



## **KMOP DISCUSSION PAPER No.103**

# **Migrants and Refugees in Greece: Current situation and Needs**

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April, 2017

This publication forms part of KMOP's "Discussion Papers" series. It has been produced in the framework of the EU-funded project "BLEND IN Language, Cultural and Social Orientation for Young Refugees".

Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the opinions of KMOP.

The "Discussion Papers" series aims at widely disseminating the research results of KMOP's various activities, stimulating academic discussion and offering a forum for new approaches on contemporary social issues.

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## Abstract

The present report focuses on one of the most vulnerable groups of in Europe, young migrants and refugees. The aim of this report is to depict the current situation on refugees and migrants in Greece, by providing some socio-economic data, by presenting policies and practices regarding their social, cultural and language orientation and also by investigating their needs in terms of their integration in Greece. The findings resulted from literature review and from two focus group, the one with young migrants and refugees and the second with operators who are working with migrants and refugees. This national report is part of the transnational research carried out within the framework of the project “BLEND IN - Language, Cultural and Social Orientation for Young Refugees”, which is funded by the Erasmus+ European Programme and which is implemented by seven (7) European organizations, from Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus and the UK. BLEND IN aims to prepare and empower young refugees and migrants in their cultural and social integration in the host communities, by developing a cultural, social and language integration toolkit (in the form of a mobile application). The toolkit will be based on the findings of the transnational research.

*Keywords:* migrants, refugees, young migrants, young refugees, integration.

## Introduction

Over the last decade, migration flows increased in most EU Member States. Migrants from third countries account for around 4% of the total EU population, according to the European Commission. The number of first time asylum applicants in the EU-28 in 2015 was almost 1.26 million in 2015 and 1.20 million in 2016 (Eurostat, 2017). In addition, according to UNHCR data (UNHCR, 2017a), in 2015, 1.015.078 migrants and refugees arrived in Europe, while in 2016, the respective number amounted to 362.376 persons. Digging further into the refugee age groups, it is noticeable that the vast majority of them are of young age. Specifically, more than four in five (83%) of the first time asylum seekers in the EU-28 in 2016 were less than 35 years old; those in the age range 18–34 years accounted for slightly more than half (51%) of the total number of first time applicants, while nearly one third (32%) of the total number of first time applicants were minors aged less than 18 years (Eurostat, 2017).

Anyone that moves to a country with different cultures, traditions and practices from one's own can be expected to undergo a significant adjustment period. Refugees accepted for resettlement often come straight out of refugee camps and have little if any knowledge of the societal and economic realities which await them. Like others who have left their homes and resettled in a foreign land, refugees may feel worried and frustrated as they adjust to life in the host country. This is especially evident for young refugees in transition to adulthood who can experience unsafe or problematic living conditions, non-access to schooling, years of insecurity with uncertain status, multiple moves, unemployment, social exclusion, and in the medium- and long-term maladaptation with respect to the cultural norms of the hosting country (Hebebrand et al., 2016).

Based on the above, the project titled “BLEND IN - Language, Cultural and Social Orientation for Young Refugees” aims to prepare and empower young refugees and migrants seeking a better life in a developed and safe community. The ultimate objective of the project is to develop their social, civic, intercultural competences, inform them on their rights and promote their autonomy, active citizenship and participation in social life and labour market, thus preventing their social exclusion, combating discrimination and segregation by facilitating their smooth cultural and social integration in the host community. In order to achieve this objective, the project will develop a cultural, social and language integration toolkit in the form of a mobile application, orienting the young newcomer refugees into the hosting societies' cultural and social realities and norms. The orientation toolkit will include basic topics, such as basic language use, living and housing conditions, access to mainstream services such as health and education, access to employment, community services, keeping and sharing your cultural identity, national laws, and their rights and responsibilities. In order to cover the widest possible refugee population, the application will be available in Arabic, Pashto and English.

BLEND IN is a project which is implemented by seven (7) European organizations, i.e. ANS - Anziani e Non Solo SC, which is the project coordinator (Italy), Caleidos Cooperativa Sociale Onlus (Italy), KMOP - Family and Childcare Centre (Greece), EEO Group (Greece), FSM - Foundation for Shelter and Support to Migrants (Malta), CARDET - Centre for Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology (Cyprus) and Canary Wharf Consulting

LTD – UK. The project is funded by the EU programme Erasmus+, in the frame of the Key-Action 2 “Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices”, as part of the “Strategic Partnerships for youth”.

