborhood.



## ENSURE LONG-TERM SOCIAL MIX

By the end of the project, most of the people should have been accommodated into long-term housing solutions (in Greece or the EU) or referred to another housing project.

As this accommodation scenario would help ensure there is a social mix with the local population, it could be used as a long-term option, as long as steps are taken to provide good access to local services. People being granted asylum in Greece should be able to stay in their apartments or neighborhood to continue their integration.

However, the high concentration of refugees within a neighborhood, and specifically within the same building, would not be appropriate over the long term; thus, the project could consider gradually reducing the number of apartments it holds to ultimately keep only the ones housing people being granted asylum in Greece.

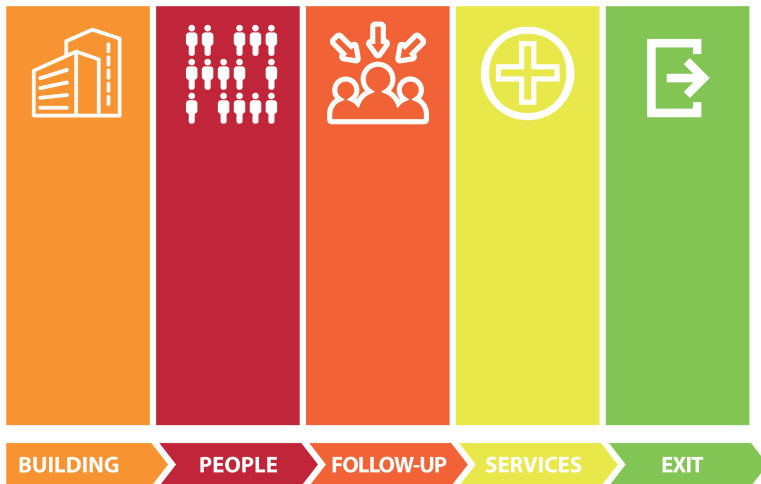
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The people being granted asylum and who are able to stay in their apartments would likely receive fewer services and less assistance from the state than they have been used to under the project. Therefore, an exit strategy will be required to phase out the project assistance provided (while continuing to ensure minimum services) and prepare the successful asylum seekers for life post-project.



There is also a risk that, over the medium to long term, clusters of apartments may become small self-contained communities with limited social diversity, which could jeopardize the integration process.

# SCENARIO 3





## INDIVIDUAL APARTMENTS

3

Refugees would be accommodated in individual apartments spread across a mixed neighborhood with good transport links and access to services. As follow-up activities will still be required, as well as some local service-related activities or mediation, it may be appropriate to ensure the apartments are grouped fairly close together, for example near (within a few bus stops of) a hospital with which NRC has developed a partnership, or in a welcoming municipality or neighborhood.

During the rental period, buildings will be continuously monitored to verify the proper use of the housing, undertake repairs and ensure bills are paid (water, electricity, etc.).

The total expected number of people able to be re-housed through such a project is constrained by various factors: the (financial and HR) resources available for providing proper follow-up and assistance; the availability of housing; and the defined maximum number of people to be housed in one place (neighborhood, town, etc.), which is mainly dependent on the service capacities.

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After having spent a few months or years cohabiting and developing close relationships with compatriots or friends, people relocated in individual apartments might feel lost in the city. Specific attention should be paid to the location of the apartments in the city, in order to prevent isolation.



To foster long-term integration and maintain a social balance within the neighborhoods, the location of the apartments should be chosen in conjunction with the municipalities and local service providers (hospitals, schools, etc.).





## LONG-TERM STAY

The accommodation can be used for medium to long-term stays; it would not be suitable for short-term accommodation as people will need some time to familiarize themselves with their neighborhood, local services, or transport links.

Individual apartments would be most appropriate for people who are self-reliant, with low to medium levels of vulnerability, but would not be suited to people with high vulnerability or dependency or with severe medical conditions. This type of accommodation would also be an option for people more likely to stay in Greece (those applying for asylum in Greece).

Beneficiaries could be selected together with UNHCR and MoMP (the selection and prioritization process will need to be harmonized).



The challenge here will be to define selection criteria for referring autonomous families that still make it possible to identify vulnerable cases in order to satisfy equity criteria and donor requirements (e.g. autonomous families with one vulnerable person: elderly, pregnant, ..).



## TAILORED FOLLOW-UP

Despite their low vulnerability and dependency status, a regular (weekly) follow-up must be conducted with all accommodated families in order to provide them with information on the project and update them on their status, ensure that they receive the required assistance (e.g. cash program, NFI, bus tickets) and assist them to develop relationships with their neighbors



The main challenge will be to develop case-by-case assistance based on each family's vulnerability (dependency, illness, etc.), and autonomy (languages spoken, etc.).



## DIRECTING FAMILIES TO URBAN SERVICES

The services provided to the relocated families would be relatively limited with assistance mainly focusing on familiarizing them with existing local services. During the first few weeks, this assistance will involve helping the families to settle in by directing them to the main local services (school, supermarket, public transportation, etc.). Later on, this assistance will become less intensive and consist of supporting families with their legal or administrative tasks (e.g. registering children in school), or visits to health-care facilities.

Another important service will involve helping people to overcome isolation and fostering social relationships by providing meeting spaces in the neighborhood.

For people more likely to stay in Greece, services to help with the integration process should be provided (such as language courses, support with understanding the Greek administration system, computer training, etc.). These activities could take place locally or in a larger center further away.



The main challenge in terms of services will involve identifying and mapping the relevant services (supermarket, doctors, schools, etc.) for each family or main location, as well as introducing the families to the local service providers.



