



2015

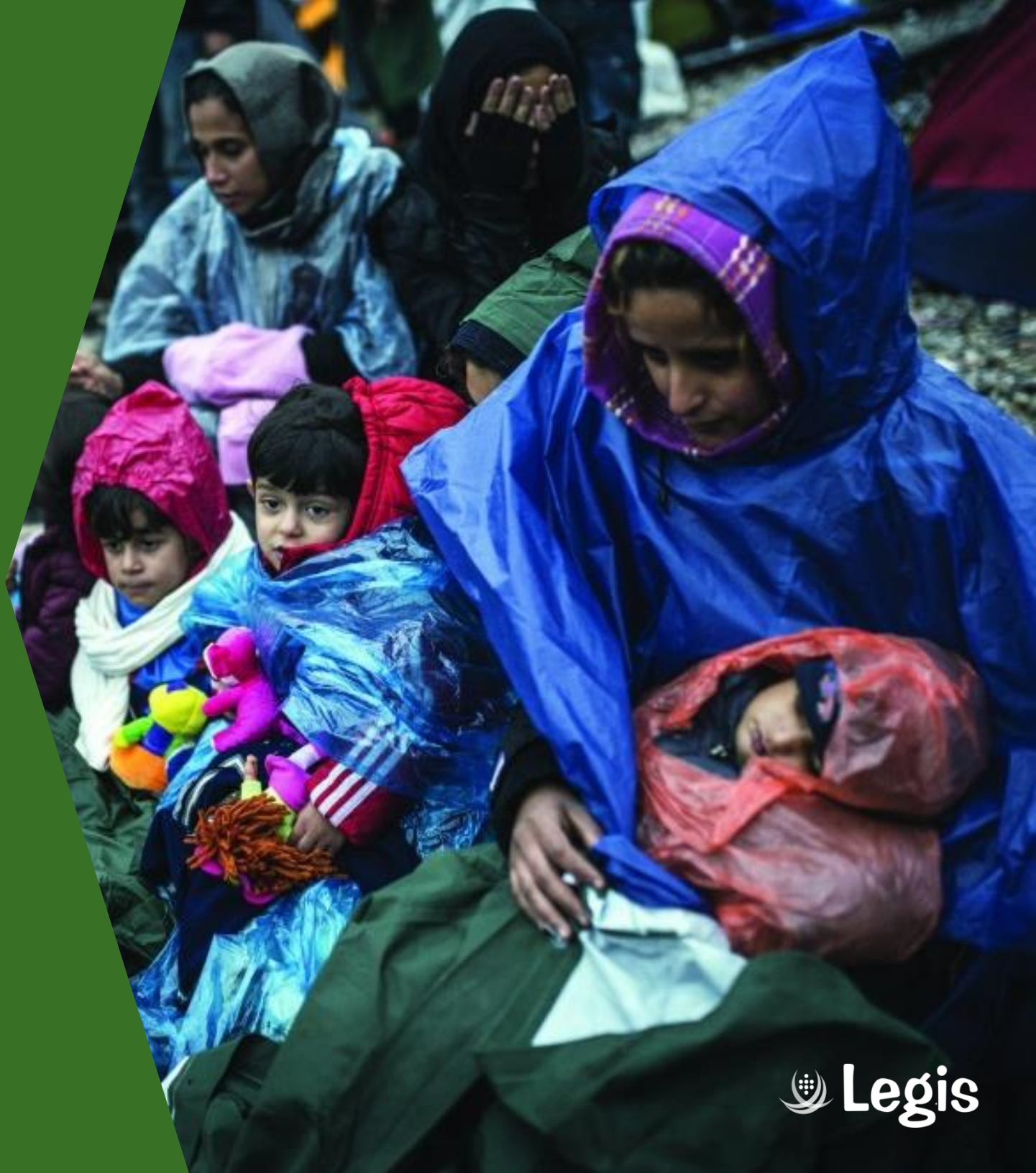
ANNUAL REPORT



Legis

With your immense support, we managed to respond to the most crucial and most necessary needs of almost
1 000 000 refugees and migrants in transit through Macedonia and the Balkan Route in 2015.

