

Towards a Comprehensive Refugee Integration Strategy for Cyprus



Nicosia, June 2018

Acknowledgments

The UNHCR Office in Cyprus is sincerely grateful to the participants of the Integration Task Force for their substantive and valuable contribution to the production of this Report:

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List of Recommendations

Sector	Recommended Actions
<p>1. Employment</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is an essential need for mapping the academic qualifications, skills, work experience and vocational training needs of refugees in order to ensure a proper job referral system. The "HelpRefugeesWork" online platform that UNHCR had developed in collaboration with its NGO partner the Cyprus Refugee Council could serve as a useful starting point. 2. The employment rights of refugees should be clearly indicated on their residence permits; this could be complemented by information systematically disseminated to employers as to the rights of refugees. 3. Develop and implement schemes facilitating structured meetings between refugees and employers, for example high-profile work fairs for refugees. 4. Support childcare schemes to facilitate the employment of refugee women; in other cases, develop and implement comprehensive programmes to assist their transition from traditional activities to the labour market. 5. Provide access to micro-credit schemes to support the entrepreneurship of refugees. 6. Facilitate the early recognition of foreign diplomas/certificates of refugees, and develop practical procedures for the assessment of their higher education qualifications where documentation is not lacking. 7. Design internship and apprenticeship schemes, as well as vocational and language training programmes linked to job-placement and offered free of charge for unemployed refugees; they should take place at times that are convenient for the target group. 8. Promote contact between refugees and employers through a mainstream work subsidy scheme for the unemployed. 9. Support the participation of refugee women in language and vocational training programmes, by planning classes/trainings at convenient times and/or with the provision of child-care arrangements. 10. Municipalities could become hubs for language training, as this could strengthen the refugees' social ties within the communities they live in. 11. The Human Resources Development Agency to consider subsidizing vocational training courses in English and Arabic running in parallel with intensive Greek language classes. 12. It is particularly recommended that the mainstream vocational training programmes include 'soft-skills' that would help refugees to build confidence and assertiveness when applying for jobs. This would include training on writing job applications and curricula vitae, presentation skills and interview techniques. Further components can relate to training in using Microsoft Office, internet, and obtaining some form of computer literacy certification.
<p>2. Education</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Develop policies on inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking children within public pre-school education. 14. Explore the introduction of incentives (such as tax deductions) for private pre-school nurseries to offer places for asylum-seeking and refugee children. 15. Utilize community-based approaches, employing both refugee mothers/caregivers and members of the local communities in early childhood education and care programmes in order to promote community building and facilitate intercultural dialogue and cultural integration 16. Develop measures to ensure that all refugee and asylum-seeking children have access to, and remain in, mainstream education; enrolment should be based on a comprehensive assessment of their educational level to ensure appropriate placement, i.e. refugee students should not be placed in lower levels due to language barrier alone. 17. Refugee and asylum-seeking children of technical and lyceum school age should not be placed in separate classes, but rather should be offered supplementary lessons, additional language classes, and other necessary support to be able to participate in mainstream education at either a technical or lyceum school; the choice of school should be based on skills and inclination.

	<p>18. Provide adequate preparation to refugee students and their parents for mainstream education, including through proper orientation on education system requirements, documentation policies for admissions, certification, academic concerns, school liaison systems, new curriculum, classroom culture, expectations, and social cohesion.</p> <p>19. Provide systematic civic and cultural orientation sessions for all new students on the local laws and reporting mechanisms regarding harassment, discrimination, child marriage, gender equality and children's rights.</p> <p>20. Make systems and resources should available for the use of qualified, trained interpreters and cultural mediators to facilitate communication between the schools and asylum-seeking and refugee children and their parents.</p> <p>21. Establish a functioning, integrated system to track refugee student and teacher needs to ensure successful inclusion and transition, as well as enrolment, attendance and completion data.</p> <p>22. Design mentorship and peer support/buddy programmes within schools with a high refugee and asylum-seeker population.</p> <p>23. Encourage and facilitate the active participation of parents in the parents' associations, as well as various classroom activities.</p> <p>24. Ensure the effective implementation of the Ministry's Code of Conduct against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents across all schools in Cyprus; establish a national monitoring and recording system for all discriminatory and racially-motivated incidents.</p> <p>25. Develop a manual on educational policies and a good practice guidance for educators to support schools receiving refugee children, and help them integrate within the school environment.</p> <p>26. Introduce training programmes for teachers on refugee background and protection needs, including strategies to address academic, linguistic, psychosocial, and social cohesion issues.</p> <p>27. Assign teachers with relevant qualifications to schools and classrooms with a high percentage of refugee children.</p> <p>28. Place refugee teachers/teaching assistants in classrooms to support with language and translation needs.</p> <p>29. Provide incentives to teachers to pursue post-graduate qualifications in multicultural education.</p> <p>30. Provide additional classroom resources that may include age- and level-appropriate reference books, text books and language learning materials.</p> <p>31. Develop programmes that support both teachers and students, as well as refugee children and families, such as academic/language support for refugees, establishing parent meetings, promoting participation of refugee children in youth and sports clubs.</p> <p>32. Provide online translation tools (together with the appropriate hardware and internet connections) to teachers and students in classrooms where there are school-aged refugee children.</p>
<p>3. Access to Basic Services</p>	<p>33. Policy measures are urgently needed to ensure that refugees have access to dignified housing; this would require in particular providing sufficient rental subsidy for those who cannot afford suitable accommodation, as well as practical measures to address the specific difficulties many refugees have in meeting advance payments and discriminatory treatment by landlords.</p> <p>34. Local authorities should play a greater role in developing mainstream housing projects for the benefit of both local residents and refugees, as this could also forge intercultural links and create a more welcoming environment for refugees.</p> <p>35. Develop social housing schemes with possible funding opportunities that can be sought from European bodies such as the European Regional Development Fund, the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund, the European Investment Bank, the Central European Bank (CEB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.</p> <p>36. Develop long-term strategies and policies to ensure non-ghettoization and non-segregation of refugees.</p> <p>37. Establish effective partnerships between the government and refugee-assisting NGOs that are essential in addressing the housing problems of refugees, whether for the provision of information and advice, negotiations with landlords, monitoring living conditions, or other issues.</p> <p>38. Amend the Medical Institutions and Services Law to provide for an exemption from the tax and social insurance requirement for refugees with less than three years of lawful residence in the country.</p>

	<p>39. Connect the databases of the Social Welfare Services, the Asylum Service and the Ministry of Health for information sharing and the facilitation of processes with regards to access to medical care.</p> <p>40. Ensure that a screening assessment takes place in order to identify vulnerable individuals in need of state-sponsored health care.</p> <p>41. Provide health education opportunities for refugees at the Kofinou Reception Centre, as well as to refugees residing in the community, via local municipalities. Health education needs to include reproductive health and family planning issues.</p> <p>42. Ensure that processes with regards to the issuance of a medical card are the same in all districts across Cyprus.</p> <p>43. Cross-cultural health mediators and interpreting services are needed so as to enable refugees to access the system properly; good use could be made in this regard of former refugees and refugee community organizations.</p> <p>44. It is strongly advisable that projects dealing with mental health of refugees incorporate activities conducive to employment, thus recognizing the link between health and employment.</p> <p>45. Outreach work should be used to go where people are, informing them of their rights and enabling them to better access health care facilities.</p> <p>46. Process applications for social assistance in a timely manner in order to prevent instances of destitution and homelessness.</p> <p>47. Establish a formal transparent procedure for refugees to provide their feedback on the reason of not being selected by an employer so that they are not unfairly denied social assistance on the presumption of being “wilfully unemployed.”</p> <p>48. Extend all available social inclusion schemes (child benefit, single parent allowance, etc.) to refugees</p> <p>49. Consideration should also be given to some additional discretionary benefits that could promote and encourage self-sufficiency and self-reliance, for example, stipends for attending language or vocational training courses, or interest-free settlement loans.</p> <p>50. Establish a joint Standard Operating Procedure involving the Social Welfare Services, the Asylum Service and the Ministry of Health for the earliest possible identification and ongoing monitoring of vulnerable individuals throughout the asylum procedure and after the granting of international protection.</p> <p>51. It is important that vulnerability assessment is conducted in a holistic manner by multi-disciplinary teams of experts, including social counsellors, health practitioners and psychologists, taking into account the specific circumstances of each refugee.</p> <p>52. Reception arrangements for asylum-seekers should include supplementary measures for persons with special needs.</p> <p>53. Establish a proper referral system with the collaboration of all relevant State and non-State actors that provide medical, psychological and social support in order to ensure that the particular needs of each vulnerable individual are met.</p> <p>54. Adequate support measures should be in place for victims of violence and torture, including medical treatment, psychotherapy, psychiatric treatment if required, psychological counselling and parallel assistance with social adjustment for both patients and their families.</p>
<p>4. Social Inclusion and Civic Engagement</p>	<p>55. Develop public information and education multi-media projects aimed at combating discrimination and fostering a positive and respectful attitude towards refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.</p> <p>56. Design and implement programmes supporting the active participation of refugees in the social, cultural and political life in Cyprus.</p> <p>57. Establish radio programmes aiming to connect refugees and local society, enhance dialogue and build bridges through music, culture, and information.</p> <p>58. Produce participatory videos and photo projects, aiming to bring participants together to learn new skills and collaborate on sharing issues and telling stories.</p> <p>59. Empower and support refugees to set up democratically elected associations that promote their rights and serve as a bridge between the various stakeholders.</p> <p>60. Develop structures of representation of the refugee population at the local administration level, such as via migrant councils and bodies.</p> <p>61. Encourage and support the participation of refugee children in sport activities.</p> <p>62. Promote joint cultural and artistic events that could include art and photography exhibitions; dance, painting and music workshops; storytelling; and gastronomy projects.</p>