## FOSTER INTEGRATION

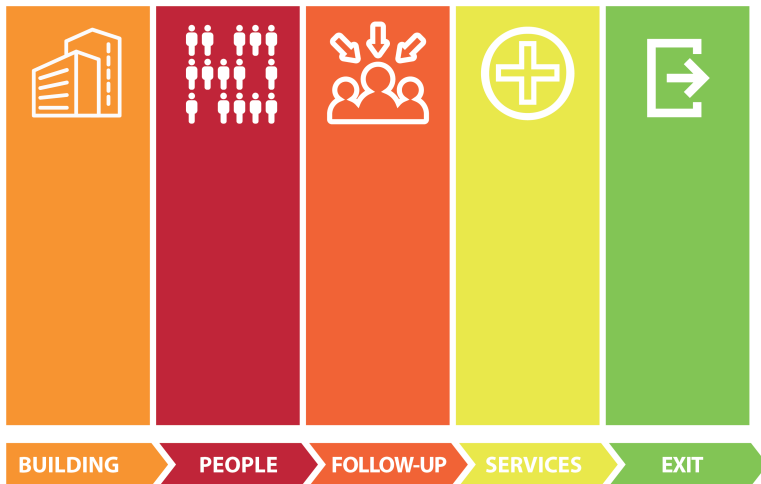
The main objective by the end of the project would be to ensure that all the people provided with accommodation are relocated to another EU country or granted asylum in Greece.

The refugees being granted asylum in Greece should be able to stay in the same neighborhood in order to foster their integration. To this end, local rental market prices need to be factored in when determining the location of the apartments.



Over the long-term, the main risk is that an overly high number of refugees is relocated within the same neighborhood and creates an imbalance within the social mix, overloads services or even impacts on market prices.

# SCENARIO 4





## EMERGENCY SHELTER

4

The emergency shelter building should be located near areas where there are high concentrations of homeless refugees or in a well-served area.

In terms of capacity, an emergency shelter could provide accommodation for 30 to 100 people (in rooms or apartments).

It may also be useful to combine the emergency shelter with a drop-in or day center in order to provide the general refugee population with certain relevant services, as well as with educational or recreational activities.



One of the main risks of the project is that the high concentration of refugees around the emergency shelter area causes problems with the local population and creates social issues.

Due to its probable high visibility and potential to cause controversy, the location of the building should be chosen in conjunction with municipal and local stakeholders.



## SHORT-TERM STAY

The emergency accommodation is intended for short-term stays (1-2 weeks).

The emergency shelter could be used as temporary accommodation for certain families in situations of high vulnerability (violence, eviction, threats, GBV, etc.). The center could provide them with safe stop-gap accommodation before a longer-term housing solution is found.

The shelter could also be used to host homeless people (arriving from the Aegean Islands or living outside the camps). Selecting the beneficiaries will be complicated by the fact that there is no data available on the homeless refugee population in Thessaloniki or in the wider region. In addition, a lot of people living in squats or renting sub-standard dwellings are not included in the different surveys. Before opening an emergency shelter for homeless refugees, a specific assessment will need to be carried out to determine their number, situations, specific needs and aspirations.

The vulnerable people to be targeted by the center could be identified in three ways: firstly, through the work of an outreach team; secondly, through referrals from other organizations; or thirdly, through self-referrals (drop-in center). The number of available rooms or beds should be regularly communicated to other actors and the coordinating agency in order to facilitate the referral of emergency cases.

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Throughout the project, the main challenge will be to refer all cases to more adequate longer-term accommodation, in coordination with other actors, not only those implementing housing projects but also agencies providing healthcare assistance.



Controlling the length of each resident's stay by establishing accommodation rules and by being able to refer all cases to more adequate housing solutions could also pose a further challenge.



## INTENSIVE ASSISTANCE

The main aim of the follow-up activities during these short-term stays is to get to know the people in order to identify adequate longer-term housing solutions that meet their specific needs.

There may be a high number of people with severe medical conditions or high vulnerability due to their exclusion or marginalization or their high exposure to violence, non-hygienic living conditions, etc. All cases will thus require specific follow-up and most will also require (medical and psycho-social) health assistance.

For the specific homeless population, some people may not be registered or be in the country illegally (still in Greece despite having had their asylum application rejected or without having requested asylum after a six-month stay). Thus, specific follow-up and legal assistance should be provided by or in close conjunction with MoMP and UNHCR.

Mediation efforts with neighbors will have to be undertaken in order to foster acceptance from the local community and encourage refugees to come and stay in the center.

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The major risk is that no long-term solution can be found in some cases due to a lack of available housing.

Therefore, one of the challenges will involve creating enough housing units to accommodate a sufficient number of emergency cases.



For the homeless population, the main challenge will be to identify longer-term accommodation solutions. The project will also have to deal with those in illegal situations while ensuring protection is provided to the refugees.





## FULL RANGE OF SERVICES

Due to the high vulnerability and dependency status of the center's residents, most of the services required will have to be provided by the project. In addition, specific health-related cases will need to be referred and passed onto external public or non-governmental actors.

There will also be a considerable need for other services, such as educational or recreational activities. These could more easily be provided by combining the emergency center with a day center in which all kinds of activities are offered to a wider refugee population.



The major challenge of the project in terms of services will be to ensure all general and specific services are available to all residents and this will require high internal capabilities or strong cooperation with external actors.



## HAND OVER TO ANOTHER ORGANIZATION

The end of the emergency shelter project poses a particular challenge as continuity in the management of emergency or homeless cases needs to be ensured.

Ideally, the center should be handed over to a local organization or a public institution.