THANK YOU!



Dear Friends,

In the year 2015, we witnessed one of the biggest movements of population, forced by war, coercion, persecution. Refugees and migrants going from middle and far east, north and central Africa, through land and sea to get to safety and possibility to rebuild. In 2015, we witnessed the inability of the institutions with mandate to respond to this movement, and the crisis of global and local policy that contributed to the suffering of millions of people in need of international protection. We witnessed the worst of mankind, the ones that abuse people in their most urgent needs, but we also witnessed a huge solidarity movement of people that left their homes and their lives and reached out to help where help was most needed.

LEGIS in 2015, with the support of all the volunteers and contributors, was the first line of response to the perpetual suffering of the refugees and migrants going through the Western Balkan Route. Serving as voice to the voiceless while providing direct field support, our teams worked night and day, to protect life and health to this immensely vulnerable group of people and ensure safe and dignified passage. We were responding to the need, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinction on the basis of nationality, race, gender or religious belief, guided by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

While providing protection against exploitation and humane treatment of the mixed population of refugees and migrants crossing the Western Balkan Route, LEGIS grew through the year to the organized group of people it is today, with leaders, staff and volunteers from different cultural and social backgrounds, working together towards a common goal: dignity, relief and respect for those in most imminent need.

With the same spirit, and with your help, we will continue providing assistance and contribute to the humanitarian response in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Jasmin REXHEPI
PRESIDENT OF NGO LEGIS

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VISION MISSION&VALUES

We seek a world of tolerance, social justice and endless humanity, world where wars, poverty and suffering have been overcome and all people live with dignity and in security.

Our mission is to protect life, alleviate suffering and oppression and ensure dignity, respect for human rights and social justice.

Our **Values** are our guiding principles that set the foundation of our work. .

- We are driven by **Humanity**, we address human suffering wherever it is found, protect life and ensure respect for human beings with **Impartiality**, making no distinctions on basis of nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, class or political opinions. Our actions are carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to those in most serious and immediate danger.
- Our actions are autonomous and with disregard of any political, economic, military or other objectives and agendas. We adhere to the principles of **Independence** and **Neutrality**, we don't take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of political, racial, religious or ideological nature.
- We serve as **Voice to the Voiceless**, to bring to attention abuse of human rights, extreme need and unacceptable suffering, when access to lifesaving aid is obstruct, when crises are neglected and provision of aid is inadequate or abused.
- We believe that **Diversity** and **Participation** within and of the people we serve is pushing us to the highest levels of leaning and performance, channeling the best of human spirit to create impact.
- We adhere to **Transparency** and **Accountability** to the people and partners we humbly serve, sharing our results, stories and lessons learnt.

2015 was a landmark year in the history of migration to Europe, with unprecedented and constantly increasing flow of refugees and migrants making their way to Europe. Fleeing war and persecution in the Middle East and Africa, more and more people embarked on a perilous journey to reach the safety of Europe. In 2015, the east Mediterranean and the Western Balkans witnessed a significant surge of refugees and migrant transits, and immense humanitarian and policy crisis was evolving. The route of transit was leading them from Turkey to Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia to Austria and other western European countries, where asylum applications were made. Most of the population was from Syria(69%), Afghanistan(19%), Iraq(6%) and elsewhere(6%). As reported by UNHCR, 851 319 arrivals were noted on Greek island and mainland in 2015. Trough Macedonia, approximately 700 000 refugees and migrant transited since June 2015.

