



SAFETY OF AID WORKERS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN THE GREEK HOTSPOTS

kuno



This flyer supports people and organizations working with asylum seekers and refugees in Greek hotspots. A better understanding of challenges and constraints in this context can improve their safety.

Due to the wide variety of aid groups, local and international NGOs, solidarians and volunteer organizations, as well as their various programmes and activities, there are big differences in how aid groups perceive, experience and act upon safety issues.

Sharing information and discussing challenges with volunteers, aid workers, solidarians, asylum seekers and others can make a difference. This brochure is a good starting point for such conversations.

KUNO facilitates learning, critical reflection and debate on urgent humanitarian issues to improve humanitarian aid. KUNO is the Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands. This is a network of 12 International NGOs, 7 academic institutes and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, all based in the Netherlands. We organize expert meetings, working sessions for professionals, webinars, training and public debates. KUNO's thematic focus areas for 2021 are: localization, the future humanitarianism, the nexus, and innovation.



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Struggle

This flyer shares some of the findings of a recent study into security for aid groups in the Greek hotspots. It can help you or your organization to re-think your approach to security and strategies, and strengthen your ability to provide assistance safely while respecting the concerns of the local population.

The study analysed how aid groups relate to the claims and frustrations of asylum seekers, host communities and other protest groups and suggests ways to reduce the risk of problems escalating, to protect people, and to remain operational in the field. Many aid actors struggle to find their role within the political complexities of migration into Europe, particularly where asylum seekers end up in camps and at border areas. How can aid actors consider the frustrations of asylum seekers, local populations and political actors in a context where deterrence measures are in place?

The findings are summarized in four areas as indicated in the pictures.



FINDING 1

A focus on short-term challenges for long-term problems

Greater awareness of how neutral, non-governmental humanitarian groups are part of the asylum dynamics is essential. The challenges and dilemmas of operating on these islands are not equally understood by all actors, who are more occupied by day-to-day needs. Engaging with migration and border regimes with a long-term perspective in mind requires more than short-term strategies.