The main risk lies in ensuring protection and vulnerability cases are directly referred to longer-term accommodation.

## 3. General recommendations on cross-cutting issues

### 3.1. Selection and referral

As seen in the conclusion of Part I of this study, the project's target population and related selection and referral system has not yet been clarified. The gap analysis has clearly shown that there is an urgent need to focus on people who have applied for family reunification and on those who seek asylum in Greece, whose number is expected to increase in the coming months. However, as things stand, these people are not included in the lists established by the UNHCR, who is in charge of organizing and centralizing the referral system. If NRC opts to focus on one of these particular groups of refugees, it will be important to establish a common methodology between stakeholders to ensure transparency and consistency in the assistance response. This methodology should include processes for:

- Establishing a reference database that lists all refugees, regardless of their status;
- Harmonizing and sharing vulnerability and prioritization criteria for accessing alternative accommodation to camps;
- Data sharing between stakeholders so that organizations that refer cases are able to ensure other agencies will take over the case management;
- Coordination between actors to create a diverse and complementary supply of housing to enable solutions to be found for all vulnerabilities, levels of autonomy and lengths of stay and which operates as a multi-stakeholder referral system.

For NRC, this will also mean clearly defining the accommodation program's target population group to enable other actors to refer adapted cases. If the project objective is to fill a gap, then the program should focus either on family reunification cases, which means developing housing solutions for medium / long term stays, or on people seeking asylum in Greece; however, these asylum seekers' specific needs (integration) do not appear particularly compatible with the existing project constraints.

For scenario 4 (the emergency center), attention should specifically focus on both the people living outside the camps and on emergency situation cases within the camps, regardless of the refugees' status. In addition to general recommendations, this scenario would require a dedicated outreach team to be set up to identify 'invisible' refugees living in the city without assistance, and also to work with ARSIS, currently the only organization working in this field as part of an independent project (not funded under the UNHCR accommodation program).

### 3.2. Follow-up

During the interviews, all organizations highlighted the fact that the regular monitoring of accommodated families is both essential and necessary, regardless of the refugee families' level of vulnerability and autonomy. This monitoring should cover several aspects:

- providing day-to-day support to help people overcome the language barrier, settle in and create networks in urban neighborhoods by conducting weekly visits, helping with certain administrative tasks (medical visits, enrolling children at school, etc.), distributing information booklets listing the services available in the neighborhood, etc.;
- supporting daily needs: cash program, food vouchers, NFI, travel cards, etc.;

- psychosocial and medical monitoring;
- mediation with neighbors in the building and the wider neighborhood to ensure acceptance and prevent conflict;
- the regular maintenance of housing and any equipment.

The frequency of such monitoring will vary: day-to-day support will be very important in the first few weeks after moving and will then gradually become less pressing (but remain necessary); mediation with neighbors is more ad hoc, but requires a continuous presence to quickly identify needs; follow-up for cash assistance and other programs will be weekly or monthly, etc. Furthermore, this monitoring should be performed by people with different skills, and will require high levels of coordination between the different teams (shelter, social, partner staff, etc.). This monitoring program is complex, yet is an essential part of the housing program.

Type of Follow-up	Description	Frequency	Staff Responsible
Day-to-day life	Introduction to the district; activities to prevent boredom and isolation and overcome the language barrier	Irregular: high during the first few weeks, then once a week	Volunteers or a social workers
Daily needs	Regular distribution of cash, NFI, travel cards, etc.	Regular: every week or month	Partner Staff (CARE?)
Psycho-social		Regular: once a week or more for vulnerable people	Psychologist
Mediation	Maintaining good relationships with the neighbors in the building and in the wider neighborhood	Irregular: "floating" follow-up to detect any issues. Frequent follow-up in the event of an incident	Social Worker
Housing maintenance	Maintaining the apartment / building in good condition. Routine maintenance and maintenance of household equipment.	Regular: every 2 weeks	Technical Worker (plumber, electrician)

The programs presented in Part 1 of the study have on average:

- 1 social worker to every 10 families / apartments;
- 1 technical worker to every 25 apartments.

All these follow-up tasks must be performed with the support of an interpreter. It is essential that there are a sufficient number of interpreters available to ensure qualitative monitoring.

If NRC opts to work in a collective building, monitoring can be simplified as the beneficiaries will all be gathered in the same place (requiring a reduced number of staff); however, their needs will remain the same (same diversity of profiles, same monitoring frequency) and there will be additional community management needs. Moreover, in this set-up (20 to 40 families in a building), it is essential to ensure there is a continuous staff presence during the day.

### 3.3. Search for housing

As mentioned above, the fact that there is a multitude of actors all seeking property to rent, and often looking for identical typologies, has led to market saturation and inefficient competition. In order to increase accommodation capacity, it seems important to streamline the search. Several methods could be developed:

- Undertake joint efforts to develop common communication tools under the aegis of the relevant municipalities: information campaigns (TV, radio, press, etc.), information booklets for real estate agencies and a common application platform for owners (unique phone number, website, desk at the town hall or in a real estate agency, etc.). It will then be necessary to share out the available housing units between actors using a set of criteria, such as geographic location (NRC could work in identified neighborhoods or municipalities), type of property (NRC could choose only buildings that can accommodate more than 5 families, for example), or each actors' capacities (e.g. ARSIS and PRAXIS have reached their target for this year). Although this solution would require excellent coordination and communication between actors, it would have the advantage of providing property owners with greater clarity and would enable municipalities to lead the process (and develop in-depth knowledge of the accommodation strategy being implemented in their area).
- Develop additional housing options and thus identify different types of property. Many actors are currently focusing on 2 to 3 bedroom apartments in urban neighborhoods, while some are opting for completely or partially empty apartment buildings. As outlined at the end of Part II, there are many empty or abandoned buildings in Thessaloniki that would be suitable for rehabilitation projects, in particular public buildings. If a second project phase is to be conducted, it would be worthwhile to start identifying these opportunities over the coming months in conjunction with the municipalities, universities and other public bodies. These typologies are particularly suitable for developing emergency accommodation solutions, which, as frequently highlighted - especially by the Municipality of Thessaloniki - are much needed (the ARSIS Asylum Shelter is a good example).
- Develop regulatory tools for rental prices in order to control the impact on the market, particularly given the economic recession and the difficulties being experienced by poor Greeks (students, young families, etc.) to find housing. The independent committee set up by the municipality of Thessaloniki to establish rental prices (see Part I) is a very interesting solution. It would be interesting to explore the option of adapting this type of committee for the NRC project or, at least, to establish harmonized price scales between stakeholders to prevent housing automatically being awarded to those offering to pay the highest rent. These processes should be led by the concerned municipalities.
- Develop rental contract monitoring and control tools to ensure that rent subsidies are not provided to only a few wealthy owners or to banks whose property portfolio is made up of housing obtained through repossessions, liquidation, bankruptcy, etc. Rules should be put in place setting a limit on the number of housing units that can be rented from one owner and to

encourage the renting of housing owned by small-scale property owners. In addition, consideration needs to be given to investing these funds to benefit the wider public, focusing especially on public buildings by helping to renovate them for future use.

### 3.4. Contracts

The organizations already implementing housing projects have all experienced difficulties in negotiating rental contracts with property owners. The main obstacles are:

- fear / reluctance to rent to refugees;
- the short-term nature of the contracts (one year or less, while regular contracts are usually for 2 to 3 years);
- the taxes and cost of legal documents that need to be paid when a formal agreement is signed.

A number of tools have been developed by other actors to overcome these barriers, including:

- drafting tailored contracts that include terms for terminating or renewing the contract every 6 months;
- paying rent in advance or even the total amount of the rent due for short-term contracts;
- providing assurances that all bills will be paid on time (water, electricity, gas)<sup>1</sup>;
- providing assurances that a technical team will carry out routine maintenance on the property and that it will be returned empty and in its original condition;
- guaranteeing that a social team will assist the families and ensure good neighborly relations are maintained.

As the NRC project is very short, it is likely that many of the contracts signed will be for less than 6 months. Where this is the case, the project could secure its own funds to anticipate possible gaps between two project phases and stabilize the management of housing stock.

Negotiations with property owners can be long and complex. Experience in similar settings (e.g. Lebanon) has shown that it is essential to train the teams in charge of contract negotiations on local market prices, assessing the value of a property, adequate housing standards, project content (in order to provide clear and accurate information) and on identifying the owners' interests to adapt language accordingly, etc. It is also important that the same person be in charge of the entire negotiation process with each owner.

### 3.5. Length of stay

As noted above, it is difficult to estimate the length of stay in Greece for refugees, whatever their status, as administrative processes all vary in length and their outcomes are uncertain. In general, however, there are a number of principles that can be used to direct people towards alternative housing solutions:

- Short-term accommodation solutions (less than 6 months) must meet adequate housing standards. Hotel rooms are unsuitable for stays of longer than a few weeks. For example, giving

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<sup>1</sup> This can be done through assigning a dedicated person to collect invoices at each due date; or developing accelerated payment procedure.

people the opportunity and facilities to cook for themselves improves comfort and can alleviate feelings of dependency and help people reconnect with family and cultural habits.

- For medium-term stays, people with no particular need for assistance or special vulnerability should have access to independent housing and access to urban services after 6 months. With medium-term stays, the challenge is to providing refugees with autonomy, access to urban services and utilities and interaction with Greek society, and, as the same time, to help them to maintain their close-knit relationships with other refugees and offering high levels of assistance to prepare refugees departing to their future host country.
- Finally, many of the refugees are likely to stay in Greece for a long period (one to several years). Long-term housing solutions and associated integration strategies are still to be defined and planned and should be overseen by the public authorities. For housing projects, strategies will involve developing and supporting refugees through the transition period from full assistance towards autonomy. They should also enable people accommodated over the coming months to stay in the same neighborhood over the long term to consolidate the networks forged (neighbors, shopkeepers, schools, services, etc.) and not create disruption to the housing scheme (standard of accommodation and location) or to the social integration process once the assistance comes to an end. Although economic integration remains a major challenge for which few strategies seem to have emerged, it will become necessary to phase in measures to help families achieve financial autonomy, such as requiring families to pay a steadily greater portion of the rent as time goes on. These solutions should be assessed by comparing them to local living standards and to the financial assistance received by poor Greek households to ensure the amount and types of aid given to refugees is harmonized as soon as possible.

### 3.6. Planning

These final remarks are not directly related to the current project being implemented by NRC, but must still be taken into account in discussions with the authorities and when defining future project strategies. Properly planning the distribution of the refugee population across the region, based on their length of stay, should gradually help guide humanitarian agencies' projects to ensure they are consistent with national and local development strategies. Regional and municipal-level studies should help define:

- Public services' ability to serve more people, particularly health services and schools. The need for additional support (human resources, equipment, space, services to meet new needs) should be clearly established in order to channel funds and inform projects. Improving public services will benefit both Greek households, especially the most vulnerable who cannot afford private services (health), and refugees. Except for specific needs, it is important to ensure there is no duplication of public services as the creation of a parallel system intended only for refugees (schools, health services, etc.) would hamper their integration.
- The ability of cities and villages to absorb new populations taking not only the housing market and services, but especially economic opportunities and areas of employment into account. This will undoubtedly be the greatest challenge given the high current unemployment rate in Greece. Several people interviewed for this study believe that agriculture is a key sector for the region's rural areas. Economic studies should be used to inform the settlement of refugees within Greece as should data on the refugees' education profiles, skills and wishes.