The first half of 2015, Macedonian law on Asylum and Temporary protection didn't allow refugees and migrants entering from Greece to be registered and legally transit the country. This increased their vulnerability to smugglers and traffickers that were widely used to transit Macedonia and the trafficking channels and concentration points in the north Lipkovo area(Vaksintse and Lojane) were used for crossing to Serbia. Refugees used the train tracks and national roads to walk across Macedonia, resulting with train accidents and death of over 30 refugees in 2015. Cases of kidnapping and other violations were noted, but never officially reported by the victims due to fear of detention and prolonged stay in the country. The detention center in Skopje was notably overcrowded and many violations of human rights took place while in detention. Humanitarian and medical assistance was huge necessity, but very hard to be provided due to the irregular and hidden nature of the transit in the first half of 2015.

Over the summer of 2015, Macedonia saw a growing number of refugees and migrants transiting trough the country. Due to the influx of people and the pressure of local CSO, Macedonia changed its 'Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection' on 16 June 2015, allowing the refugees and migrants to obtain a document, Intention for Asylum, that allows them to legally transit through and leave the country within a period of 72 hours.

CONTEXT in 2015

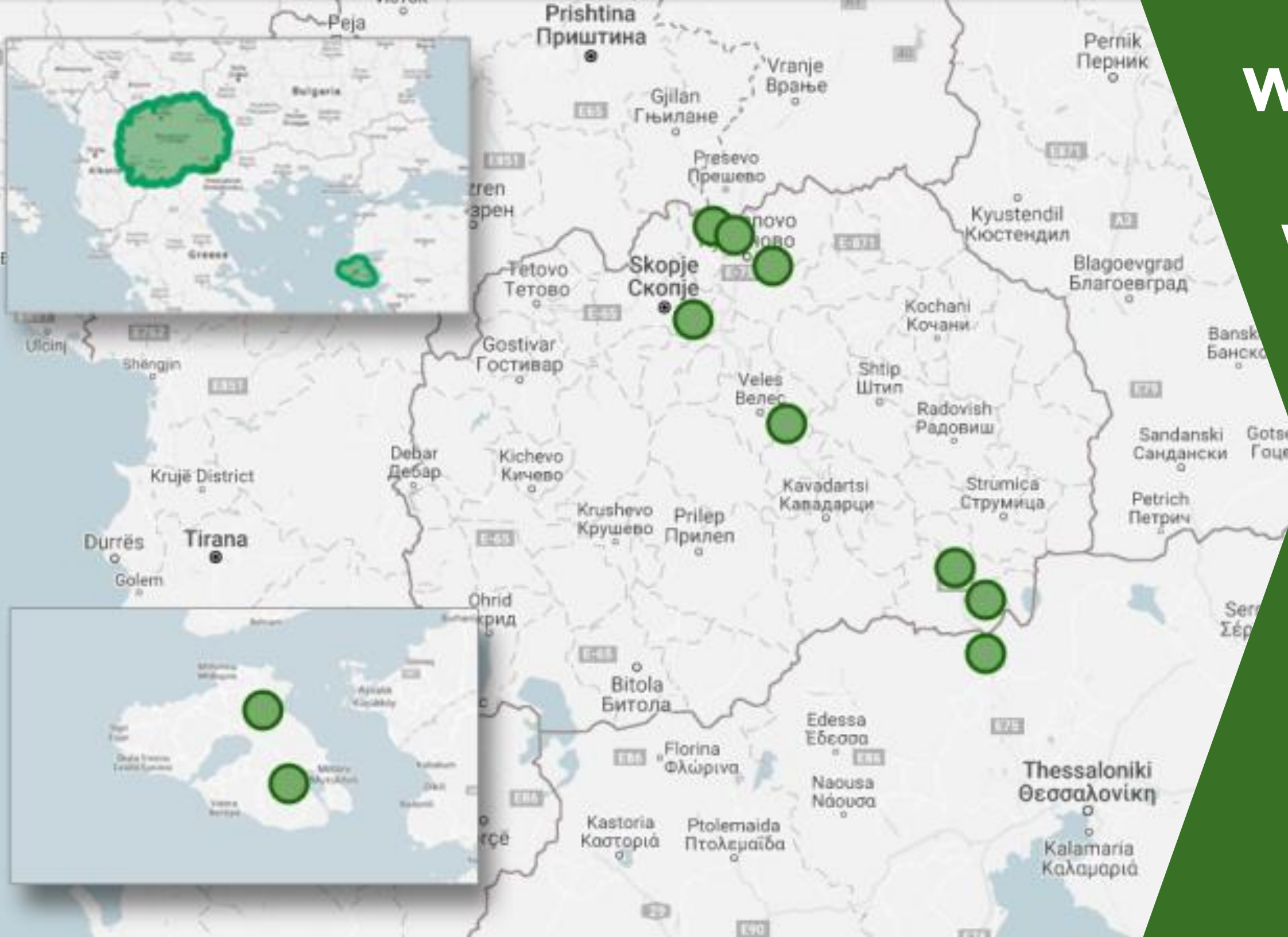


The increasing numbers in August 2015 and the first Macedonian-Greek ^{border} closure in August 2015, lead to chaotic situation in Idomeni, with more than 4000 people being violently prevented to cross to Macedonia and stuck for days without access to shelter, hygiene facilities or food. This resulted with clashes and state of emergency was declared in Macedonia on 20th of August 2015, extended to June 2016. Following the state of emergency in August 2015, Macedonian government approached the situation more seriously, with opening 2 transit points in the country: TC Vinojug, Gevgelija as an entry point and TC Tabanovce on the north, as an exit point to Serbia.

Refugees and Migrants who were allowed to enter the country at the Idomeni (Greece)/ Macedonia) border crossing receive their registration document at the Gevgelija reception centre. Initially police were only able to register one-third to one-half of all people entering the country. From December 2015, all people entering were formally registered. From Gevgelija, refugees and migrants continued their transit directly to the Macedonian-Serbian border at the Tabanovce transit centre. People travel by bus, train, or taxi and have to pay for their journey. Prices of train ticket rose from 1eur in June to 25eur in September 2015. Concerns remained over the fact that migrants have to walk several kilometres from TC Tabanovce to Miratovac and Presevo Registration Center, the transit camp on the Serbian side of the border, along a path with muddy sections and two streams with no bridges.