	<p>63. Facilitate the creation of mentoring and buddy programmes aiming at bringing together citizens and refugees, by local authorities and educational institutions.</p> <p>64. Introduce measures for the effective enforcement of the existing anti-discrimination legislation and strengthen the reporting mechanisms, particularly in relation to discrimination relating to employment, housing and education.</p> <p>65. Provide information on how the reporting mechanisms work via relevant online platforms and in written format made available to NGOs, municipalities and other bodies that work with refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.</p> <p>66. Strengthen the role of local authorities in combating discrimination at the local level. Key elements in combating discrimination on the local level include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Produce and publicize quarterly reports on racist and discriminatory incidents, their prosecution and conviction rates. b) Produce a guide for employers on how to create a working environment free from discrimination. c) Strengthen the relationship between refugees and the police as a means, among others, to encourage reporting discriminatory treatment and racially motivated incidents. <p>67. The long-term residence requirements should be applied flexibly taking into consideration the specific situation of refugees.</p> <p>68. Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection should be issued with machine-readable travel documents (MRTDs) without further delay; UNHCR is renewing its offer to provide to the authorities any technical, practical and/or legal advice they may require.</p> <p>69. Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection should have equal and immediate access to family reunification procedures.</p> <p>70. The authorities should employ a flexible interpretation of the concept of 'family' so as to include other dependants.</p> <p>71. Adopt policy measures to effectively facilitate the naturalization of qualifying refugees as provided for in Article 34 of the 1951 Refugee Convention.</p> <p>72. Applications for naturalization should be decided on within a reasonable period of time.</p> <p>73. Financial obstacles to the attaining of citizenship should be lifted.</p> <p>74. Refugees would benefit from objective, measurable and transparent procedures and criteria for the acquisition of citizenship.</p>
<p>5. Refugee Women</p>	<p>78. All refugee programmers should include a gender perspective, so that the specific needs of women and girls are effectively addressed.</p> <p>79. Raise awareness amongst women on their legal rights and available mechanisms for reporting incidents, for example, of discrimination, sexual and gender based violence, and harassment.</p> <p>80. Ensure adequate measures for the prevention of and effective response to gender discrimination and gender-based violence against women.</p> <p>81. Special measures are needed to encourage and support women's participation in programmes aiming at increasing employability, including language classes, internships, apprenticeship programmes and vocational training programmes.</p> <p>82. Enhance the employability of refugee women through increased availability of state-funded childcare and better parental leave provisions.</p> <p>83. The Government should adopt positive measures aimed at alleviating the particular situation of refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls living in inadequate housing so as to ensure their security from harassment and violence in the home, as well as protection from illegal forced eviction.</p> <p>84. Adequate measures should be in place to ensure access to age-sensitive reproductive health care, HIV information and education, and other special health care needs of women and girls.</p>
<p>6. Unaccompanied and Separated children</p>	<p>85. Central to effectively meeting the protection and long-term needs of unaccompanied and separated refugee children is the establishment of a best interest determination procedure involving a trained multifunctional team from the Asylum Service, Social Welfare Services, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.</p> <p>86. Ongoing training and professional development for staff working with unaccompanied and separated children.</p> <p>87. Placement of unaccompanied children in education programmes, including technical courses and lyceum placement, should be determined through a mixture of assessed knowledge and the informed desires of the child, i.e. children should not be placed in lower levels due to language barrier alone.</p>

	<p>88. Family tracing must be carried out for all separated children at the earliest possible opportunity; even if immediate family reunification is not possible, tracing is important for restoring links with their families.</p> <p>89. Develop a plan and timeline for inclusion of all refugee and asylum-seeking children, including unaccompanied and separated children, into formal, mainstream education.</p> <p>90. As an interim measure, adjust the school timetable for the current special programme for unaccompanied and separated children so they can be mainstreamed in some classes where knowledge of Greek is not an imperative, including sport and art classes.</p> <p>91. Provide supplementary lessons and other forms of assistance such as 'catch up' classes in literacy and numeracy, in order for unaccompanied children to be able to smoothly participate in mainstream education; engaging volunteers from the local community, including retired teachers, may be a cost-effective way of providing this assistance.</p> <p>92. Provide accelerated education programmes, aligned to the Cypriot educational system, that allow transition of unaccompanied children who have received none or little formal education in their country of origin into the formal system.</p> <p>93. For those children of lyceum or technical school age who have pending applications to transfer to other EU countries under the Dublin Regulation, schooling options should be considered in light of the child's individual circumstances, i.e. age, level of education, and imminence of transfer from Cyprus; it may be useful to provide English language classes and/or classes in the language of the country that the child will be transferred to.</p> <p>94. Develop measures to support the transition to independent living for unaccompanied and separated children reaching adulthood and having to leave the special shelters; areas of needed support include continuing education, accommodation and employment.</p> <p>95. Provide opportunities for host community children and youth to engage with the unaccompanied and separated children outside of formal classes, and include asylum-seekers in non-academic classes such as art and gym, and to reinforce their experience of belonging in the school environment.</p> <p>96. Funding for such schemes can be sought from European bodies such as the European Investment Bank, the Central European Bank (CEB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.</p>
<p>7. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships, Coordination and Funding</p>	<p>97. Establish a dedicated integration authority (directorate, department, service or unit) within one of the relevant ministries; once set up, this authority will have the responsibility to develop and oversee the implementation of the national refugee integration strategy and plan of action proposed in this paper; it will also serve as the main governmental coordinating body in all aspects of refugee integration.</p> <p>98. Establish an inter-ministerial committee for the coordination of the cross-government implementation of the integration strategy and assist the participating ministries to develop their respective action plans and monitor the progress of their implementation.</p> <p>99. Strengthen the role of municipalities through delegated authority and multi-annual funding for the design, implementation and evaluation of integration programmes.</p> <p>100. Establish a National Integration Forum that includes representatives from a range of refugee and migrant communities in Cyprus, as well as NGOs, employers' associations and other relevant civil society organizations; the role of the Forum will be to advise the Government on all integration-related matters.</p> <p>101. Ensure sufficient and timely allocation of resources for effective integration programmes and projects identified following participatory needs assessment.</p>

Foreword

UNHCR's fundamental business in the Republic of Cyprus is to assist the Government to further refine and improve its asylum legislation and the procedures and capacities for a refugee protection system fully in line with international standards. While helping to further strengthen the quality of the national asylum procedures and promoting decent reception conditions for asylum-seekers, the ultimate goal of UNHCR's work in the Republic of Cyprus, as elsewhere in the European Union, is to help find a lasting solution to the problems of refugees by way of integration into the economic, social and cultural fabric of the host society.

The process of integration is obviously complex and gradual, and it is inextricably linked to the rights they effectively enjoy as refugees. Of course, refugees have important responsibilities to ensure their successful integration into their host societies. Indeed many of the best integration practices in different countries in Europe and North America demonstrate that the principal actors in integration are the refugees themselves. Refugees are resourceful individuals, some of whom have survived on their wits during long and treacherous journeys to the country of asylum. If provided with the necessary tools of language, skills development and employment opportunities, they are capable of not only assuming responsibility for their own affairs but also contributing to their host society, economically, socially and culturally. They are therefore in the best position to identify their own integration needs and potentials.

Refugees will more easily fulfil their responsibilities if they are received by welcoming societies and given adequate support, if they are empowered and assisted to make the most of their own resources and skills to reach and develop their full potential, and if they are able to enjoy equality of rights and opportunities in all spheres of society while preserving their cultural identity. Only through such a dynamic two-way process, where all parties recognize and meet their respective duties, will integration be achieved and cohesive societies built.

There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to integration. However, there are a number of broad goals of integration that apply across countries. These include efforts to enable refugees to reach and develop their full potential, to protect the human rights of refugees, reduce their marginalization, and foster social cohesion and harmonious coexistence. Access to education, to employment, to housing and to family reunification are the key ingredients of integration in any society.

I strongly believe that the Republic of Cyprus has the opportunity to get the integration of refugees right and harness its benefits. This would require that first and foremost the various challenges facing refugees be identified and thoroughly addressed. Do the jobs refugees get meet their skills and qualifications? Is the government addressing the barriers of refugees in the labour market, for example by providing them with specific, technical language and skills training that allows them to re-gain confidence and self-esteem? Have sufficient measures been taken to ensure the timely licensing and recognition of foreign credentials? Do education authorities know about the special needs of unaccompanied children at their schools? Is the naturalization of refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection encouraged and facilitated? Can they bring the family members they were forced to leave behind? Are there structures and services in place that encourage self-reliance and sustainable self-sufficiency?

The present Report, *Towards a Comprehensive Refugee Integration Strategy for Cyprus*, challenges us all to collectively find more practical and meaningful ways to ensure the effective integration of refugees whom the Republic of Cyprus has had the privilege to protect. The report is an outcome of extensive consultations within a multi-stakeholder Integration Task Force over a twelve-month period. The Task Force brought together, on an equal basis, representatives from the Government, the refugee community, UNHCR, non-governmental organizations, academia and the business sector. Based on the inputs of the Task Force and its own research and analysis, UNHCR has set out in this Report a set of recommendations for the design and implementation of a national integration plan for consideration by the Government, with a particular focus in four inter-related areas: *employment, education and vocational training, access to basic services, and social inclusion and civic engagement*.

The Report is not a work of academic research, but primarily a call to action for more effective ways to facilitate the integration of refugees. I hope that the institutions to which the Report is directed - Government ministries/departments, public bodies, the business sector, non-governmental organizations, faith-based groups, cultural and sporting organizations as well as local and refugee community groups - will all find in it food for thought.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to all members of the Integration Task Force who participated in and supported this effort. This work would not have succeeded, needless to say, without the active engagement of the many refugee women, men, girls and boys from diverse backgrounds whom UNHCR had consulted and worked with, whether in one-on-one discussions or focus group meetings. A very special thank you to all.