- The ability of refugee crisis response programs to strengthen municipalities and Greek public bodies by now working on:
  - identifying vacant public buildings that can be rehabilitated and also giving consideration to their use once they are no longer required to house refugees. For example, the University of Thessaloniki could authorize the use of a building for a given period in exchange for rehabilitating the building for future use.
  - setting up facilities for refugees that have the services required to meet long-term needs and for other organizations in place to provide support once the crisis is over. For example, an emergency shelter can be transformed into a service center for the homeless that is open to all.
  - the potential positive economic impacts of relocating new population groups in certain declining neighborhoods, such as helping to boost local businesses, completing the construction of areas left unfinished due to the economic crisis, building new affordable housing, etc.



# Annexes

## A. List of People Met

### NGOs and volunteers associations:

Mathilde De Riedmatten, UNHCR

Ioannis Tsiaras, UNHCR

Ilias Andreadis, UNHCR

Ioanna Fourkiotou, Solidarity Now

Anestis Ischnopoulos, Praxis

Vasilis Paligiannis, ARSIS

Manolis Papadakis, ARSIS

Joshua Kyller, CRS

Elias Anagnostopoulos, Oikopolis / Ecological movement of Thessaloniki

Stefanos Kamperis, Housing Project

Joseph Bergson, Asylum links / Elpida Project

Elizabeth Seeman, Elpida Project / Radcliffe Foundation

Theo, Filoxenia International

Emmanouil Athanasiou, WAHA

### Public Authorities:

Calypto Goula, Deputy Mayor, Municipality of Thessaloniki

Eleni Deligianni, REACT Project Coordinator, Municipality of Thessaloniki

Leonidas Makris, Advisor to the Mayor, Municipality of Thessaloniki

Andreas Takis, Advisor to the Mayor, Municipality of Thessaloniki

**Real Estate Agent and building companies:**

Dimitris Piperopoulos, Eurobank Properties Services

Alexandros Karoutas, RE/MAX

George Georgiadis, Liberty Real Estate

Dominiki Dadatsi, NaNA architects

**Civil Society:**

Michalis Goudis, Housing Europe

Michael Velenis, Loopo Architects

George Tulas, Parallaxi Magazine

Charis Christodoulou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Evangelia Athanasiou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

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## D. Checklist for Building Visit

(visualization of the excel file transmitted to NRC)



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BUILDING VISIT CHECKLIST			
Date :			
Name of the surveyor :			
<b>1. Main info</b>			
Name			
GPS Coordinates	latitude		
	longitude		
Adress			
Owner			
Real Estate Agent			
Description			
<b>2. Around the building</b>			
Public transportation / bus stop	yes / no	Distance:	
Parking	yes / no	Capacity:	
Sidewalk	yes / no	Width:	
courtyard / garden	yes / no	Area:	
Neighborhood	residential commercial industrial mixed	Other/comments:	
<b>2. The Building</b>			
<b>2.1 Construction</b>			
Structural integrity	good/new used/mean condition bad/deteriorated	Empty since:	
Date of construction			
Initial / last use			Other/comments:
Future use:			
Number of floors		total area of each floor	

Number of floors of housing			
Total common space area		Actual use/Comments:	
Total ground floor area			
Total outdoor space			
Total private green space			

### 2.2 General condition

General condition	good/new	used/mean condition	bad/deteriorated
Comments			
Condition of materials	good/new	used/mean condition	bad/deteriorated
Comments			
Durability of materials	durable	moderately durable	non-durable
Comments			
Electricity	good	minor works needed	major works needed
Comments			
Water	good	minor works needed	major works needed
Comments			
Paints	good	minor works needed	major works needed
Comments			
Doors	good	minor works needed	major works needed
Comments			
Windows	good	minor works needed	major works needed
Comments			
Insulation	good	minor works needed	major works needed
Comments			
Stairs and railing condition	good	minor works needed	major works needed
Comments			

### 2.3 Safety and accessibility

Elevator	yes / no	Evacuation plan: Fire protection: Access for emergency vehicles	yes / no
Corridors width:	yes / no		yes / no
Safety issues	yes / no		yes / no
General comments on safety:			

## 2.4 Acceptance

General comments on acceptance:	
---------------------------------	--

### 3. If Residential : Housing areas

#### 3.1 Housing units

Apartments	yes / no	Number:	
Average number of bedroom per appartement		Possibility of extra bedroom (partition):	
Rooms	yes / no	Number:	

#### 3.1 Equipment

Kitchens	yes / no	Number of kitchens	
Kitchen condition		Equipment:	
Bathrooms	yes / no	Number of bathrooms	
Bathroom condition		Equipment:	
Toilets	yes / no	Number of toilets	
Toilets condition		Equipment:	
Heating	yes / no	Condition:	
Condition of materials	good/new	used/mean condition	bad/deteriorated
Durability of materials	durable	moderately durable	non-durable
Insulation	good	minor works needed	major works needed
Furniture		Furniture needed	

### 3. If Not Residential : Housing areas

#### 3.1 Housing units

Number of available floors		Available area per floor	
----------------------------	--	--------------------------	--

#### 3.2 Common Equipment

Kitchens	yes / no	Number of kitchens	
Kitchen condition		Equipment:	
Bathrooms	yes / no	Number of bathrooms	
Bathroom condition		Equipment:	
Toilets	yes / no	Number of toilets	
Toilets condition		Equipment:	