On 18 of November 2015, Macedonia was one of the countries on the Western Balkan Route that started screening nationalities, allowing only people from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan to enter legally. This again resulted with clashes and protests by non-SIA nationalities in Idomeni, Greek-Macedonian border crossing. More over, it resulted with activation of the smuggling channels that received very few people in the period of August, September, October and November 2015. On 28th of November 2015, Macedonia began to erect a fence along its border with Greece in attempt to limit the influx of refugees and migrants.

Where We Work



ACTIVITIES IN 2015

AWARENESS RAISING AND ADVOCACY

In 2015 LEGIS served as a Voice to the Voiceless, raising awareness for the situation in Macedonia concerning the conditions and circumstances in which the refugees were transiting on this part of the Balkan Route. Using social and other media, LEGIS gave an alternative to the prejudices and the xenophobia that were widely present towards the refugees in transit. Sharing their stories and their struggle towards safety, LEGIS allowed the wider public to get more clear picture about the profile of the people that were transiting through the country, the reasons that brought them to take this road and what they are striving towards, which made the citizens of Macedonia and the wider public to sympathize with the human tragedy evolving in their “back yards”, take charge and become part of the response in 2015. Together with other NGO’s and private citizens, a facebook group was created called **“Help the refugees in Macedonia”**, which was used for awareness raising, information sharing and coordination between volunteers active on field level and the public.

LEGIS took the role to actively lobby for legislative changes in the Law on Asylum in Macedonia in April, May and June 2015, through numerous meetings held with MPs and other relevant structures, to adopt amendments to the Law on Asylum, in order to introduce the instrument of Intention for Asylum, widely used by other countries in the Balkan route, allowing Macedonia to register the refugees

entering the country and allow them to have legal status for 72hours before they decide to apply for asylum.