Damtew Dessalegne
UNHCR Representative in Cyprus
Nicosia, June 2018

1. Introduction

A word cloud featuring various terms related to refugee integration and human rights. The words are arranged in a circular pattern and include:

- Welcome
- Refugees
- Include
- Community
- Understanding
- Solidarity
- Respect
- PROTECT**
- Equality
- Work
- Education
- Human Rights
- Asylum
- Appreciate
- Diversity
- Family
- Citizenship
- Tolerance
- Integrate
- Value
- Responsibility
- Home
- Empowerment
- PARTICIPATION

Refugees¹ have enormous settlement difficulties when they arrive in a new country with an unfamiliar setting. They often arrive alone, separated from their families and with little more than the clothes on their back. Unlike immigrants, they have no time to prepare for such a fundamental change in their lives. In addition, many arrive traumatised by their experiences of persecution, violence, or discrimination.

In addition to their efforts to forge new lives in a strange land, many refugees therefore bear psychological and physical scars from past abuses and suffering that can endure for years. But they find the strength to overcome adversity. They have the courage not to give up hope. Hope can be nurtured – and realized – if refugees are accepted for who they are, are seen as equals and given the chance to engage fully in all aspects of community life. They are capable – if given the chance and supported with effective integration measures – of assuming responsibility for their own affairs and contributing to their host society economically, socially and culturally.

With significant numbers of people afforded international protection in Cyprus in recent years (some 5,500 persons since 2014 alone), greater assistance and support to help them integrate has become more apparent. Yet, the national integration plan for third-country nationals that has been under development by the Government since the conclusion of the first plan for the period 2010-2012 is yet to materialise. In the interim, efforts have been made to implement some small-scale integration projects (both general and refugee-specific) under the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) since 2014.²

Considering that integration remains the weakest link in the national asylum system, and given UNHCR's statutory role in promoting integration as one of the durable solutions to the problems of refugees, UNHCR took the initiative in establishing and leading a multi-stakeholder Task Force to help formulate specific recommendations for the design and implementation of a national integration plan. The present Report is based to a great extent on the extensive consultations and exchanges within the Task Force and refugees over a one-year period.

As was evident from the consultations with the refugees, the first thing they think of when asked what would help them to integrate is to have a decent job. Employment is indeed key to the integration of refugees. But employment is also closely related to other areas of integration, such as access to affordable housing, language training, skills development, family reunification, health care, long-term residency status, childcare, and the asylum process itself. To be considered "successful," integration has therefore to occur on legal, social, economic, political and cultural levels.

The Report provides an overview of the legislative and policy framework for refugee integration in Cyprus within the Common European Asylum System and gives a brief account of what has been achieved so far, as well as the remaining barriers. The Report's central aim and focus, however, is to delineate the contours of a comprehensive refugee integration strategy for Cyprus with proposed positive actions with respect to four key facilitators of integration: *employment and skills development*, *education*, *access to basic services*, and *social inclusion and civic engagement*.

¹ The term "refugee" as used in this Report applies to all persons granted international protection whether in the form of refugee status under the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol or subsidiary protection.

² http://www.moi.gov.cy/MOI/eufunds2015.nsf/page13_gr/page13_gr?OpenDocument

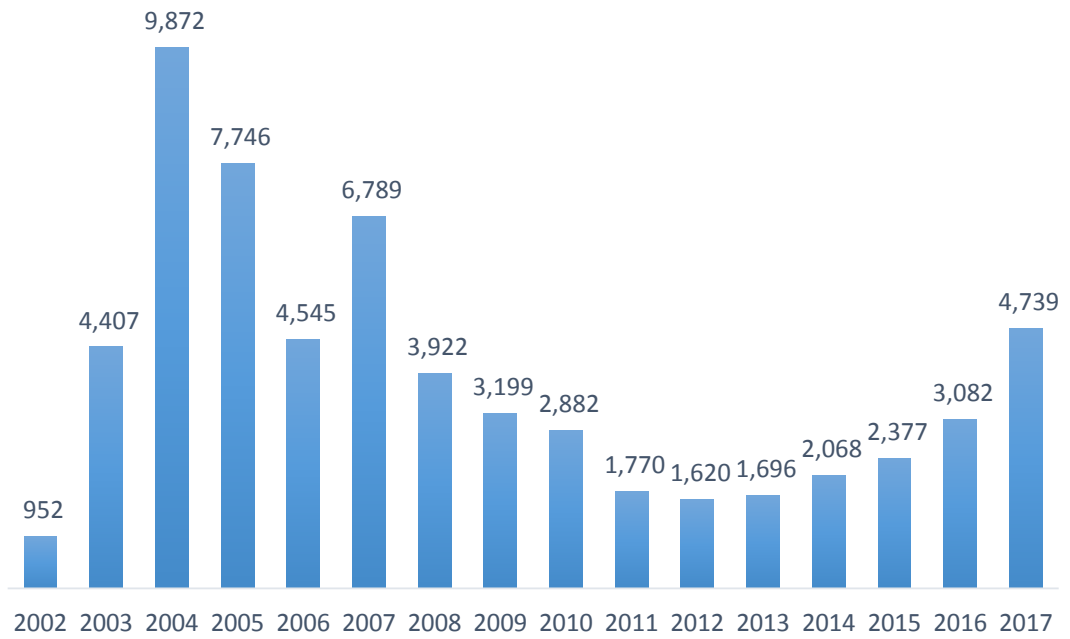
2. Asylum Trends



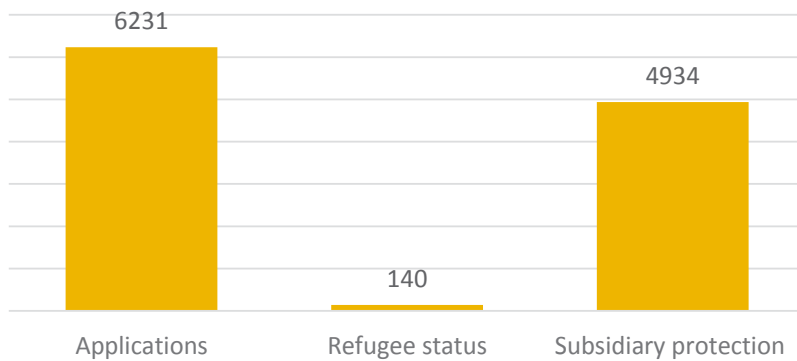
As at December 2017 in Cyprus:

- ***1,317 granted refugee status (2%)***
- ***7,950 granted subsidiary protection (15%)***
- ***5,405 asylum-seekers***
- ***221 unaccompanied and separated children applied for asylum in 2017***