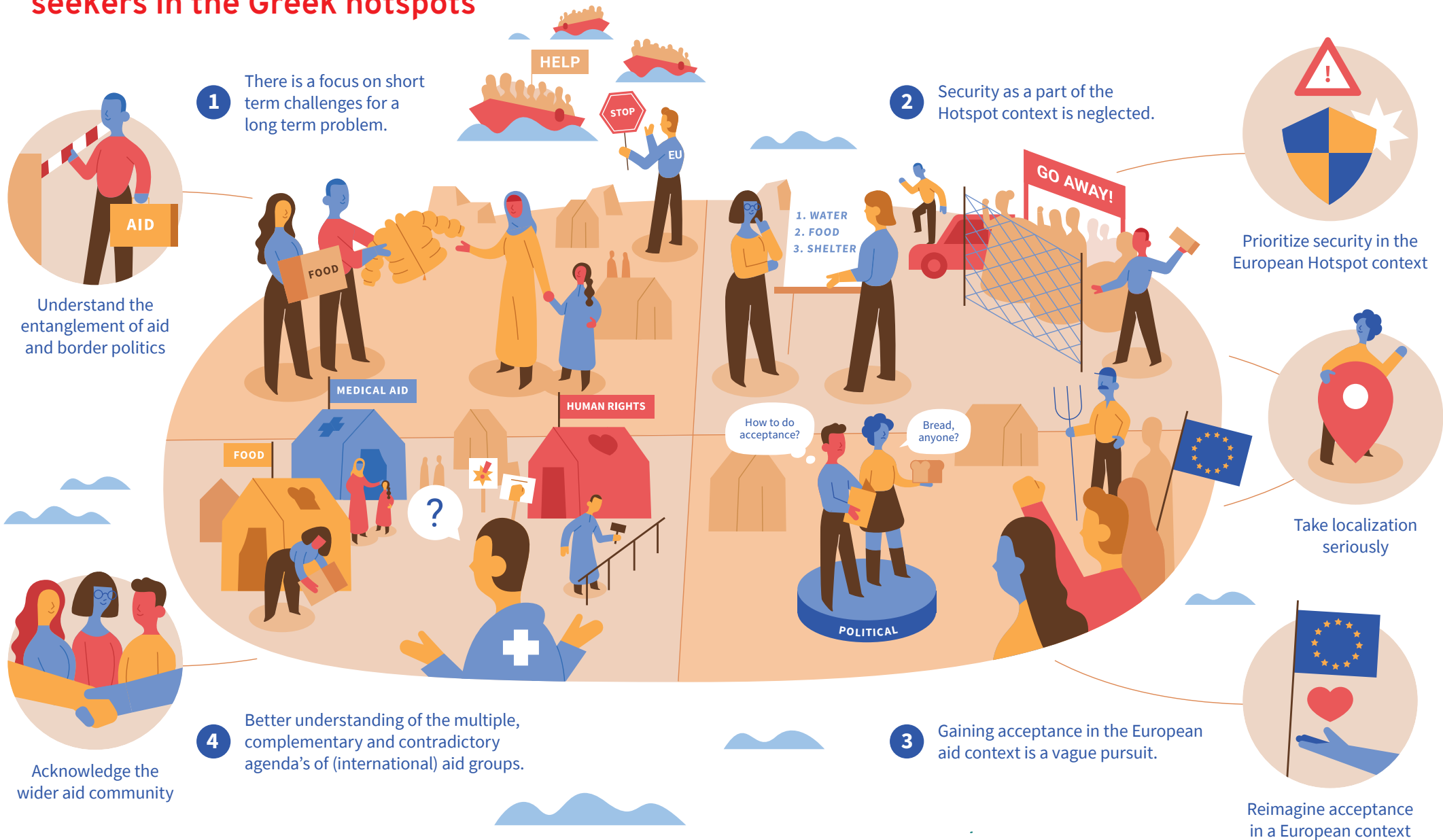
FINDING 2

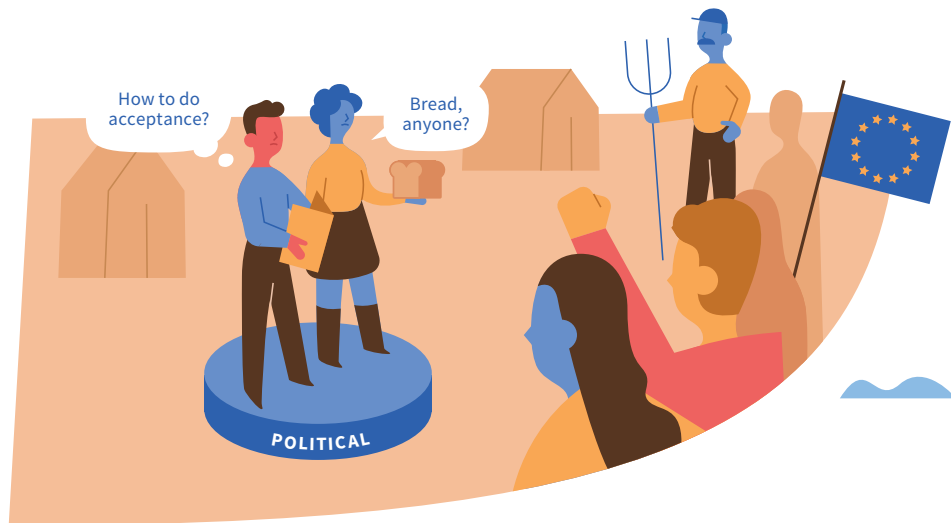
Security as part of the hotspot context is neglected

Security has not been high on the agenda of aid groups. That's because migration hotspots, as part of the European Union, are considered to be safe spaces. Aid groups are also insufficiently aware that aid activities are embedded in a border regime. As a result, risks and threats are underestimated, especially those from the islands themselves (rather than in-camp threats). Ad hoc responses to threats and violent protests have been the modus operandi of most aid groups.