The present national report is part of the transnational research which was carried out by all partner organisations; it has been developed in the framework of the Intellectual Output 1 “State of Art and Needs Analysis”. The report outlines the current situation on refugees and migrants in Greece, by providing some socio-economic data and by presenting policies and practices regarding their social, cultural and language orientation. Moreover, the report focuses on migrants and refugees needs as regards their integration in the host country. It is concluded with a series of recommendations on the issues that are of great importance for migrants and refugees, which should be taken into account in the development of the BLEND IN Toolkit.

## Methodology

In order to record and analyse the current situation on refugees and migrants in Greece as well as their needs on integration, qualitative research was conducted according to the following methodology:

- Secondary research - desk research: the conduct of a secondary research was deemed necessary in order to report on and fully understand Greek reality in relation to the issue under consideration. Furthermore, secondary research was essential, as it provided guidelines for planning the subsequent field research. Regarding the collection of secondary data, a relevant Greek and international literature review was carried out.
- Primary research - field research using the method of focus group discussions. This particular method was chosen as the most appropriate on the one hand to cross-check secondary data, and on the other hand to enrich and specialise existing knowledge, mainly focusing on the gaps observed on the subject matter. Besides, conducting focus group discussions contributed to highlighting special aspects of the issue not identified or pointed out in existing literature. Overall, two (2) focus groups were conducted. The first focus group was attended by ten (10) operators coming from three NGOs (“Solidarity Now”, “Praxis” and “Doctors of the World / Médecins du Monde – Greece”). In particular, the participants included 6 social workers, 2 psychologists, 1 teacher and 1 volunteer, all of them are working directly with migrants and refugees. The second focus group consisted of four (4) young migrants – refugees, all of them coming from Syria. On that point, it should be noted that it was very difficult to find young migrants and refugees from other countries, due to the fact that the majority of the newly resettled migrants and refugees come from Syria.

## Findings from the desk research

### Socio-economic data on migrants and refugees in Greece

Greece received a very large number of economic immigrants in the 1990s, as a result of the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. The majority of immigrants came from Albania, Bulgaria and Romania. Next, followed immigrants from African and Asian countries. According to Triandafyllidou (2008), migration to Greece is related also to the rise in living standards and in the educational levels of native youths who began refusing seasonal jobs or work in the informal economy, and instead waited for jobs that would match their qualifications and/or be of better pay and higher status; this created a pool of work available for migrants and led to a demand for a work force to fill these job vacancies at the lower end of the occupational scale.

Immigration flows into Greece continued with the same intensity in the decade 2000 – 2010. According to 2011 Census data (Hellenic Statistical Authority/Ελληνική Στατιστική Αρχή, 2014α), immigrant population amounts to 912,000 and constitutes 8,4% of the total population of the country. As regards the reasons that the migrants stated for immigrating to Greece, according to a recent special survey of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (Ελληνική Στατιστική Αρχή, 2014β), most of them mentioned the job search (48,0%), while the second reason for immigration included family reasons (27,6%). “Other” reasons follow (6%), 3,4% of the participants stated that “found a job in Greece and came to work”, 1,2% came to study and 0,3% came to Greece for international protection reasons, asylum request.

The consequences of the economic crisis, the precarious working conditions and the dramatic increase in unemployment have resulted in the decrease of the number of migrants in Greece, since 2009 (Anagnostou and Gemi/ Αναγνώστου και Γκέμη 2015). The apparent decline in the number of migrants after 2009-2010 though, has been offset by the large numbers of refugees and irregular migrants who came into Greece in the course of 2015 and during the first months of 2016 (Anagnostou, 2016). Indeed, the refugee crisis changed the migration landscape in Greece, in 2015, when an increased number of refugees and immigrants started to move towards the European Union, via the Mediterranean Sea or Southeastern Europe, mainly through Greece and Italy, so as to ask for asylum primarily in countries of Central and Northern Europe. Given that, Greece, as southeastern border of the European Union, was required to cope with the inflow of an immense number of refugees and immigrants, most of whom originate from Syria, which is plagued by civil war, and other countries experiencing unrest and conflict.

The figures concerning refugees’ arrivals in Greece are indicative, as they were registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2017b). In 2015, 856,723 refugees arrived, while in 2014 the respective number amounted to 41,038. In 2016, the number of refugees coming to Greece was 173,450. The number of refugees had been 2,842 people by February 2017. The majority of refugees come from Turkey to the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Castellorizo, Samos, Kos, Leros and Tilos. According to the most recent statistical data, 39,8% of refugees arriving to Greece come from Syria, 9,6% from Iraq, 7,1% from Afghanistan and 6,6% from Pakistan, whereas a high proportion reaching 35,5% comes from other different countries. Regarding newly arrived refugees, 42,1% were men, 21,1% were women and the remaining 36,8% was children.