Asylum Applications in Cyprus 2002-2017

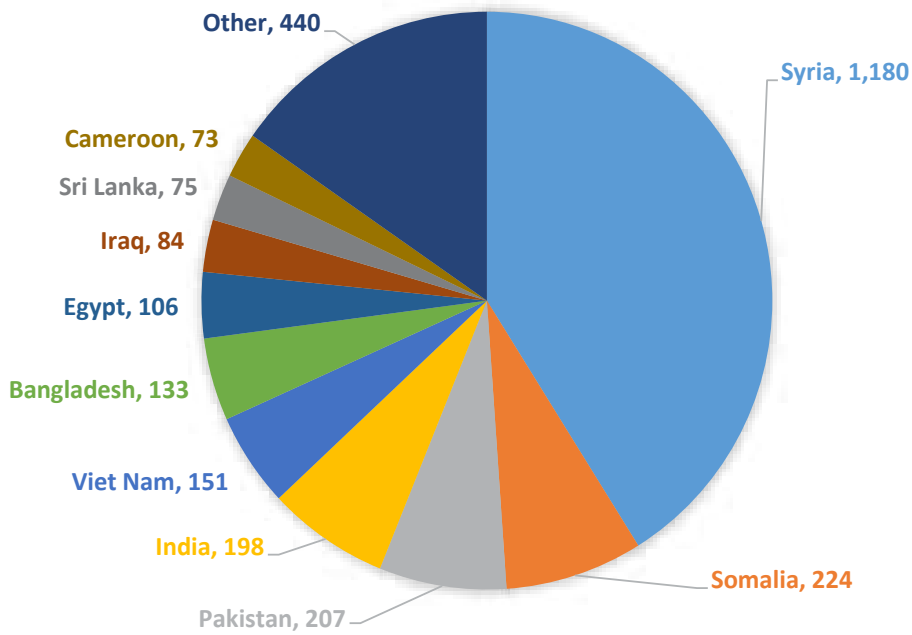


Syrians in Cyprus 2011-2017

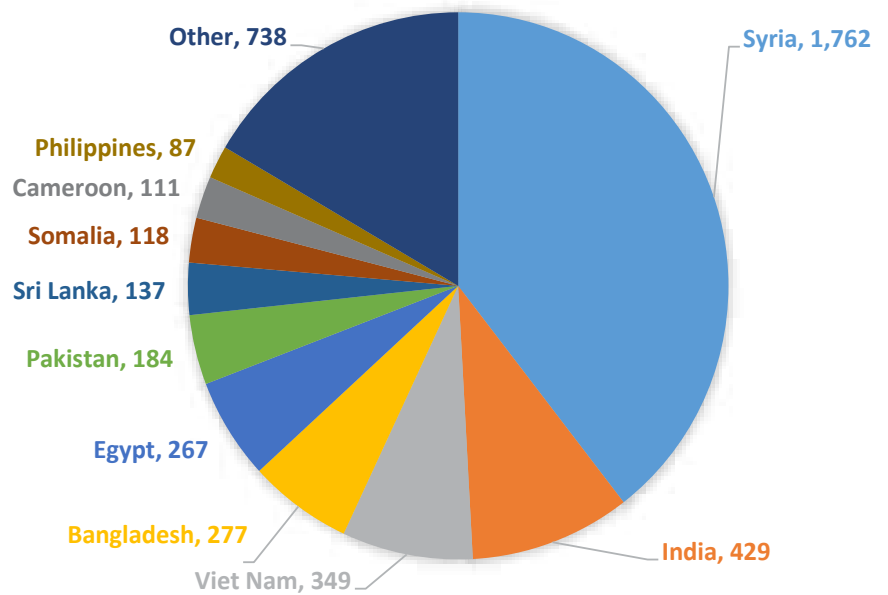


Asylum applications in 2016 and 2017: Top 10 nationalities

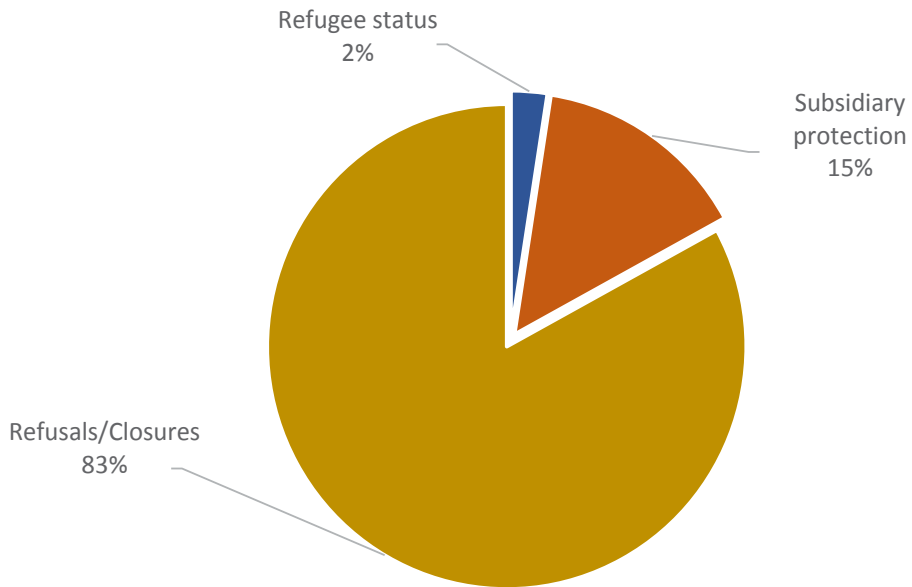
2016



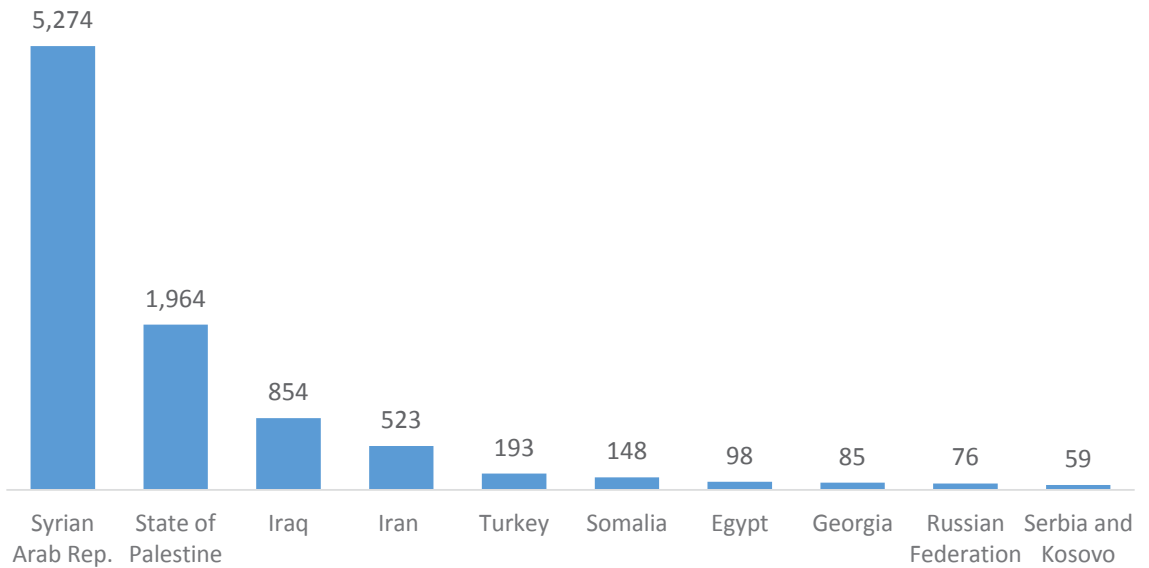
2017



Asylum Decisions in Cyprus 2002-2017



Top 10 nationalities granted international protection in Cyprus 2002-2017



3. The Rationale for Integration



3.1 What is integration?

When establishing the international refugee protection regime over five decades ago, States collectively recognized that the situation of being a refugee should not be permanent. The refugee should either return voluntarily to his or her home country when the conditions that forced him or her into exile have been reversed, or would have to find a lasting solution within a new community, either in the country of first refuge or in a third country.

Most exiled populations naturally desire to go back to their homeland as soon as they can. When, however, voluntary repatriation is not feasible, which is often the case, the protection objective will call for the local integration of refugees in their country of first asylum or, in other circumstances, resettlement in third countries. And thus the three durable solutions that States and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have successfully resorted to over the decades – i.e. voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement – have in combination benefited tens of millions of refugees.

The integration of refugees is therefore an important part of the commitments of States under the *1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. It is generally defined as a dynamic and multi-faceted process leading to full and equal membership in society. It as such involves a two-way, long-term process of mutual adaptation between refugees (and immigrants) and the host society that demands constant dedication. Integration thus requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome and meet the needs of a diverse population.

Integration is not, therefore, an “all or nothing matter.” That is to say, the choice is not between either overt assimilation or exclusion. The integration model lies between these two extremes. It enables refugees and legally-residing immigrants alike to enjoy equality of rights and opportunities for effective social participation, inclusion and civic engagement while preserving their cultural identity. Integration thus emphasizes the value of cultural, national, ethnic and linguistic diversity and pluralism as essential requisites for societal and personal development. The refugees maintain, in varying degrees, their own cultural identity and merge elements of their own cultures with the changing cultures of their host societies.

Integration is also of use to the host society as it promotes the development of a tolerant, adaptive and culturally diverse society, providing new opportunities for growth within the society, as well as the injection of new skills, labour and experiences. Indeed the majority of refugees arriving in Cyprus have skills and a strong desire to rebuild their lives and contribute to their new host society, if given the opportunity to do so. What they essentially require is to be provided with tailor-made and mainstream vocational training and education to upgrade their skills or learn new ones; sustained support to help them understand job-related administrative procedures and initiatives to match their talents with employers' needs.

This dynamic two-way process of integration means not only expecting third-country nationals to embrace EU fundamental values and learn the host language, but also offering them meaningful opportunities to participate in the economy and society of the Member State where they settle.
(European Commission, 2016)

3.2 Integration as a human rights issue

Refugees have rights, flowing generally from the fact of their humanity and, more directly and specifically, from their predicament. Human rights apply to all persons. And refugees and asylum-seekers are not different from anyone else when it comes to basic standards of treatment provided for by international human rights law.

Given the very specific predicaments in which refugees find themselves, there is, in addition to the general human rights instruments, a specific rights framework for refugees embodied in the *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* and its *1967 Protocol*. These two treaties were landmarks in the setting of universal standards for the treatment of refugees found to be necessary additions to the general human rights instruments. These include:

- *The right not to be returned to persecution or the threat of persecution (the principle of non-refoulement);*
- *The right not to be discriminated against in the grant of protection;*
- *The right not to be penalized for unlawful entry into or presence in the country where asylum is sought, given that persons escaping persecution cannot be expected to always leave their country and enter another country in a regular manner;*
- *The right not to be expelled, except in specified, exceptional circumstances to protect national security or public order;*
- *The right to minimum, acceptable conditions of stay, which would include: freedom of movement, the right to education and to gainful employment or self-employment, access to public relief and assistance including health facilities, the possibility of acquiring and disposing of property and the right to obtain travel and identity documents. Contracting States to the Convention are also expected to facilitate naturalization of refugees by reducing legal and administrative barriers to citizenship and to actively support refugees' family reunification.*

These are the building blocks of integration. Successful integration will thus depend on the extent to which the refugees' rights under the 1951 Convention and applicable human rights treaties are effectively protected.

3.3 Integration as a continuum

The process of integration is complex and gradual, comprising distinct but inter-related legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions, all of which are important for refugees to be able to integrate successfully as fully included members of society. A key question to be asked is at what point integration programmes should start. Upon application for refugee status? After recognition of refugee status? Upon the granting of citizenship? Is there an overlap between "reception" by society and "integration" into that society?

While it is not UNHCR's position that the full range of integration programmes for refugees should be extended to asylum-seekers, it is in the best interests of both the host society and asylum-seekers and refugees to promote a reception policy with a long-term perspective. Such a policy should be designed to minimize isolation and separation from host communities and should provide for effective language and vocational skills development, decent accommodation and assistance to pursue employment.

Every refugee is first an asylum-seeker.

The basic reception services provided by States during the asylum procedure constitute the first point of reference for the potential refugee. As asylum-seekers already bear an emotional and psychological burden as a result of the traumatic experience of departure and flight, their ability to integrate rapidly and satisfactorily into the host community after their acceptance as refugees depends on this initial stage. The conditions in which asylum-seekers find themselves during the immediate reception stage are therefore of key significance as regards the future possibilities for either integration or return. A refugee who began his life in the host country in detention, for example, or isolated for several months in a state of enforced inactivity at a collective reception centre for asylum-seekers is likely to be hampered when he or she attempts to integrate. By the same token, the host community may also have difficulty constructing a harmonious relationship with refugees when government policies towards asylum-seekers, combined with negative media coverage, encourage non-acceptance and intolerance.