LEGIS team on an open debate, talking about the situation with refugees in Macedonia, May 2015

The amendments were approved end of June 2015, bringing a dramatic change in the Balkan Route, from Macedonia being viewed as country of criminal activities and feared by the refugees in transit, country that they need to walk through from 7-14 days while using the costly services of smugglers, often being attacked and kidnapped by traffickers, to Macedonia being the best country that allows the refugees few hour train ride from one border to another, while providing the needed humanitarian assistance and information on both points.

Bringing the international attention to the situation in Macedonia was another challenge that LEGIS had to overcome in 2015. In the first half of the year, before the

amendments in the Asylum Law took place, the Detention Center for foreigners, Gazi Baba was overcrowded with refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries, that were captured and detained for months. The detention center Gazi Baba, with maximum capacity of 150 people was housing up to 400 people in the first half of 2015. The conditions in Gazi Baba appeared to have had a negative impact on detainees’ mental and physical health. LEGIS contributed to the Human Rights Watch report on the situation of the refugees and migrants in the detention center Gazi Baba, **“As Though We Are Not Human Beings”** Police Brutality against Migrants and Asylum Seekers in Macedonia. After this report was published, the detention center Gazi Baba was cleared out, and the detained refugees and migrants were given the opportunity to register with the instrument Intention for Asylum, introduced in the end of June 2015.



Mersiha Smailovic (LEGIS), during a press conference for lowering the price of train tickets, October 2015

In September and October 2015, LEGIS advocated for lowering the price of the train tickets the refugees were paying to transit the country, which had risen from 1eur to 25eur per person for refugees and migrants in September.

Over the whole year of 2015, LEGIS was constantly raising awareness and advocating for humane and dignified treatment for refugees and migrants upon entrance, during detention, and afterwards during registration and transportation.

CAPACITY BUILDING

MOBILIZING AND EMPOWERING VOLUNTEERS (LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL)

LEGIS, as the first NGO working on the humanitarian response in the refugee crisis on the Macedonian part of the Balkan route since 2014, took the role to mobilize and empower the local population on the main points of concentration the refugees could be reached on route. Providing guidance in consideration to the basic humanitarian principles and support in Food and Non-Food Items, LEGIS with the local volunteers established the base for the first organized response on many spots, such as Gevgelija Train Station, Miravci Train Station, Demir Kapija Train Station, Kumanovo Mosque, Tabanovce Train Station (later on official Transit center).

Local community donations and contributions in food, water, hygiene items, clothes etc., were collected in the LEGIS warehouse in Skopje, Kumanovo and Gevgelija, to be processed and packed for distribution. Calls for

volunteers were constantly open, to support the field teams or the warehouse teams, and contributors were invited to assist in packing and distributions. International volunteers were supported in terms of legal stay in Macedonia and directed towards the local field teams depending on the needs.



LEGIS International team on Tabanovce train station, September 2015

LEGIS volunteers were supported for providing assistance in Idomeni and Lesvos, from assisting distribution and information provision, to food preparation. LEGIS international volunteers were organizing volunteer house in Tabanovce village in the end of 2015. LEGIS was also offering volunteering opportunities to registered asylum seekers in Macedonia, as well as refugees with unregulated status, who were stuck on some of the transit points for a longer time, including them in the translations, distributions and information provision.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

Together with the UNHCR and the OSCE Mission in Skopje, LEGIS was part of the training of border police units of MoI of Macedonia. The purpose of the training was to raise awareness to MoI staff for their role in the application for asylum process, the rights of refugees and humane treatment of refugees and migrants upon entrance and during registration.



Jasmin Rexhepi, during UNHCR, OSCE and LEGIS Training for MoI staff, 2015

HUMANITARIAN AID AND ASSISTANCE

ON THE ROAD ASSISTANCE IN MACEDONIA (MOBILE TEAMS)

Since the beginning of 2015, LEGIS organized mobile teams of volunteers that were providing assistance to refugees/migrants walking through Macedonia. Food, water and basic NFIs were distributed on various points of assistance in the length of the transit route crossing the country, as well as medical aid and services for fixing bikes were provided in the time when the refugees and migrants were biking through the country.