With regard to the reasons why refugees were made to leave their own countries, according to a recent survey of the Association of Greek Regions (Ένωση Περιφερειών Ελλάδας) and Kapa Research (Κάπα Research) (2016), 69,9% of the participants mentioned the danger of their own life or their family members' lives, 19,6% reported military service avoidance or involvement in war avoidance, 18,7% referred to financial reasons (work, poverty), 12,3% stated limited civil and political rights, 11% mentioned family reunion reasons and 10,5% pointed out shortages of essentials/infrastructure (food, accommodation, water).

Refugees consider Greece as a transit country and not as a final destination country. Although refugees hold a positive view about Greece just over three quarters (77,6%), only 0,4% of the refugees wishes to stay in Greece, while 68% of the refugees want to go to Germany, 5,8% to Sweden, 4,5% to the United Kingdom, 4,1% to France and 3,4% to the Netherlands (Ένωση Περιφερειών Ελλάδας και Κάπα Research/ Association of Greek Regions and Kapa Research, 2016). Even if – on their first attempt – they do not manage to cross the borders towards central Europe, just 12,5% of the refugees would choose to stay permanently in Greece, either in an organized accommodation structure (8,6%), or in relatives/friends who already live in Greece (3,9%), while 27,9% of them stated that they would stay in Greece if they find a job and dignified living conditions (Ένωση Περιφερειών Ελλάδας και Κάπα Research/ Association of Greek Regions and Kapa Research, 2016).

The closure of the borders, as well as restrictive measures taken against the entry of refugees in countries like FYROM, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria, which were implemented in 2016 resulted in the entrapment of thousands of refugees in Greece. More than 46,000 refugees remained stranded in Greece, according to data collected by 11th April 2016 (Amnesty International/Διεθνής Αμνηστία, 2016). Due to this fact, many of the trapped refugees applied for asylum in Greece, thus ensuring their stay in a country of the European Union, while at the same time it is highly likely to relocate to another country of the European Union. According to statistical data of the Greek Asylum Service (Υπηρεσία Ασύλου, 2017), asylum applications totaled to 9,432 in 2014, amounted to 13,195 in 2015, climbed to 51,091 in 2016, while they reached the number of 6,346 since the first month of 2017. The following table depicts the situation regarding the number of refugees who arrived in Greece during the last three years and the number of relevant asylum applications.

<b>Refugees arrived / Asylum applications</b>			
	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Number of refugees arrived	41,038	856,723	173,450
Number of asylum seekers	9,432	13,195	51,091

It should be noted that the promise on the part of the European Union that it will provide a legitimate outlet from Greece for asylum seekers, has remained to a great extent unfulfilled, which is largely due to lack of political will on behalf host countries (Amnesty International/Διεθνής

Αμνηστία, 2016). It is indicative of this fact that by 16<sup>th</sup> March 2017, 9,998 asylum seekers had been transferred from Greece to other European Union member states out of 63,302, who were offered relocation commitments (European Commission, 2017). According to the latest data of the Coordinating Body for the Refugee Crisis Management (Συντονιστικό Όργανο Διαχείρισης της Προσφυγικής Κρίσης, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2017), the number of refugees in Greece adds up to 62,385 people.

The majority of them are accommodated in so-called hotspots (centres which are administered by the European Union and the Greek State aiming at fast registration and identification of the people), which are filled to capacity (200%), as mentioned in a recent report of Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontiers (2016). More specifically, on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016, there were approximately 15,000 people mainly at the hotspots in Lesbos, Chios and Samos, which can reach accommodation capacity of just 7,450 people, while at the same time reception conditions of the Greek mainland are not considered better. Although the situation is completely different from one camp to another, most asylum seekers live under miserable conditions, which very often has negative consequences for human health and especially more vulnerable people's health. Owing to lack of proper accommodation and specialised care most vulnerable people's health status deteriorates and can even threaten their life (Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontiers, 2016). Gradually, refugees and immigrants settle in hotels and apartments all over Greece, through a housing benefit programme of the UNHCR, funded by the European Union.

## **Current situation: policies, practices, initiatives**

### **Policies**

Despite the sharp increase of migration since the 1990s, Greek policy over the 1990s and the early 2000s primarily focused on controlling migration. The issue of integration of the migrant population in Greek society did not become a concern and an issue in the policy agenda in Greece until well into the 2000s (Anagnostou, 2016). In the middle of 2000s, Greece has struggled to develop a sustainable asylum policy which would allow it to receive persons in need of international protection, while protecting the EU's external borders (Bolani, Gemi & Skleparis, 2016). However, the political turmoil in the Middle East and Africa combined with the financial crisis have added new pressures, rendering the need for a revision of Greece's asylum policy approach and introduction of integration schemes (e.g. in the labour market) particularly urgent (Bolani, Gemi & Skleparis, 2016).