A lengthy asylum procedure can also be one of the key obstacles to the successful social, economic and cultural integration of refugees. The period during which an asylum-seeker waits for a decision on his/her refugee application is often characterized by insecurity and inactivity, which can be detrimental to their psychological and physical well-being. UNHCR's position is that where the procedures become drawn out, asylum-seekers should be granted a broader range of benefits and services in view of the negative impact of an extended period of uncertainty and insecurity. Such an approach would build on individual skills and resources and empower asylum-seekers to become active and contributing members of society.

A reception policy that combines effective and adequate services – in particular as regards skills training, timely access to gainful employment and health care – with a swift asylum procedure based on giving asylum-seekers as much autonomy as possible increases the chances of successful integration in the host country; re-integration in their own country upon return is also improved in the cases of asylum-seekers whose claims are unsuccessful. Ultimately then, the ability of a refugee to integrate depends both on his/her own willingness to show long-term commitment, as well as on the obligations of the host state to provide an infrastructure for reception that has a long-term perspective.

3.4 Mainstreaming vs. targeted integration

To be effective, a national refugee integration strategy should involve both mainstream services and targeted initiatives. Many integration challenges faced by refugees are similar to those faced by other third country nationals staying legally in the European Union. Discrimination and xenophobic attitudes affect refugees and other migrants alike, as does the need to bridge language and cultural barriers, including those relating to different gender roles. Preference given to nationals by employers as well as for housing are examples of the kinds of obstacles that both refugees and other migrants may face. Integration policies for refugees should, therefore, be mainstreamed in general integration plans drawn up for third country nationals.

Refugees should be given the support necessary in order to access mainstream activities at the earliest possible opportunity.

At the same time, it should be recognized that mainstream services may not always be responsive to the specific needs of refugees. Often refugees are compelled to flee at short notice, leaving behind belongings and documents. They may have lost contact with family members and with social support structures in the country of origin. Unlike other migrants, refugees do not enjoy the protection of their countries of origin and have to rebuild their lives in new countries of

residence, without – at least in the short term – the option of returning home. All these facts need to be taken into account in planning and implementing integration measures that may require a differentiated approach between refugees and other migrants. It also needs emphasizing that refugees are not a homogenous group and in particular the specific needs of certain groups – e.g. women, unaccompanied children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and survivors of torture or sexual-violence – would require targeted, special measures.

3.5 Integration and the European Union

The degree to which members of refugee and migrant populations are effectively integrating into European societies has been, and continues to be, an important question for the European Union, due in part to concerns to improve social cohesion and security. At the European Council meeting in Tampere (Finland) in October 1999, the leaders of the European Union called for a common immigration and asylum policy and stressed that “the European Union must ensure fair treatment of third country nationals who reside legally on the territory of its Member States” and that “a more vigorous integration policy should aim at granting them rights and obligations comparable to those of EU citizens.” Subsequently, the EU adopted in 2004 a set of *Common Basic Principles of Integration*³ to guide the development and strengthening of national integration policies for legally-resident immigrants and refugees.

³ COM (2005) 0389 final

European Common Basic Principles of Integration (European Council Conclusion, 19/11/2004)

- 1) Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States.
- 2) Integration implies respect for the basic values of the European Union.
- 3) Employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigrants, to the contributions immigrants make to the host society, and to making such contributions visible.
- 4) Basic knowledge of the host society’s language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration.
- 5) Efforts in education are critical to preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society.
- 6) Access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to public and private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a non-discriminatory way is a critical foundation for better integration.
- 7) Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental mechanism for integration. Shared forums, inter-cultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures, and stimulating living conditions in urban environments enhance the interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens.
- 8) The practice of diverse cultures and religions is guaranteed under the Charter of Fundamental Rights and must be safeguarded, unless practices conflict with other inviolable European rights or with national law.
- 9) The participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, supports their integration.
- 10) Mainstreaming integration policies and measures in all relevant policy portfolios and levels of government and public services is an important consideration in public policy formation and implementation.
- 11) Developing clear goals, indicators and evaluation mechanisms are necessary to adjust policy, evaluate progress on integration and to make the exchange of information more effective.

Building on the *Common Basic Principles*, the European Commission set out in 2011 a European Agenda⁴ for the integration of third-country nationals, calling for a strengthened and coherent approach to integration across different policy areas and government levels. However, the European Commission has noted that notwithstanding the efforts made, third-country nationals across the EU including beneficiaries of international protection continue to fare worse than EU citizens in terms of employment, education, and social inclusion outcomes.⁵ As the Commission pointed out on the occasion of issuing a new EU Action Plan on Integration in 2016⁶, “in times when discrimination, prejudice, racism and xenophobia are rising, there are legal, moral and economic imperatives to upholding the EU's fundamental rights, values and freedoms and continuing to work for a more cohesive society overall. The successful integration of third-country nationals is a matter of common interest to all Member States.” The Action Plan sets out policy priorities and tools for concrete actions to be undertaken across many different policy areas: education, employment, vocational training, entrepreneurship, housing, access to health services, and active participation and social inclusion.

The Action Plan offers useful guidance to the Member States in implementing their legal obligations deriving from the Qualification Directive⁷ which sets out the rights and entitlements of persons granted refugee status or subsidiary protection. The Directive enshrines in EU law the access of refugees to integration facilities (Article 34). This includes the provision of language training; information concerning individual rights and obligations relating to their protection status; adequate social welfare and means of subsistence and access to health care including both physical and mental health care. The Directive also calls on the Member States to effectively address the practical difficulties encountered by beneficiaries of international protection concerning access to employment-related educational opportunities and vocational training, as well as the authentication of their foreign diplomas and certificates.

⁴ COM (2011) 455 final of 20.7.2011

⁵ See Eurostat data: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migrant_integration_statistics_-_overview

⁶ COM(2016) 377 final

⁷ Directive 2011/95/EU of 13 December 2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32011L0095>

4. Employment



Even where refugees are legally entitled to employment and they have employable skills, they often face many barriers to finding decent jobs. The obstacles include difficulties in having their foreign qualifications recognized, language and communication problems, lack of understanding of the labour market and prejudice and discrimination.

Employment is a core part of the integration process. A good job is essential for integration as it provides the refugee not only with an income but also with independence, self-esteem, social status and recognition in the wider community. In other words, employment provides an opportunity for positive socialisation, and for the development of resourcefulness and self-sufficiency. It is therefore in the social and economic interests of both the host society and refugees to support and facilitate effective access to the job market by providing counselling and advice, as well as training and retraining.

4.1 Access to work and quality of jobs

A major flaw in the referral process concerns the lack of information on the profile of the refugees who reside in Cyprus. At present, the Department of Labour of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance does not have an overview of the number, location, skills and competencies of refugees living in the country and on the extent to which their skills are needed in the local labour market. Their referrals to prospective employers often contain very little or no information at all as regards the qualifications and previous work experience of the refugees.

Generally, the Department of Labour only refers refugees to low-skilled, manual jobs regardless of their professional qualifications, physical fitness, family situation, or childcare needs. These jobs are often in remote areas away from services or schools, and they are also at the bottom of the pay scale. Another factor hindering refugees' access to the labor market relates to the lack of awareness on the part of employers regarding the employment rights of refugees, which are often confused with those of migrants whose employment is subject to a number of restrictions that do not apply to refugees. Refugees also face difficulties in accessing information about available employment positions commensurate with their qualifications. Likewise, most refugees are constrained in submitting job applications in the required language, format and detail and meeting the demanding selection process without adequate counselling and mentoring. Finally, many refugee women are constrained in accessing jobs due to the lack of affordable childcare and cultural issues, such as their gender role in the community.

Recommendations

1. *There is an essential need for mapping the academic qualifications, skills, work experience and vocational training needs of refugees in order to ensure a proper job referral system. The "HelpRefugeesWork" online platform that UNHCR had developed in collaboration with its NGO partner the Cyprus Refugee Council could serve as a useful starting point.*
2. *The employment rights of refugees should be clearly indicated on their residence permits; this could be complemented by information systematically disseminated to employers as to the rights of refugees.*
3. *Develop and implement schemes facilitating structured meetings between refugees and employers, for example high-profile work fairs for refugees.*
4. *Support childcare schemes to facilitate the employment of refugee women; in other cases, develop and implement comprehensive programmes to assist their transition from traditional activities to the labour market.*
5. *Provide access to micro-credit schemes to support the entrepreneurship of refugees.*

4.2 Strengthening employability: skilling and qualification

Information from the Department of Labour of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance indicates that refugees face significantly higher unemployment rates than nationals and migrants due to their particular circumstances requiring special attention. Refugees may arrive in Cyprus without any documentation regarding their qualifications or previous job experience. Their qualifications and experience may also reflect different employment conditions than the ones in the country of asylum.

The need for tailor-made programmes to target refugee unemployment is evident. Beyond the development of the current referral system of the labour office, there is a need for designing efficient programmes aiming for labor integration on a wider scale. For the integration of refugees in the labor market, it becomes imperative to offer certification possibilities through the

assessment of their skills as well as the possibility for recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications. It is important that assessments of qualifications are carried out as early as possible.

4.3 Language training programmes

Learning the language of the host community is essential and services should be available to facilitate this from the earliest possible stage. Refugees without language skills face problems such as isolation, exploitation and the distrust of the host community. Language is therefore a fundamental tool in the integration process. It is also crucial for developing good relations with the host population.