LEGIS Mobile Units providing food and basic assistance to refugees and migrants walking/biking through the country, May 2015

The mobile teams were most active in the first half of the year, until the legislative changes on the Asylum Law in Macedonia allowed refugees entering the country to register and travel with legal means through Macedonia, and official transit and assistance points were formed in the southern entrance and the northern exit point of the country.

MOSQUE REFUGEE STATION

During the first half of 2015 the refugees entering Macedonia from the south border had no other choice but to walk for 7-14 days to transit across the country, in constant fear of attacks by local gangs, smugglers and traffickers that saw an opportunity to take advantage of the vulnerability of the people that lacked a possibility to obtain a legal status. In fear of the police and detention, sleeping in ditches and fields, constantly under direct influence of the atmospheric changes, not properly dressed and equipped for such journey, there was a huge need of organizing a transit shelter, where they could stop and rest, receive aid in a safe environment. Because of the Macedonian Law on Asylum, and the lack of registration instrument, this was impossible to organize on a legal way.



LEGIS Volunteer cleaning and dressing wounds of walking to a refugee in Kumanovo Mosque, June 2015

The Sinan Pasha Mosque in Kumanovo was a public place that was already established as a spot where some of the refugees would stop, rest and sleep under a solid roof, but was lacking support in humanitarian, medical and other aid and assistance.



Refugees resting Inside Sinan Pasha Mosque in Kumanovo, June 2015

LEGIS local volunteers team took upon themselves to organize and provide constant medical assistance and assistance in food and NFIs, together with many small local NGOs and individuals that started supporting the mosque.



As the only form of organized and constant presence of volunteers providing assistance to refugees, the mosque was very active in May and June 2015, with 150 to 600 refugees rotating on daily basis. Once the legislative changes took place and the refugees had the opportunity to register and use public transport to transit from the south to the north of the country, the mosque stopped being used and the mosque team transited on the exit point in Tabanovce, organizing a transit and support center on the Tabanovce train station.

MEDICAL SUPPORT

In the first half of 2015, when the Macedonian legislation didn't allow the refugees and migrants entering the country to obtain a legal status, putting them into a very vulnerable position of being totally irregular, thus not being able to use any of the services (transport, medical, shelter, etc), there was a huge need of Medical Aid to be provided on the route and the concentration points. LEGIS organized mobile units of medical volunteers (doctors, nurses) that were providing medical assistance from the south border with Greece to the north border with Serbia.

The aid consisted of cleaning and dressing wounds and injuries from walking or from violent attacks, assisting individuals with deteriorating health by ensuring access to medication, providing medical assistance and medication for non-serious inflammatory processes, colds and fevers, organized gynecologic exams for women with other NGOs, including pregnant women, etc., as well as referrals to the public medical facilities for cases that needed more in-depth treatment.



LEGIS medical teams providing basic medical aid for refugees and migrants walking through Macedonia, May 2015

The medical teams were mostly active in the first half of 2015, later on, after the legislative changes, the Red Cross and ministry of Health offered free medical care to the registered refugees on the move. The medical teams also provided special care and assistance to hospitalized refugees in the public health facilities, many of whom were victims of electricity shock and were facing a long and complex treatment.

LEGAL ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Since the refugees did not have any previous knowledge of the Macedonian law, it was important to have lawyers on the ground, who would inform them about their right and the legal possibilities they had in the country. LEGIS was actively providing ad hoc legal advice and support to refugees and migrants on the move, as well as to detained

or hospitalized refugees and migrants as well as asylum seekers in 2015.

INFORMATION PROVISION

The teams of volunteers working on the entrance and exit points of Macedonia, were constantly providing information concerning the changes in policy, situation, response in following countries, empowering the refugees and migrants to be aware of their legal possibilities and services offered.



LEGIS volunteers painted signs that will lead the refugees arriving with busses to the transit point Tabanovce, August 2015



LEGIS volunteers were constantly in contact with different solidarity initiatives, NGOs and other relevant factors in all of the countries on the Balkan Route, in order to obtain and share relevant information about the ever-changing situation on the route.