In August 2010, Greece has submitted to the European Commission an Action Plan on Asylum and Migration Management, which was revised in 2013. The Action Plan was the strategic implementation of the Government's determination to reform the asylum and immigration processes; it is part of its efforts to tackle the issues related to asylum, including creating first-reception centers, establishing screening procedures, addressing detention conditions, and improving facilities for families with children and for vulnerable groups. Based on the first version of the Action Plan, the Presidential Decree (Προεδρικό Διάταγμα) 114/2010 on the "Procedures

concerning the recognition of refugees and person entitled to subsidiary protection” was adopted. Among others, the Presidential Decree foresees the establishment of one or more Appeals’ Boards with deciding power; each of them consists of a) a civil servant from the Ministry of Interior or from the Ministry of Justice, b) a representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and c) a jurist specialised in refugee law and human rights law.

Besides, in 2011, Greece legislated the Law (Νόμος) 3907/2011 “Establishment of an Asylum Service and a First Reception Service”. According to the Law, an Asylum Service is established which is composed of the Central Service located in Athens and the Regional Asylum Services. The Asylum Service is responsible for implementing the legislation on asylum and any other forms of international protection of foreign nationals and stateless persons, as well as for contributing to the planning and formulation of the national asylum policy. The Asylum Service, among other, receives and examines applications for international protection and rules on them at first level; informs the persons applying for international protection on the application consideration procedure, as well as on their rights and obligations under it; provides the foreign nationals applying for international protection, as well as the beneficiaries of international protection with the legalizing and travel documents provided by the applicable law. In addition, the Law foresees the establishment of the First Reception Service, whose mission is to effectively handle third-country nationals illegally entering the country, in conditions of respect for their dignity, by subjecting them to first reception procedures. All third-country nationals arrested entering the country without legal formalities are subject to first reception procedures. The first reception procedures for third-country nationals include: a. a verification of their identity and nationality, b. their recording, c. their medical check and the provision to them of any required care and psychosocial support, d. their update on their rights and obligations, in particular with regard to the conditions under which they may be placed under international protection status and e. the care for those belonging to vulnerable groups, so that they are subject to the procedure laid down for such cases. By decision of the competent police authorities, third-country nationals who are arrested illegally staying in the country and not proving their citizenship and identity by means of a document issued by a public authority, may be to subject to the first reception procedures.

The Presidential Decree (Προεδρικό Διάταγμα) 113/2013 “Establishment of a single procedure for granting the status of refugee or of subsidiary protection beneficiary to aliens or to stateless individuals” adjusts the procedure for granting the status of refugee or of subsidiary protection beneficiary to aliens or stateless individuals. This Presidential Decree is applied to all applications for international protection submitted on the Greek territory, including the borders, or in transit zones of the country, as well as to the withdrawal procedures of a granted international protection status. All applications for international protection are initially examined according to the criteria set in the Geneva Convention regarding refugee status, and in case they are not fulfilled, are examined under the criteria of subsidiary protection status. Any alien or stateless person has the right to apply for international protection. The competent receiving authorities shall ensure the exercise of the right to submit an application for international protection, on condition that the applicant will appear in person before the above authorities. If an applicant is subject to the process of First Reception or is a detainee, the competent services of First Reception or detention shall make every effort immediately to inform and refer him/her to the territorially competent

examination authority, within the lawful deadlines. An unaccompanied, or not, minor above 14 years old, can lodge an application on his/her own behalf, while an unaccompanied minor, under 14 years old, lodges an application through a representative. Applicants are allowed to remain in the country until the conclusion of the administrative procedure for the examination of their application and they shall not be removed in any way. The Asylum Service makes the decisions on applications on an individual basis, following comprehensive, objective and impartial examination. The decisions on the application for international protection shall be notified to the applicant in due diligence of the competent examination authority. Notification shall be performed as soon as possible after the issuance of the decision and after notice to the applicant to appear for the receipt of the decision at a specific date.

In addition, the Presidential Decree (Προεδρικό Διάταγμα) 141/2013 defines the standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons who qualify as refugees or are eligible for subsidiary protection. In order to be granted the refugee status, the applicant must face a well-founded fear of being persecuted for one of the following reasons: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group (based on a common characteristic of gender, age, invalidity or health condition or sexual orientation), political opinion. As regards the grant of the subsidiary protection status, this concerns a third country national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to his or her country of origin, or in the case of a stateless person, to his or her country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm. The serious harm consists of a. the death penalty or execution; or b. torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of an applicant in the country of origin; or c. serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict. According to the same Presidential Decree, both refugees and persons eligible for subsidiary protection have a series of rights and benefits including:

- **Maintaining of family unity:** the family members of the beneficiary of international protection in whose name he/she applied for international protection shall be granted same status as the one granted to the beneficiary, unless they do not wish or such status is incompatible with other protection already granted to them.
- **Residence permits:** persons who are recognized as refugees or who are granted subsidiary protection status are issued a residence permit valid for 3 years, which is renewable by decision of the determining authority following an application by the person concerned. Similar residence permits are issued for the family members of beneficiaries of international protection.
- **Travel documents:** refugees are issued a travel document in the form set out in the Schedule to the Geneva Convention for the purpose of traveling abroad, irrespective of the country in which they were granted refugee status, unless compelling reasons of national security or public order linked to the person concerned otherwise require. The travel document is to be printed by the Passports Department of the Hellenic Police Headquarters. The same provisions apply to beneficiaries of subsidiary protection who are unable to

obtain a national passport, unless compelling reasons of national security or public order otherwise require.

- **Documentation and certificates:** the regional asylum offices issue for beneficiaries of refugee status the necessary documentation and certificates.
- **Access to employment:** beneficiaries of international protection are authorized to engage in employed or self-employed activities; moreover, they can participate in employment-related education opportunities for adults, vocational training, including training courses for upgrading skills, practical workplace experience and counseling services afforded by employment offices under equivalent conditions as Greek nationals. The law in force applicable to remuneration, access to social security systems relating to employed or self-employed activities and other conditions of employment also applies to beneficiaries of international protection.
- **Access to education:** all minors granted international protection status have access to education under the same conditions as Greek nationals. Access to the general education system and to programs of further training or retraining is allowed to adults granted international protection status under the same conditions as third-country nationals legally resident in Greece.
- **Access to procedures for recognition of qualifications:** beneficiaries of international protection enjoy equal treatment to Greek nationals in the context of the existing recognition procedures for foreign diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications.
- **Social welfare:** beneficiaries of international protection receive the necessary social assistance on the same conditions as provided to Greek nationals.
- **Health care:** beneficiaries of international protection have access to health care under the same eligibility conditions applicable to Greek nationals. In addition, beneficiaries of international protection who have special needs, in particular pregnant women, disabled people, persons who have undergone torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, minors who have been victims of any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or persons who have suffered from armed conflict are provided with adequate health care, including treatment for mental disorders, when needed, under the same eligibility conditions as Greek nationals.
- **Unaccompanied minors:** as soon as possible after the granting of international protection the Department of Refugees and Asylum Seekers' Protection, Directorate of Social Solidarity, Ministry of Employment, Social Security and Welfare takes all necessary measures to ensure the representation of unaccompanied minors by the appointment of a guardian or, when needed, by the assignment of relevant responsibility to an organisation responsible for the care and protection of minors, or by any other appropriate representation in accordance with legislation in force and Courts' decisions. The above mentioned authority also ensures that the minor's needs are duly met by the appointed guardian or representative and makes regular assessments of the minor's condition. It also ensures that unaccompanied minors are placed either with adult relatives, or with a family having the

minor's custody, or in centres specialised in accommodation for minors, or in other accommodation suitable for minors.

- **Access to accommodation:** beneficiaries of international protection have access to accommodation under equivalent conditions and restrictions as other third-country nationals legally resident in Greece, always with a view to offering equal opportunities regarding access to accommodation.
- **Freedom of movement:** freedom of movement of beneficiaries of international protection is allowed under the same conditions and restrictions as those provided for other third-country nationals legally resident in the country.
- **Access to integration facilities:** beneficiaries of refugee status attend the appropriate social integration programmes established by the competent departments of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare.
- **Repatriation:** the competent authorities provide assistance to beneficiaries of international protection status who wish to be repatriated.

Besides, the recent Law (Νόμος) 4368/2016 provides free access to public health services and pharmaceutical treatment to asylum seekers and members of their families. Moreover, according to the recent Law (Νόμος) 4375/2016, applicants for international protection after completing the procedure for lodging the application for international protection, in accordance with the relevant provisions, and if they are in possession of the "applicant for international protection card" or "asylum seeker's card", shall have access to salaried employment or to the provision of services or work.