The linguistic competencies of refugees are indeed the single most important determinant for their employment integration prospects. People who are proficient in the local language have nearly 10% more chances of securing a job compared to their peers of equal qualifications and experience but without the language skills. Depending on their proficiency, refugees with knowledge of the local language also receive higher wage earnings, ranging from an additional 12% to 22%.

Despite the high number of registered unemployed refugees, however, the Labor Department is not engaged in addressing the linguistic challenges of the refugee population. There are some language programmes implemented by volunteer groups, non-governmental organizations, local authorities and through projects funded via the Asylum, Migration and Integration Funds (AMIF), but these programmes often lack in continuity and feature high dropout rates. Reports of refugees who have attended previous classes indicate three primary reasons for the high dropout rates: first, the classes are often not available during after-work hours; second, the teaching is either at too fast or too slow a pace, and third, a certificate is not issued upon completion. Moreover, refugees have varying educational levels and knowledge of another foreign language. These differing needs and abilities are not reflected within language training schemes, which are not tailored to the specific needs of refugees.

Refugees rapidly learn a language that is useful for the job market. Language training should therefore not be treated in isolation, but linked to technical training and civic orientation. Civic orientation programmes provide a foundational understanding of the laws, customs and values of the host society. Refugees learn the rights and responsibilities attached to living in their new societies, thus aiding their integration and encouraging their active participation and membership. Cyprus has yet to adopt this policy, since classes are not provided to refugees in a systematic manner.

Cultural orientation and civic education classes are a signature policy of countries with successful integration practices around the world.

Language learning is central to integration since it enables refugees to become members of the wider society, fostering a sense of belonging, enabling social interactions and access to services and employment. At present, language opportunities for adults exist – such as at the University of Cyprus, the Adult Education Centres and the State Institutes of Further Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture, or via municipality programmes – but they are limited in both scope and scale.

The underlying principle of teaching language in conjunction with vocational training and civic orientation is to link abstract learning to practical experience, either informally through links with the host community, or formally, through a combination of work experience, training and study. Through real-life language practice, soft skills are developed, confidence is increased, employment

is promoted over welfare usage and improvement is achieved in both language and job-readiness.⁸ Schemes linking language to vocational training may prove more motivating to refugees and more cost-effective for the host community in the long-term.

4.4 Vocational training programmes and job placement

Vocational training is a practical investment for the future. It allows the individual to gain specific skills with a view to obtaining employment. As such vocational training is a highly useful service to offer refugees at the reception stage, as it can be a motivating form of outreach to persons who would otherwise be excluded or marginalized. Often, however, refugees are not aware of the existence of mainstream vocational training schemes available in Cyprus. And there are virtually no NGO programmes or even outreach schemes to systematically provide information and guidance. There are no career services offered to refugees to discuss their interests, capabilities and job prospects, and provide them with an understanding of the labour market and the social and economic environment.

Cyprus implements, through the Human Resources Development Authority, a government-led scheme for the co-financing of employment positions in order to enable individuals to gain work experience and increase their employability. Vocational training programmes are offered only in Greek through (a) the Cyprus Productivity Centre for specialized manual labour (including welding, plumbing, automation, car repairs) and (b) a number of Vocational Training Centres (Κέντρα Επαγγελματική Κατάρτισης) that include local universities. Very few, if any, refugees participate in these programmes, mainly due to language barriers and the cost.

Recommendations

1. *Facilitate the early recognition of foreign diplomas/certificates of refugees, and develop practical procedures for the assessment of their higher education qualifications where documentation is not lacking.*
2. *Design internship and apprenticeship schemes, as well as vocational and language training programmes linked to job-placement and offer these free of charge for unemployed refugees; they should take place at times that are convenient for the target group.*
3. *Promote contact between refugees and employers through a mainstream work subsidy scheme for the unemployed.*
4. *Support the participation of refugee women in language and vocational training programmes, by planning classes/trainings at convenient times and/or with the provision of childcare arrangements.*
5. *Municipalities could become hubs for language training, as this could strengthen the refugees' social ties within the communities they live in.*
6. *The Human Resources Development Agency could consider subsidizing vocational training courses in English and Arabic running in parallel with intensive Greek language classes.*
7. *It is particularly recommended that the mainstream vocational training programmes include 'soft skills' that would help refugees to build confidence and assertiveness when applying for jobs. This would include training on writing job applications and curricula vitae, presentation skills and interview techniques. Further components can relate to training in Microsoft Office and internet use, and obtaining some form of computer literacy certification.*

⁸ UNHCR (2013) "The labour-market integration of resettled Refugees. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Policy Development and Evaluation Service", available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/5273a9e89.pdf>.

5. Education



Education is a basic human right, enshrined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Education also constitutes one of the most powerful tools for integration, since it allows for the development of basic skills that become the bedrock for further learning, leading to employment and social inclusion. Participation and accomplishment in education increases opportunities for self-reliance and provides a sense of purpose, normalcy and continuity in otherwise unsettled environments. Educated children and youth stand a greater chance of becoming adults who can participate effectively in civil society in all contexts.

The Cyprus Refugee Law provides for the access of asylum-seeking children to the national elementary and secondary education system under the same conditions as nationals. It further provides that their school enrolment should not be delayed for more than three months from the date on which the application for asylum was lodged. Despite the considerable efforts of the Ministry of Education and concerned schools, however, there are continuing challenges in this area.

5.1 Early childhood education and care

Pre-school education is mandatory in Cyprus from the age of 4 years and 8 months to 5 years and 8 months for the year prior to enrolment in primary school. As such, it is offered free of charge at public schools and the Directorate of Elementary Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible to ensure the enrolment of all children in that age-range.

Younger children may attend public, community or private nursery schools at a fee. These fees are not affordable for many refugee parents and they are therefore not able to provide early childhood education for their children. And there is no active Government policy to ensure access for refugee and asylum-seeking children to public or private pre-school education. For these children, the developmental and psychological consequences of forced displacement can be devastating because the first years of life play a vital role in the formation of intelligence, personality and social behavior as well as in the capacity for later participation and productivity in their communities, workplaces and societies.

Early childhood education would be very beneficial for refugee children since the support, facilities and care provided, as well as their social contact with other children of their age would help them feel safe and secure, develop confidence, promote their early language learning and build their communication and social skills. Moreover, access of young children to early education would facilitate their parents' access to the labour market and their self-sufficiency. Investing in early childhood education would therefore improve the children's cognitive, socioemotional and educational results, as well as the whole family's social inclusion and integration. Research, especially in economics, illustrates clearly that such investments are wise, both economically and socially⁹.

Recommendations

1. *Develop policies on inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking children within public pre-school education.*
2. *Explore the introduction of incentives (such as tax deductions) for private pre-school nurseries to offer places for asylum-seeking and refugee children.*
3. *Utilize community-based approaches, employing both refugee mothers/caregivers and members of the local communities in early childhood education and care programmes in order to promote community building and facilitate intercultural dialogue and cultural integration.*

5.2 Mainstream, inclusive education for all

Since refugees share the same rights to education as nationals, it is only normal that they should have access to national education programmes at all levels, rather than in refugee-exclusive systems that are not sustainable, are not appropriately monitored or able to guarantee timely certification that can lead to continued education during asylum. The Ministry of Education has indeed taken measures in support of access to mainstream education for children with a "migrant background," which includes refugee and asylum-seeking children (section 9 below discusses the situation of unaccompanied children who are excluded from mainstream education). The Ministry has also set up an inter-departmental committee tasked with facilitating the integration of children at schools. In this context, it has developed a *Policy Document for the integration of children with a migrant background in the educational system of Cyprus*, based on which an Action Plan has been elaborated, but remains largely unimplemented.

⁹ World Bank, "World Bank Support to Early Childhood Development. An Independent Evaluation", 2015

The Ministry's Action Plan mentioned above includes mentorship and buddy programmes for the non-Greek-speaking schoolchildren. Such programmes are immensely beneficial, especially for newly-arrived refugee and asylum-seeking students who had lived through conflicts and experienced many losses. These children will need to feel safe and welcome and have the appropriate support in order to settle in and become effective learners. Mentorship and buddy programmes could indeed prove useful in supporting new arrivals by creating a positive atmosphere towards diversity, thereby fostering an enabling environment for refugee children, but are currently not implemented at any of the schools in Cyprus.

Since 2014, the Ministry has also introduced a *Code of Conduct against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents* for schools. Whilst this constitutes a significant advancement in the field of combating discrimination within the school system, more work needs to be done to ensure the effectiveness of the policy. For example, there are no procedures in place for ensuring the consistent application and enforceability of the policy and it is left to the discretion of the school directors to monitor its implementation. Moreover, there is a lack of information on the number and locations where racially-motivated incidents have occurred, preventing an evidence-based response to prevent or respond to such incidents.