Heating	yes / no	Condition:	
Condition of materials	good/new	used/mean condition	bad/deteriorated
Durability of materials	durable	moderately durable	non-durable
Insulation	good	minor works needed	major works needed
Furniture		Furniture needed	

#### 4. Cost & Appropriateness

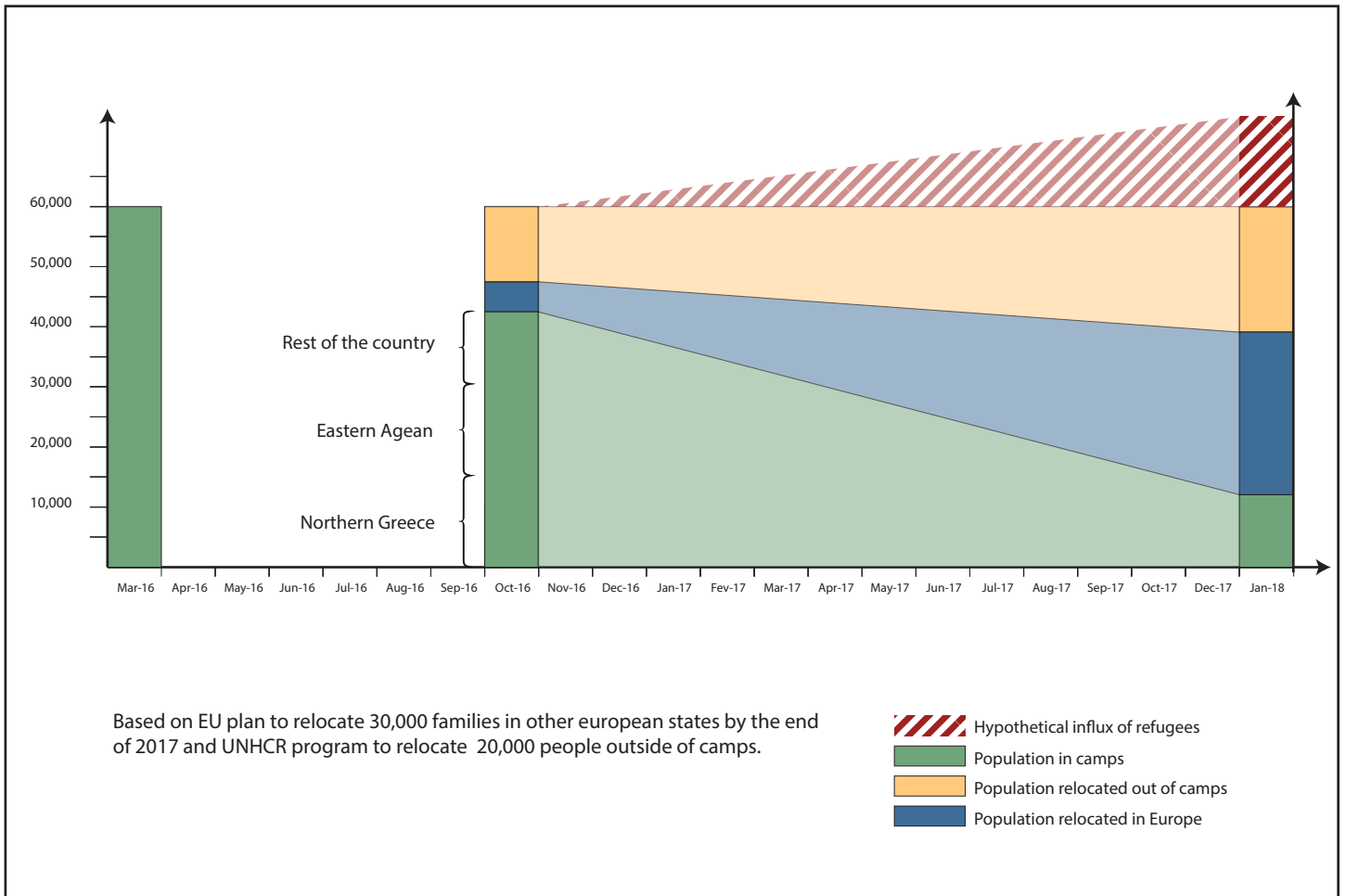
##### 4.1 Rent

Rent cost		Rent length (months)	