Even though there are many measures and provisions as regards the integration of migrants and refugees in the economic and social life, in practice, they are not applicable. The hard financial conditions that exist in Greece make their integration even more difficult, especially as regards their access to employment. As it is pointed out in the recent report of the Greek Council for Refugees (2016), taking into consideration the current context of financial crisis, the high unemployment rates and further obstacles posed by competition with Greek-speaking employees, it is particularly difficult in practice for asylum seekers to have access to the labour market, which may lead to 'undeclared' employment with severe repercussions on the enjoyment of basic social rights. Besides, according to the same report (Greek Council for Refugees, 2016), the education sector faces problems with regard to refugee children's integration in Greek schools and a gap persists in meeting the needs of children who have missed years of schooling due to conflict or displacement and require catch-up programmes; at the same time, obstacles are posed relating to the enrolment of international protection beneficiaries in vocational training programmes. In addition, as regards the access to health care services, the recent report of the Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontiers (2016) states that the administrative barriers remain in place, as people are not informed on how they should proceed and where they should go to obtain the required documents. The staff in the hospitals and health care centres are also not always aware of the law on the provision of services to asylum seekers; at the same report, it is stated that hospitals are struggling to respond to the needs of both local people and migrants, mainly due to a lack of resources. As a result, people regularly face difficulties in accessing proper healthcare, especially



specialised care. Whilst they theoretically have access to the treatment in hospital for specialised issues, in reality access is difficult due to a general lack of capacity, including a lack of financial and human resources. In terms of accommodation, even though beneficiaries of international protection have access, in practice, there are generally limited accommodation places for homeless people in Greece and no shelters dedicated to recognised refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection exist (Greek Council for Refugees, 2016). There is also no provision for financial support for living costs.

### **Practices & initiatives**

There are many practices and initiatives in Greece which are considered promising and have contributed to the integration of migrants and refugees. One of them is the **Athens Solidarity Center – ASC** (<http://www.solidaritynow.org/en/kentro-allileggiis-athinas/>), coordinated by Solidarity Now (<http://www.solidaritynow.org/en/>), which operates as a central hub for civil society organizations in Greece to implement their individual projects, while at the same time providing a space for these organizations to collaborate, co-design programs and jointly execute actions that help address poverty alleviation and social integration for marginalized and vulnerable populations. The ASC opened its doors in December 2014. It has an “open door” policy, meaning it is accessible to all people regardless of nationality, religion, ethnic origin or social status.

The first phase of the Athens Solidarity Center was implemented in partnership with the Municipality of Athens and civil society organizations, including Praksis (<https://www.praksis.gr/en/>), ARSIS (<http://arsis.gr/en/home/>), Network for Children’s Rights (<http://ddp.gr/>) and Together for Children (<http://mazigiatopaidi.gr/en/>) with the financial support of the European Economic Area Grants. This collaboration provided free primary healthcare services, legal aid and counseling, employment services to assist with job acquisition and labor market reentry, and a comprehensive service system for mothers and children. In September 2015, the Greek Asylum Service began its operations at the Center, with a specific focus on cases of vulnerable persons.

After two years of operation, ASC entered its second phase. In this new period, services were adjusted and expanded in order to best address the evolving social challenges, shaped by the parallel crises in Greece – the socioeconomic hardship and the influx of refugees and migrants. Building on its successful experience, this reconfiguration offers an improved and more comprehensive set of services to refugees, migrants and Greeks who are in need, such as:

- **Legal support:** legal advice, mediation, litigation and advocacy
- **Social Work:** counselling and guidance on connection with services and availability of aid, access to services and referrals, protection
- **Psychological support:** evaluation of psychological needs, counselling and support, diagnosis and guidance to specialized aid /specialized therapy
- **Helpline and Counseling for Families, Children and Adolescents** (with the partnership of Together for the Children)

- **Children Friendly Space** (through the Network for Children's Rights)
- **Asylum Office Services**, following a booked appointment by the central Asylum Service.



## Findings from the field research

### Focus group with operators

The main services provided by the organisations of the participant operators include:

- medical and health care services to vulnerable social groups including migrants and refugees
- legal aid services
- psychosocial support
- counselling and integration services
- services for homeless people
- services for people affected by the economic crisis
- specialised services for unaccompanied minors
- hosting and accommodation programmes for refugees
- information and interpretation services
- intercultural mediation services

It has to be noted that some of the organisations provide services which are specifically addressed to migrants and refugees.

As regards the main target groups/beneficiaries being served at their organisation, they include:

- migrants, refugees, asylum seekers
- unemployed people
- homeless people
- people affected by the economic crisis
- people who are in need of medical assistance and have not health insurance.

The majority of migrants and refugees they serve come from Syria. The countries that follow are Pakistan, Afghanistan, Albania, Nigeria and other African countries, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran. As regards the reasons that migrants/ refugees leave home, the operators agreed that they are forced to leave their countries due to wars, conflicts and unstable political situations, that do not make them feel safe and free in their countries. Besides, many migrants (for instance those from Albania) have landed to Greece for economic reasons. They also mentioned some cases of migrants who left their countries for reasons related to their sexual orientation, mainly those from Middle East countries, which are not considered LGBT friendly countries.