Recommendations

1. *Establish measures to ensure that all refugee and asylum-seeking children have access to and remain in mainstream education; enrolment should be based on a comprehensive assessment of educational level in order to ensure appropriate placement, i.e. refugee students should not be placed in lower levels due to language barrier alone.*
2. *Refugee and asylum-seeking children of technical and lyceum school age should not be placed in separate classes, but rather should be offered supplementary lessons, additional language classes, and other necessary support to be able to participate in mainstream education at either a technical or lyceum school; the choice of school should be based on skills and inclination.*
3. *Refugee students and their parents should be adequately prepared for mainstream education, including through proper orientation on issues such as education system requirements, documentation policies for admissions, certification, academic concerns, school liaison systems, new curriculum, classroom culture, expectations and social cohesion.*
4. *Provide systematic civic and cultural orientation sessions for all new students on the local laws and reporting mechanisms regarding harassment, discrimination, child marriage, gender equality and children's rights.*
5. *Systems and resources should be available for the use of qualified, trained interpreters and cultural mediators to facilitate communication between the schools and asylum-seeking and refugee children and their parents.*
6. *Establish a functioning, integrated system to track refugee student and teacher needs to ensure successful inclusion and transition, as well as enrolment, attendance and completion data.*
7. *Design mentorship and peer support/buddy programmes within schools with a high refugee and asylum-seekers population.*
8. *Encourage and facilitate the active participation of parents in the parents' associations, as well as various classroom activities.*
9. *Ensure the effective implementation of the Ministry's Code of Conduct against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents across all schools; establish a national monitoring and recording system for all discriminatory and racially-motivated incidents.*

5.3 Supporting the educators of diverse classrooms

Teaching multicultural classrooms can be challenging for educators, and they need special support and guidance in order to respond to the different needs of asylum-seeking and refugee children. The Ministry of Education has taken some steps in this regard, with training sessions for teachers on how to teach Greek as a second language, as well as forthcoming sessions on multicultural education that will be provided in collaboration with the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute.

As schools are welcoming an increasing number of refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children into their classrooms, teachers are also facing the challenging task of addressing local students on refugee, asylum and migration matters. Quality teaching materials which the teachers can use to help pupils make sense of forced displacement in all its complexity are all the more important at a time of intensified public debate about asylum and migration and greater media to these issues. UNHCR has produced several teaching resources, for example:

- Not Just Numbers <http://www.unhcr.org/not-just-numbers.html> (also in Greek);
- Passages Game <http://www.unhcr.org/passages-game.html>;
- Against All Odds <http://www.unhcr.org/against-all-odds.html>;
- UNHCR Data Website <http://www.unhcr.org/unhcr-data-website.html>.
- See also <http://www.unhcr.org/cy/education/> and <https://bit.ly/2JRSLt3>

1. **Recommendations**

2. *Develop a manual on educational policies and a good practice guidance for educators to support schools to receive refugee children and help them integrate within the school environment.*
3. *Introduce training programmes for teachers on refugee background and protection needs, including strategies to address academic, linguistic, psychosocial, and social cohesion issues.*
4. *Assign teachers with relevant qualifications to schools and classrooms with a high percentage of refugee children.*
5. *Place refugee teachers/teaching assistants in classrooms to support with language and translation needs.*
6. *Provide incentives to teachers to pursue post-graduate qualifications in multicultural education.*
7. *Provide additional classroom resources that may include age and level appropriate reference books, text books and language learning materials.*
8. *Develop programmes that support both teachers and students, as well as refugee children and families, such as academic/language support for refugees, establishing parent meetings, promoting participation of refugee children in youth and sports clubs.*
9. *Provide online translation tools (together with the appropriate hardware and internet connections) to teachers and students in classrooms where there are school-aged refugee children.*

6. Access to Basic Services



Effective integration requires access to basic services for refugees from the time of arrival. Asylum-seekers are entitled, in accordance with the EU Reception Conditions Directive, to a dignified standard of living which guarantees their subsistence and protects their physical and mental health. Recognized refugees are entitled to the same level of assistance as nationals, in accordance with the EU Qualification Directive. The Refugee Law guarantees rights to basic services; however, in practice, there is a need to improve the provision of basic services to asylum-seekers and refugees in order to ensure a standard of living that facilitates effective integration.

6.1 Affordable housing

Access to dignified housing is one of the basic conditions for refugee integration; it is a cross-cutting issue which impacts on social integration and inclusion, on health, on employment opportunities, and therefore on future outcomes. Poor quality or inadequate housing can affect the physical and mental health of the refugee. Poor accommodation can also influence education and vocational training, as it can affect concentration and motivation.

Housing refugees in collective accommodation centres have more disadvantages than advantages. Housing asylum-seekers in reception centres during the initial months following their arrival has the advantage that it facilitates efficient dissemination of information and the provision of tailor-made services, advice and guidance. At a later stage, when the need for information and advice has been alleviated, private accommodation is often more suitable even for asylum-seekers let alone for those already accepted as refugees. The longer people stay in collective centres, the greater the dangers of institutionalization and marginalization.

In the absence of social housing schemes for low-income households and the lack of family support and social networks, most refugees face formidable obstacles in securing decent, affordable housing. Landlords are generally reluctant to rent to people who do not have a stable job, or who are on social benefits, and this unfortunately includes many refugees. This leads to a vicious cycle, whereby the refugee needs to find a job in order to have access to housing, whilst a permanent address is often a prerequisite for registration with the Labour Office for job referral and for social security benefits. The other major hurdle refugees face is meeting the demands of landlords to pay rent in advance or deposits up front, that can be the equivalent of up to 3 months' rent. Even if they are able to pay the monthly sum, many cannot pay these additional amounts. An additional expense for refugees renting a place to live is for the transfer of utility bills to their name, which costs nearly double the amount that Cypriots and EU nationals have to pay.

Recommendations

1. *Policy measures are urgently needed to ensure that refugees have access to dignified housing; this would require in particular providing sufficient rental subsidy for those who cannot afford suitable accommodation, as well as practical measures to address the specific difficulties many refugees have in meeting advance payments and facing discriminatory treatment by landlords.*
2. *Local authorities should play a greater role in developing mainstream housing projects for the benefit of both local residents and refugees, as this could also forge intercultural links and create a more welcoming environment for refugees.*
3. *Develop social housing schemes with possible funding opportunities which can be sought from European bodies such as the European Regional Development Fund, the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund, the European Investment Bank, the Central European Bank (CEB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.¹⁰*
4. *Long-term strategies and policies are required to ensure non-ghettoization and non-segregation of refugees.*
5. *Effective partnership between the government and refugee-assisting NGOs is essential in addressing the housing problems of refugees, whether for the provision of information and advice, negotiations with landlords, monitoring living conditions, and other related issues.*

¹⁰ Please refer to: <http://www.housingeurope.eu/resource-728/financial-support-to-social-housing-projects-in-europe>.

6.2 Health care

Refugees may suffer health problems as a result of their experiences of persecution, violence and flight. They are also affected by other factors upon arrival, such as poor housing conditions, social isolation and inactivity; separation from family members left behind and a general sense of insecurity in a new environment may add to the pressure.

Under the Medical Institutions and Services Law, refugees have access to subsidized state medical care on an equal footing with low-income nationals, but are often not able to meet some of the eligibility requirements because of their particular circumstances. The two most difficult requirements many refugees cannot fulfil are previous social insurance contributions for at least three years and income tax declarations in the previous year. The legislation exempts certain categories of persons from these requirements, including those in receipt of welfare assistance; persons with specific illnesses; persons registered with the labour office as unemployed; pregnant women and members of single parent families. Refugees are not exempted as a group. The requirement of three years of social insurance contribution would thus mean that a person who was granted refugee status in less than three years would not have access to state health services even if s/he meets all other criteria.

Access to mental health services is generally problematic. Persons with mental health care needs are often not identified in a timely manner; moreover, psychosocial counselling and therapy are often not covered by public health services.

Recommendations

1. *Amend the Medical Institutions and Services Law to provide for an exemption from the tax and social insurance requirement for refugees with less than three years of lawful residence in the country.*
2. *Connect the databases of the Social Welfare Services, the Asylum Service and the Ministry of Health for information sharing and the facilitation of processes with regards to access to medical care.*
3. *Ensure that a screening assessment takes place in order to identify vulnerable individuals in need of state-sponsored health care.*
4. *Provide health education opportunities for refugees at the Kofinou Reception Centre, as well as to refugees residing in the community, via local municipalities. Health education needs should include reproductive health and family planning issues.¹¹*
5. *Ensure that processes with regards to the issuance of a medical card are the same in all districts across Cyprus.*
6. *Cross-cultural health mediators and interpreting services are needed so as to enable refugees to access the system properly; good use could be made in this regard of former refugees and refugee community organizations.*
7. *It is strongly advisable that projects dealing with the mental health of refugees incorporate activities conducive to employment, thus recognizing the link between health and employment.*
8. *Outreach work should be used to go where people are, informing them of their rights and enabling them to better access health care facilities.*

¹¹ A list of presentations on different health-related topics can be found here:

<https://www.heartlandalliance.org/refugeehealth/materials/>

Information on reproductive health policies and reports: <http://www.unhcr.org/reproductive-health.html>

6.3 Social Assistance

Refugees are entitled to social assistance provided under the national Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) scheme. The overall aim of the GMI scheme is to provide better support and a minimum acceptable standard of living to groups exposed to the risk of poverty. It is a top-up benefit calculated as the difference between a pre-specified minimum threshold set by the law and the actual income of the recipient. The recipients are also entitled to a housing allowance, cash allowances (which subsidize the care needs of certain categories of recipients) and other minor in-kind benefits.

GMI benefits are at present as follows: €480 for the basic needs of the primary applicant; €240 for each dependent (spouse and children above 14 years old); €144 for every child below the age of 14; €280 for rent (maximum, depending on the area). The total (maximum) amount for one person is €760, and for a family of four it amounts to €1480. For individuals with special needs, an additional €226 is provided for basic necessities and €70 for rental allowance.

The particular needs of certain categories of recipients (e.g. families with children, or the elderly with limited capacity to care for themselves) can be subsidized through a series of specialized allowances, including single parent allowance, child benefit schemes, disability allowances, home care subsidy and other schemes. Curiously, these benefits are available to Cypriot and other EU nationals only; refugees are excluded except in the case of disability allowance since 2017 following interventions by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

There is a number of eligibility criteria to be met in order to qualify for GMI, including a set of conditions with regards to employment. Amongst other requirements, the recipients should register with Public Employment Services and be willing to accept any employment offered by the Labour Office, provided that they have the required skills for the particular job. In case a GMI applicant refuses the available job offer, for whatever reason, they are declared as 'willfully unemployed' and excluded from both welfare support and employment.