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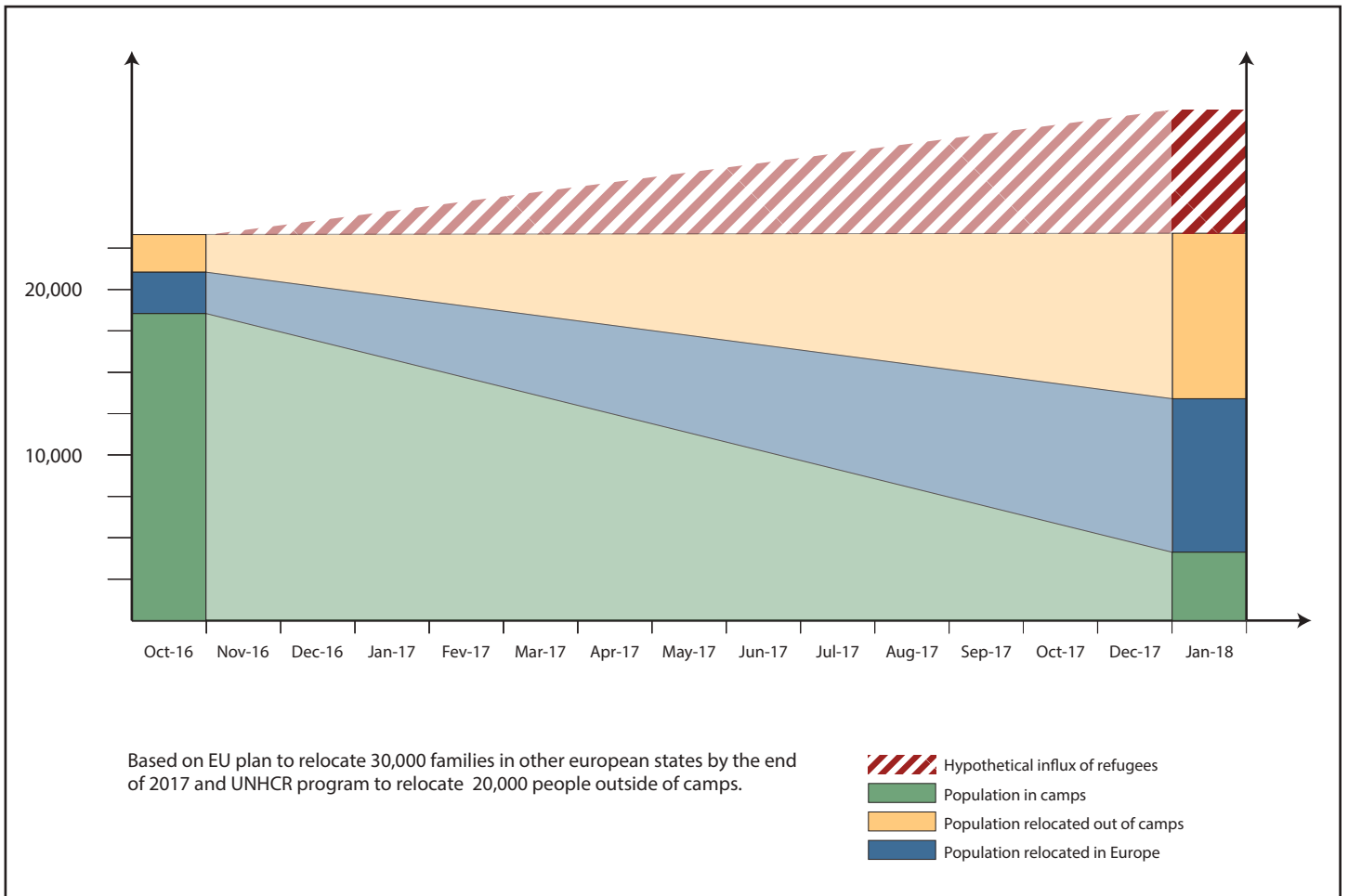
##### 4.4 Appropriateness

Appropriate location	Very Moderately Slightly Not at all	Comments:	
Appropriate for housing	Very Moderately Slightly Not at all	Comments:	
Appropriate for Community center	Very Moderately Slightly Not at all	Comments:	
Appropriate for school	Very Moderately Slightly Not at all	Comments:	