The safety of aid workers and asylum seekers in the Greek hotspots

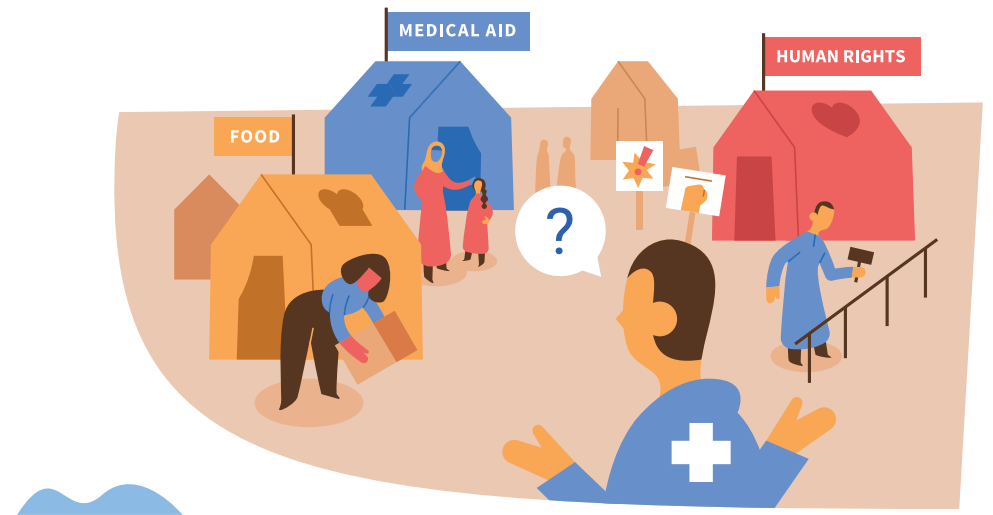




FINDING 3

Gaining acceptance in the European aid context is a vague pursuit

Acceptance achieved by maintaining relations with people, target groups and host communities can lead to mutual understanding and improve safety. Acceptance can be achieved in various ways, ranging from sharing resources to participating in programme design. Among aid groups, proactive measures that can be understood as acceptance are vague and poorly defined.



FINDING 4

Greater understanding of the multiple complementary and contradictory agendas of aid groups

The variety of aid groups that engage with asylum seekers on the Greek islands reveals diversity in mandates and agendas. The differentiation between humanitarians, 'solidarians' and, or political activists complicates security cooperation and coordination in the field. Understanding how and why aid groups position themselves and how they relate to various overlapping and contrasting agendas and mandates can create new avenues for collaboration.

Based on these findings, we recommend the following.



RECOMMENDATION 1

Understand the entanglement of aid and border politics

Aid actors need to be aware of their role, intentional or not, as extensions of migration management and how others perceive this. Greater insight into the interwoven nature of agendas and their long-term effects can alert aid groups to the political context in which they are operating. Aid in this setting is not a solution, nor can it be. It is a mitigation of immediate needs until a political solution can be found. Meanwhile, aid and its intentions are not innocent. A response to aid programming from a variety of groups in society is inevitable, and specific triggers may ignite frustration and violent protest, as instances in the past have shown.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Prioritize security in the European hotspot context

The European context is generally seen as a safe space. However, frustrations, political agendas and resentment surface in Europe as well as in any crisis context and may increase as the situation develops. It is imperative that aid groups see the European hotspot context not as an exception to other crises and instead understand that their presence is not necessarily appreciated, regardless of the ethics of their mandates. This requires a strategy and coherent security approach that applies both inside and outside camp settings.



RECOMMENDATION 3

Take localization seriously

As part of the Grand Bargain agreements, many aid actors have committed to a localization agenda: increasing local people's involvement as partners in aid. From a security perspective, localization can be seen as a way to streamline relations with local actors, people, authorities, police and navy. Localization allows for an understanding of, and antenna for, local sentiments and how these change due to circumstances on the islands. This may provide access to significant leaders and influencers, ensure aid groups are alerted of any tensions and frustrations, and show ways to mitigate them.



RECOMMENDATION 4

Re-imagine acceptance in a European context

Although security should not necessarily be viewed in isolation from other humanitarian settings, mitigating tensions should. Acceptance is a strategy to gain the approval of stakeholders and includes maintaining good relations with other groups than the direct targets of aid, i.e. local people who are affected by aid programming or the presence of asylum seekers. The question is to what extent do measures to mitigate tensions make sense in an EU context. Some local people are directly affected by the existence of a camp and its residents, while others base their opinions on rumours and stereotypes. However, finding ways to involve and benefit local communities so that there is mutual gain requires creative and critical approaches that are applicable to the EU hotspot context.



RECOMMENDATION 5

Acknowledge the wider aid community

Aid groups have a tendency to operate in isolation but need to understand that the action of one implicates others. This is a call to understand that asylum seekers and host communities will not necessarily differentiate between organizations. Instead, they will experience a blur of international involvement. To operate in isolation from this community can harm reputations, operations, and the safety of other aid groups. Better communication and coordination among the various aid groups is recommended. Coordination platforms can streamline common security concerns, and organizations can share experiences and help one another so that newer groups don't have to reinvent the wheel.

This flyer is brought to you by KUNO, the Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands.

More info: www.kuno-platform.nl

The full report referred to in this flyer is available here:

www.kuno-platform.nl/themes/report_greek_hotspots/

The research for this study was carried out by Wageningen University in 2020.

A digital version of the flyer is available here:

www.kuno-platform.nl/themes/flyer_greek_hotspots/