SUPPORT OF EVI

In lack of structured cross-border support for refugees and migrants with physical and mental disabilities and impairment, faced with extremely difficult terrain of few kilometers through fields and creeks without bridges on the entrance of Serbia, LEGIS Tabanovce team together with DRC staff in Serbia set the base for cross-border referrals and support of Extremely Vulnerable Individuals. In August 2015, as the numbers of refugees and migrants with disability rose, the need of this type of support was eminent. During August, September and October 2015, more than 200 EVIs with their families were referred to DRC and IOM teams in Serbia for border pick-up and transport.

DISTRIBUTION

Humanitarian aid and assistance in food and non-food items was provided on daily basis in 2015, on the various concentration points on the length of the route through Macedonia, and later on in the official transit points, TC Vinojug, Gevgelija and TC Tabanovce.



LEGIS Team distributing food packages, Gevgelija, September 2015

Food and non-food items were provided on ad hoc basis in the concentration points in the Lipkovo area, villages Vaksince and Lojane in the north of Macedonia, in the second half in 2015, as well as in the asylum seekers center "Vizbegovo" and the detention center for foreigners "Gazi Baba". LEGIS teams were actively distributing food and non-food items in the exit point in Northern Greece, especially in situations of prolonged stay and greater concentration of refugees was piling up due to tightened border controls and restrictions on the south border with Greece.



LEGIS team Distributing food and water, Idomeni, July 2015

Minimum 600.000 food packages were distributed in 2015, consisted of water, croissant, energy bar, chicken pate and a loaf of bread. The non-food items distributed in 2015 included blankets, clothes, raincoats, shoes and boots, wheelchairs, wheelbarrows, hygiene items, etc

Due to the rising numbers of refugees in transit and lack of international support in 2015, we often faced financial impossibility to satisfy the needs in non-food items. In

such occasions, our volunteer teams had to find creative solutions for items that were lacking. Making raincoats out of plastic sheeting and distributing wheelbarrows in lack of wheelchairs for refugees with disabilities were some of the successful, short-term field solutions that provided the needed relief, but not necessarily the dignity.

WASH ACTIVITIES

During the second half of 2015, when the transit of refugees in Macedonia was organized in two transit points, entrance point in Gevgelija and exit point in Tabanovce, LEGIS was contributing to the infrastructure in order to provide temporary stay and transit with dignity to thousands of refugees transiting daily.

In cooperation with Solidarites International, LEGIS installed sanitation facilities on the entrance of the transit center, where refugees and migrants line-up and waited of hours to be admitted and processed. The installation of 2male, 2female and 1 toilet for persons with disability and barrel of water for washing was complimented with regular distribution of sanitizing gels for personal use, contributed to enhanced protection, dignity and quality of life of the refugees and migrants entering the country.

MONITORING

In parallel to the field activities in 2015, LEGIS teams were constantly monitoring the situation on all concentration points in Macedonia, concerning human rights and access to assistance. LEGIS had constant presence in Lipkovo area, monitoring the situation of the trafficking channel

that is going through the country towards western Europe, and providing help and as hoc assistance to the refugees and migrants using this channel. LEGIS teams often visited concentration spots in Greece, Serbia, Hungary and Croatia, to have deeper understanding for the situation for refugees and migrants transiting this counties, and network with NGOs and volunteers working on field level.

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION, NETWORKING AND REPRESENTATION

In line with the constant changes of context and lack of information flow between NGOs and Volunteer initiatives working on ground level trough the Balkan route combined with the constant need of up-to-date information concerning this changes of context, LEGIS volunteers and staff was putting a lot of effort in 2015 to partner with relevant actors working on ground level across the Balkan Route (Greece, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria) in order to share reliable information that affected the refugees in transit and coordinate for specific cases such as separated families, refugees with special needs and extremely vulnerable individuals and families. Some of our unofficial partners were: MigSol (Hungary), Czech team (Serbia/Croatia), Youth for Refugees (Serbia), volunteer initiatives in north of Greece, Croatia etc.