They all agreed that refugees in Greece feel safer than in their countries, especially those from the war countries. Moreover, it was emphasised that many of them who consider Greece as a transit to the countries of Central and North Europe feel very frustrated, as they remain stranded in the country, after the closure of the main Balkan migration route to Western Europe at the beginning of 2016. The operators also believe that migrants and refugees in Greece do not get the support they need in terms of their integration into the labour market and society, something which is mainly related to the limited support that these people received by the Greek state. In addition, it was mentioned that some of them feel very insecure, for instance, migrants from Algeria,

Somalia and Morocco, as they do not have the right to stay in the European Union and to relocate to EU countries; they do not even have the right to have access to the housing and accommodation services and other benefits for refugees.

The operators mentioned the following early days' needs of migrants and refugees:

- Information on how to move from Greece to other countries, information about relocation countries
- Information on asylum procedures, relocation programmes
- Housing
- Food and clothes
- Access to health care services
- Employment: info on how to get a job, working rights and responsibilities
- Education
- Support/ benefits by the State
- Learning the language of the country they want to be relocated
- Learning the Greek language.

The main barriers that the migrants and refugees when accessing the services provided by the participant operators are related to cultural and languages issues, which are usually overcome with the help of a cultural/ linguistic mediator. In addition, in some cases beneficiaries are unwilling and hesitant in expressing their real needs, something which is also related to cultural differences or to gender issues (e.g. women beneficiaries feel more comfortable with the service providers of their gender).

As regards the migrants' and refugees' information and orientation needs in relation to their integration into the country they currently live, these include many aspects. First of all, most of the migrants and refugees wish to receive information on how to cover basic needs, e.g. housing, food, medicines. Then, there is an increasing need for information about their access to healthcare services and then as well as for information of the Greek labour market and their access to employment, including how to search for a job, their rights and responsibilities, benefits, etc. Moreover, they are interested in getting information about the education system in Greece and if their children have the right to go to school. Little has been expressed as regards their need for cultural adjustment.

Also, the operators gave emphasis on their increased need for training on how to work with refugees and migrants, as they have never had the time to be trained and be fully prepared, given the huge amounts of refugees and migrants that arrived in Greece the last two years. They mentioned the following needs/ challenges:

- Background information and methodologies on refugees and migrants issues
- Cultural diversity issues
- Language issues, intercultural mediation
- Legal issues, medical, psychosocial support

At the end of the discussion, when operators were asked to rate how important are the following topics in terms of migrants' and refugees' integration in Greece are, the following scores were given (1 means that it is not at all important and 5 means that this is very important):

	1	2	3	4	5
Housing (Types of houses, Appliances and electronics, Cleaning and hygiene, Housing rights and responsibilities, Neighbour etiquette)					10
Transportation (Public transportation, Walking, Owning and driving a car etc.)			3	6	1
Employment (Looking for a job, Interview procedure, Salaries/Taxes, Workplace etiquette, Rights and responsibilities etc.)		3	1	1	5
Education (Education system, School environment, Educational opportunities for adults, etc.)		1	3	4	2
Leisure time, activities and sports		3	4	3	
Health and Hygiene (Available healthcare resources, Nutrition, Personal and public hygiene, Emotional and mental health)			1		9
Budgeting and Personal Finance (Sources of income, Banking, Forecasting and managing personal finances, prioritizing and saving money etc.)			4	4	2
Cultural adjustment (Greetings and body language, Punctuality, Etiquette, National holidays, Culture and arts, Historical references; Preserving and communicating your cultural identity etc.)		1	4	1	4
Discrimination and bullying			4	3	3

Community services (Community services and facilities, Getting involved/volunteering, Useful phone numbers, etc.)			5	5	
National law, rights and responsibilities			2	2	6
Learning the national language of the recipient country	1		6		3

### Focus group with migrants- refugees

All four participants come from Syria. As regards their gender, 2 of them are men and 2 of them are women. Their age is between 21 to 34 years old and they live in Greece from 10 months to 2 years. Their educational level varies from secondary (2 participants) to higher education (2 participants).

All of them stated that the only and one reason that they left home was the Syrian civil war. Only one of them stated that Greece was her first choice of destination and envisages to live permanently in this country; the other three participants mentioned that Greece was not their first choice of destination, but for the time being they stay in the country, where they have applied for asylum, with the hope to be relocated in another EU country with better financial conditions. They mentioned that they feel safe in Greece. When they were asked about their early days' need, they provided the following answers: safety/ safe living conditions, housing, job, food and clothes, medicine, information about relocation to other EU countries, information about asylum seeking procedures, information about their legal, civil and human rights and translation and intermediation services.