## E. Refugee Population Distribution and Projections

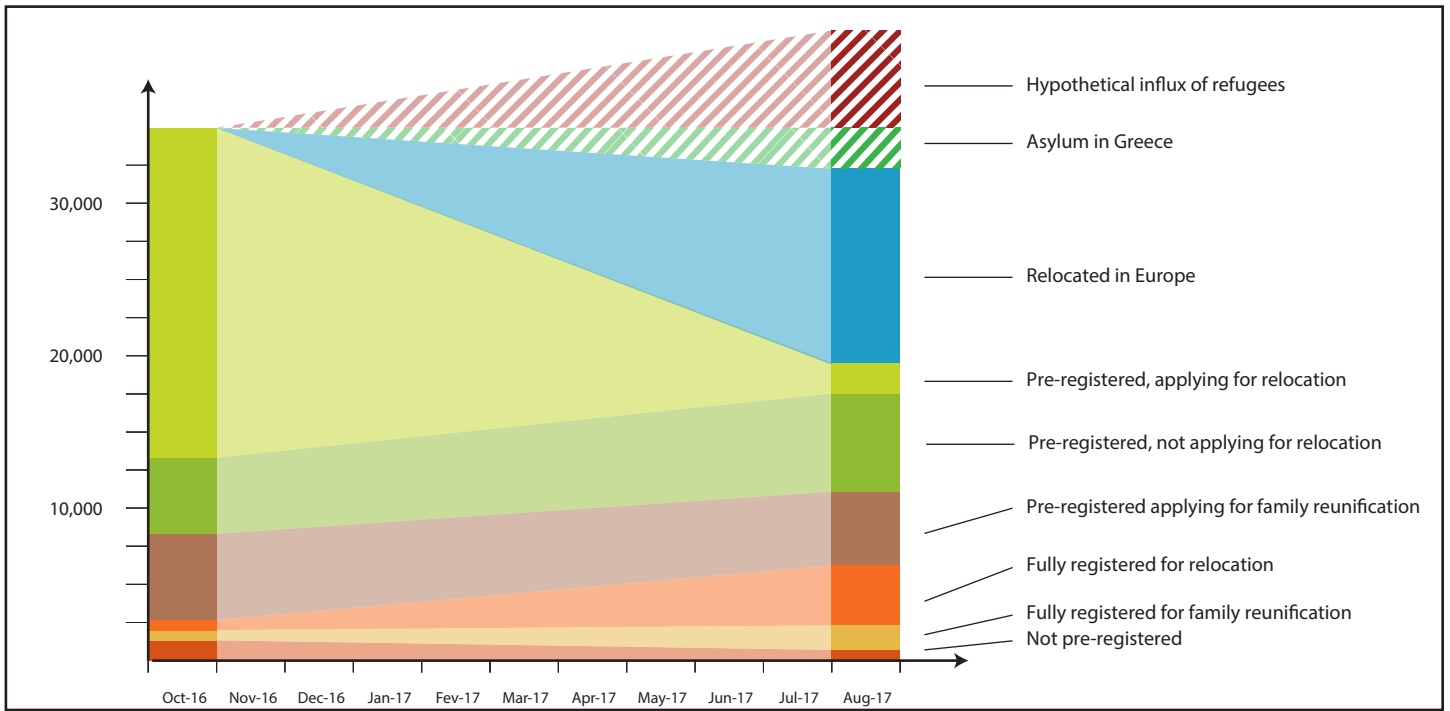


Refugee population distribution in Greece in October 2016 and 14-month projection



Refugee population distribution in Northern Greece in October 2016 and 14-month projection

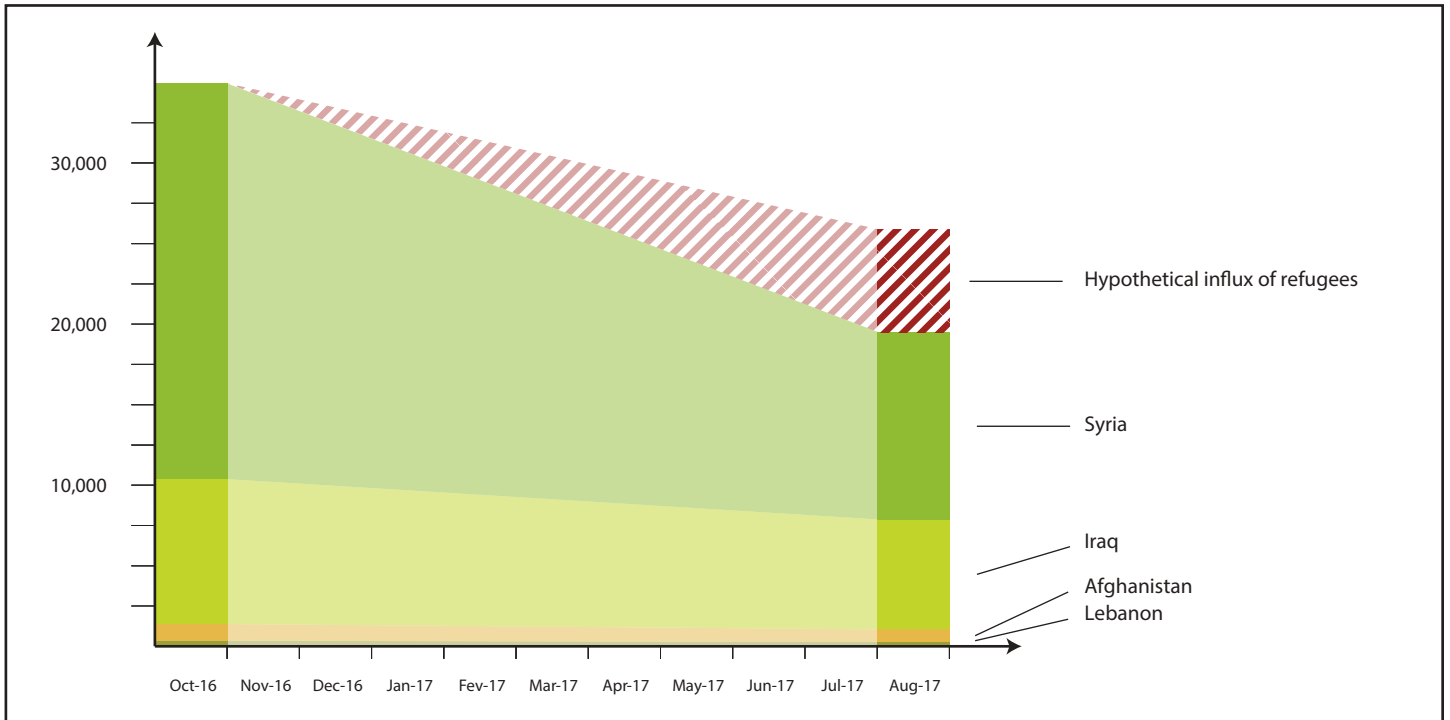
**FIGURES I AND II**



Refugee Population distribution per Nationality in Northern Greece (October 2016 and 14-months projection)

Based on :

- EU plan to relocate 30,000 families in other European states by the end of 2017.
- Most pre-registered asylum seekers are expected to receive an answer by spring 2017, but failed applicants to relocation or family reunification might apply eventually for asylum in Greece.
- Successful applicants for relocation might have to stay more and more in Greece before being able to travel as only few European countries welcome the EU relocation plan and implement in accordance to the planned pace.
- As the expected waiting time for family reunification application is at least 11 months, population is expected to remain stable (although some vulnerable cases will continue to be relocated in UE).
- Non registered migrants will still remain an unknown number, as there are not targeted by any specific program, apart from those living in camps.



Refugee Population distribution per Status in Northern Greece (October 2016 and 14-months projection)

Based on :

- Syrians are actually the only candidates for relocation in EU as they are the only nationality to meet the requirement of an average recognition rate of international protection at the EU level above 75%. Other nationalities will more likely be successful applying for family reunification or asylum in Greece.

**FIGURES III AND IV**

**Study On Adequate Urban Housing For Refugees. Thessaloniki, Greece  
November 2016.**



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