LEGIS activists and volunteers participated in numerous debates, conferences and events connected with the response to the refugee crisis and the rights of refugees, sharing positive examples and positive experiences from the field teams and campaigns.

VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

LEGIS is ensuring the visibility of its activities and projects through various channels, both online and offline. At the moment one active webpage and two Facebook pages are being updated weekly. Many news articles and photo galleries were published throughout the year. Additionally, LEGIS cooperated with the local and national media outlets (TV channels and newspapers), which produced

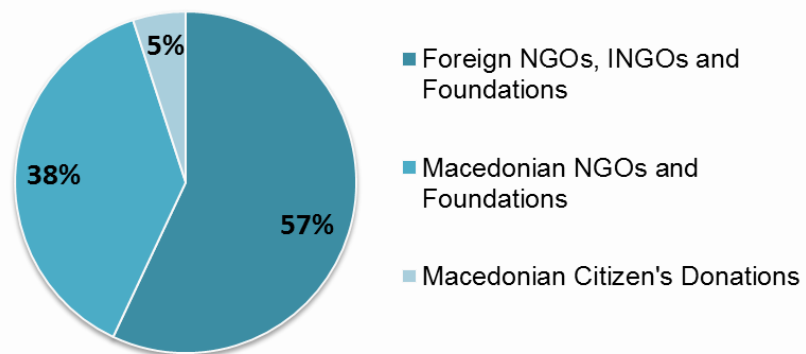
over 50 press-releases and videos, finding in LEGIS a trustworthy and credible partner in the coverage of the refugee crisis on the Western Balkan Route and in Macedonia.

This year, LEGIS has been managing the following pages:

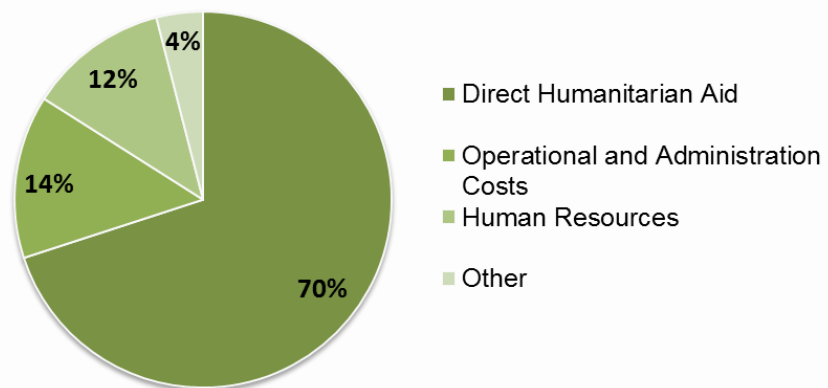
- Legis.mk
- facebook.com/legis.mk
- facebook.com/groups/help.mk.refugees

FINANCES IN 2015

Total Support and Revenue in 2015 Total: 232 244 EUR



LEGIS' Expenditures in 2015



LEGIS 2015 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the work in 2015, LEGIS received the following acknowledgements:

Mother Theresa Award (2015)
Islamic Community Award (2015)
Volunteer of the Year (2015)

LEGIS volunteers' and activists' work was also recognized on national and international level:

Mersiha Smailovic – Islamic Community Award (2015)
Jasmin Rehzepe – Islamic Community Award (2015)
Aleksandra Davidovska – Islamic Community Award (2015)
Gabriela Andreevska – Islamic Community Award (2015)
Mersiha Smailovic – Personality of the Year 2015 – Islamic Youth Forum
Aleksandra Davidovska – Personality of the Year 2015 – European Civic Forum
Mersiha Smailovic – 12 most influential women in 2015 (FOCUS)





Contact Information

LEGIS Office
John Kennedy bb
1000 Skopje || Macedonia

Legis.mk
info@legis.mk
facebook.com/legis.mk