All research participants stated that they have adequate and safe living conditions, while three of them responded that they dispose the necessary financial means to live decently in the host country. None of them speaks Greek, however they all agree that speaking the Greek language is essential for their integration in the country. As regards their legal, civil and human rights in Greece, they mentioned that they have been provided information, however one of them mentioned that the information he received was not adequate.

Only one of them feels that she has been culturally and socially integrated in the country; one of them answered that she has been a little bit culturally and socially integrated; the rest two participants provided a negative answer, even though they have received enough information about the society and culture of the host country since they arrived. They stated that the main problems and challenges they face with regard to their integration into country include their living in camps, miscommunication and confusion because they do not know the Greek language. All four participants stated that having a job would make them feel at home or integrated in Greece. Another answer that was added on the what would make them feel at home or integrated was being

accepted by people; another participant also added the speaking of language; and a third answer that was given was “having a daily routine”.

As regards their employment status, they are unemployed, except one participant, who found a job, with the help of a social worker, as an interpreter from English to Arabic and vice versa. They all agreed that being employed is important to their integration in Greece, and this maybe the most important factor. Financial crisis in Greece, unemployment and language are among difficulties mentioned, when trying to find a job. Only one of them feels that she has been integrated into the labour market of Greece, the research participant who is currently employed. Three of them stated that they have received information about integration since they arrived in Greece by NGOs. Those three also mentioned that they are aware of the counselling services regarding the integration of migrants and refugees. One of them replied that he has made use of these services; in particular, he used relevant legal services provided by an NGO and he feels that these services improved his integration into the country he currently lives.

When participants were asked to rate how relevant the following topics are in terms of their integration, the following scores were given (1 means that it is not at all relevant and 5 means that this is very relevant):

	1	2	3	4	5
Housing (Types of houses, Appliances and electronics, Cleaning and hygiene, Housing rights and responsibilities, Neighbour etiquette)					4
Transportation (Public transportation, Walking, Owing and driving a car etc.)			1	1	2
Employment (Looking for a job, Interview procedure, Salaries/Taxes, Workplace etiquette, Rights and responsibilities etc.)					4
Education (Education system, School environment, Educational opportunities for adults, etc.)			1		3
Leisure time, activities and sports			3	1	
Health and Hygiene			1	2	1

(Available healthcare resources, Nutrition, Personal and public hygiene, Emotional and mental health)				
Budgeting and Personal Finance (Sources of income, Banking, Forecasting and managing personal finances, prioritizing and saving money etc.)			1	3
Cultural adjustment (Greetings and body language, Punctuality, Etiquette, National holidays, Culture and arts, Historical references; Preserving and communicating your cultural identity etc.)			2	2
Discrimination and bullying			1	3
Community services (Community services and facilities, Getting involved/volunteering, Useful phone numbers, etc.)			1	3
National law, rights and responsibilities				4
Learning the national language of the recipient country			1	3

## Conclusions – Recommendations

Our research has shown that migrants and refugees in Greece face many problems and barriers as regards their integration. Even though they are accorded rights and there is a series of laws and measures which protect them and can contribute to their economic, social and cultural integration, in practice, migrants and refugees in Greece are rather marginalized. This is related to the bad financial conditions and the high percentages of unemployment, due to the economic crisis. Moreover, Greece was not prepared to receive the large numbers of migrants and refugees who landed in the country over the two last years, so this has affected not only their integration, but also the covering of their basic needs. Despite all these difficulties, mainly local and international non-governmental organisations as well as volunteers and local communities make great efforts to support migrants and refugees by providing first of all assistance at practical level (food, medicines, accommodation, clothes); they also offer them medical and health care services, legal aid, psychosocial support, counselling and integration services.

Any other assistance such as the envisaged BLEND IN application would be more than welcome by the refugees and migrants who reside in Greece and wish to be integrated in the society, the labour market and the culture of the country. Based on the desk research and the fieldwork with operators and migrants- refugees, the following recommendations could be made as regards the content of the BLEND IN Toolkit:

*From the point of view of migrants – refugees:*

- Information about hospital and health services at local level
- Information about public transportation
- Information about counselling and integration services provided by the state and NGOs.
- Information about legal services and lawyers, who are specialized in immigration issues
- Common Greek words and phrases
- Greek language courses locations
- To be available in Arabic language.

*From the point of view of operators:*

- Hospital contact details, information about how the hospitals and the healthcare system work, hospitals and pharmacies on duty, pharmacies
- Public transportation: info about itineraries, tickets, schedule, maps
- Emergency phone numbers
- Contact details of important services, such as police departments, courts, fire departments, asylum service, counselling services, NGOs.
- Migrants' associations contact details
- Job advertisements and links to relevant portals
- Culture and arts events
- Free wifi spots

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