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Passing through Greece

Until the partial opening of the borders through the Balkans in summer 2015, Patras – Greece's third city and harbour – used to be the main transit port for irregular migrants heading to Italy and the rest of Europe. In 2011, relocation of the port in the southern part of the city prompted hundreds of refugees and migrants to move into an abandoned industrial area just in front of the new port. Mostly Afghans and Sudanese populate these empty factories facing the port, waiting for a chance to sneak under a lorry and embark onto a ferryboat towards Italy.

Among the newcomers, most (mainly of Afghan nationality) chose not to apply for asylum; their only hope is to illegally leave the country before the expiry date of their paper, valid for thirty days, without leaving any trace (or fingerprint). After that term, they would become illegal and possibly face detention. In the Greek asylum system different procedures

apply according to the applicant's nationality and to the period in which the asylum application was lodged. Since December 2014, Syrians have been able to benefit from a fast-track examination procedure that lets them have an answer within the same day. Unsurprisingly, this generates resentment among those seeking asylum.

The eagerness of refugees and migrants to leave Greece and travel to other European countries is quite evident. Whether recent arrivals, or waiting for a response to asylum claims submitted some time before, or facing detention, or even having fallen into irregularity and thus being unable to leave legally, one thing unites them: the unrelenting longing to leave Greece.

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