A particular difficulty for refugees is the delay in the examination of a GMI application, which may take up to six months. As a result, many refugees remain in the Kofinou Reception Centre for months after their refugee status has been determined. For asylum-seekers already renting private housing, their living allowance is immediately stopped upon a decision on their asylum application without the necessary transitional arrangements for refugees while they go through the GMI application process.

Recommendations

1. *Process applications for social assistance in a timely manner in order to prevent instances of destitution and homelessness.*
2. *Establish a formal, transparent procedure for refugees to provide their feedback on the reason of not being selected by an employer so that they are not unfairly denied social assistance on the presumption of being 'wilfully unemployed.'*
3. *Extend all available social inclusion schemes such as child benefit and single parent allowance to refugees.*
4. *Consideration should also be given to some additional discretionary benefits that could promote and encourage self-sufficiency and self-reliance, for example, stipends for attending language or vocational training courses, or interest-free settlement loans.*

6.4 Persons with specific needs

Specific needs and vulnerabilities can affect all aspects of an individual's life, including his or her prospects of employment, education possibilities and participation in social life. Not addressing vulnerabilities in an adequate and timely manner can have a very negative impact on the prospects of integration for refugees. It is thus of great importance to identify and address specific needs at the earliest possible upon the individual's arrival in the country, and have a regular follow-up.¹²

As noted above, many of the special needs benefits available to nationals are not provided to refugees. Other special assistance measures, such as support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and survivors of torture, are lacking. One of the other main problems is the lack of early identification of persons with special needs. There are, if any, very little efforts made to systematically carry out vulnerability assessment during the initial asylum stage.

Recommendations

1. *Establish a joint Standard Operating Procedure involving the Social Welfare Services, the Asylum Service and the Ministry of Health for the earliest possible identification and ongoing monitoring of vulnerable individuals throughout the asylum procedure, and after the granting of international protection.*
2. *It is important that vulnerability assessment is conducted in a holistic manner by multi-disciplinary teams of experts, including social counsellors, health practitioners and psychologists, taking into account the specific circumstances of each refugee.*
3. *Reception arrangements for asylum-seekers should include supplementary measures for persons with special needs.*
4. *Establish a proper referral system with the collaboration of all relevant State and non-State actors that provide medical, psychological and social support in order to ensure that the particular needs of each vulnerable individual are met.*
5. *Adequate support measures should be in place for victims of violence and torture, including medical treatment, psychotherapy, psychiatric treatment if required, psychological counselling and parallel assistance with social adjustment for patients and their families.*

¹² The Recast Reception Conditions Directive (2013), in relation to asylum-seekers, requires EU Member States to take into account the situation of persons with specific needs, whom it defines as follows:

“...vulnerable persons such as minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, victims of human trafficking, persons with serious illnesses, persons with mental disorders and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, such as victims of female genital mutilation...” (Article 21).

7. Social Inclusion and Civic Engagement



Equality

Treating people fairly and with respect.

Diversity

Recognizing and valuing difference within a culture of respect and fairness to everyone.

Inclusion

Taking positive actions to create an environment that allows our differences to thrive and be accepted and valued.

7.1 Managing diversity and inclusion

The notion of social inclusion is generally understood as a feeling of belonging, acceptance and recognition and is intertwined with notions of diversity, equality, opportunity and democratic participation. Inclusiveness is linked to social health and quality of life, and this in turn is closely connected to economic prosperity. Social inclusion thus seeks to ensure that those disadvantaged and marginalized on the basis of their identity or status, and who may find themselves at risk of poverty and exclusion, gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, and to enjoy a standard of living that is considered normal in the society in which they live. Social inclusion also ensures that those individuals have greater participation in decision-making, which affects their lives and their access to their fundamental rights.

There are many vulnerable and disadvantaged people in any society. The disadvantages arise from class status, social group identity, political affiliation, gender, age, disability and other factors. Yet, asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants are particularly vulnerable because they are the “other.” Because of their marginalization, many face material deprivation such as unemployment, poverty, and homelessness. They lack access to vital information and public discussion and are thereby unable to participate in public affairs and act as an equal citizen. They are at the edge of society, with no active voice, identity, or place within that society. In Cyprus, refugees are excluded from formal democratic institutions. Contrary to common practice in other EU member states, they are not allowed to vote in local elections, irrespective of their years of lawful residence in the country.

The situation has been exacerbated across much of Europe in recent years with the rise of nationalistic identity politics. Although in Cyprus asylum and migration issues have only played a very marginal role in mainstream politics, there are some signs that certain segments of the society are developing a negative attitude towards refugees and asylum-seekers.¹³ This is for the most part rooted in ignorance and fear. Politicians and the public often fail to appreciate the difference between refugees and asylum-seekers on the one hand, and migrants on the other. Some regard the arrival of asylum-seekers and refugees as an unwelcome disruption to their normal lives, or as a threat to their national identity or culture. Others regard them as competitors for jobs or as a drain on public resources. Facts are often distorted by fears and exaggerations. This environment not only undermines the international system for the protection of refugees, but can also be a fertile ground for racism, xenophobia and intolerance.

Refugees bring valuable skills and are willing to work hard to be able to support themselves and their families. If they are given the chance and if proper integration programmes are put in place, each can make a positive contribution to the host society, economically, socially and culturally.

Hate speech is one of the most worrying forms of racism and intolerance prevailing across Europe in the digital age. There is a veritable explosion of hate on the Internet. It is the responsibility of all, and political leaders in particular, to effectively counter this disturbing phenomenon through education and positive public discourse promoting instead the virtues of tolerance, equality, inclusion and respect for diversity and difference. These values need, of course, to be taught in schools, upheld in the home and at the workplace and practiced in daily civic life.

¹³ <http://www.unhcr.org.cy/el/nea/2015/article/d46a3cb56d3d243a9a2125da45701cd3/oi-antilipseis-echoyn-simasia-ti-nomizo.html> (Annex V).

In anxious times such as the one we are living in today, enhanced partnership is essential among all actors – the government, politicians, civil society, religious leaders, the media, and the refugees themselves. It is the responsibility of all, and political leaders in particular, to counter narratives that would seek to exclude and marginalize refugees and other uprooted people. Faith-based organizations and religious leaders can play an immensely positive role in countering negative public attitudes and building tolerant and inclusive communities, based on the common values of caring and respect for the stranger.

The media, as influential opinion-makers and shapers, also have a key role to play. There are indeed few non-governmental institutions that wield so extensive and huge power and influence as the media. The media bear significant responsibility for informing the public and raising awareness on a wide range of issues if they report properly, that is if they give the facts, avoid bias, and provide context. But the media can also be misused to manipulate, distort, stigmatize or stereotype. The influence of the media can therefore often make or break national policy.

Recommendations

1. *Develop public information and education multi-media projects aimed at combating discrimination and fostering a positive and respectful attitude towards refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.*
2. *Design and implement programmes supporting the active participation of refugees in the social, cultural and political life in Cyprus.*
3. *Establish radio programmes aiming to connect refugees and local society, enhance dialogue and build bridges through music, culture, and information.*
4. *Produce participatory videos and photo projects, aiming to bring participants together to learn new skills and collaborate on sharing issues and telling stories.*
5. *Empower and support refugees to set up democratically elected associations that promote their rights and serve as a bridge between the various stakeholders.*
6. *Develop structures of representation of the refugee population at the local administration level, such as via migrant councils and bodies.*
7. *Encourage and support the participation of refugee children in sport activities.*
8. *Promote joint cultural and artistic events that could include art and photography exhibitions; dance, painting and music workshops; storytelling; and gastronomy projects.*
9. *Facilitate the creation of mentoring and buddy programmes aiming at bringing together citizens and refugees, by local authorities and educational institutions.*

7.2 Protection against discrimination and racism

Combating discrimination, racism and hate speech is extremely important for promoting social cohesion and helping the integration of refugees within Cypriot society. The Republic of Cyprus adopted anti-discrimination legislation in 2004 and has established the Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman). As already noted, the Ministry of Education has also introduced an anti-racism policy for schools. Whilst the formal guarantees against racism and discrimination are in place, additional emphasis is needed on their enforceability. Beyond law enforcement, other ways to combat discrimination are easy access to reporting mechanisms, a zero-tolerance policy and public education on the benefits of diversity. In addition, it is important that incidents of racism and discrimination are promptly identified and recorded in order to enable the authorities to monitor the progress.¹⁴

¹⁴ See the Toolkit produced by EUROCITIES, <http://www.eurocities.eu/media/fbook/antidiscrimination/index.html>

Recommendations

1. *Introduce measures for the effective enforcement of the existing anti-discrimination legislation and strengthen the reporting mechanisms, particularly in relation to discrimination relating to employment, housing and education.*
2. *Provide information on how the reporting mechanisms work via relevant online platforms and in written format made available to NGOs, municipalities and other bodies that work with refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.*
3. *Strengthen the role of local authorities in combating discrimination at the local level. Key elements in combating discrimination on the local level include the following:*
 - a) *Produce and publicize quarterly reports on racist and discriminatory incidents, their prosecution and conviction rates.*
 - b) *Produce a guide for employers can be produced on how to create a working environment free from discrimination.*
 - c) *Strengthen the relationship between refugees and the police as a means, among others, to encourage reporting of discriminatory treatment and racially-motivated incidents.*

7.3 Long-term residency and mobility

The duration of residence permits has a considerable impact on refugee integration. Short-term residence permits, like the two-year renewable permits in Cyprus, are detrimental to refugees' sense of security and stability. Security of residence is essential for a refugee to build a life in the host country; it acts as a guarantee, encouraging public/local authorities to provide the refugee with services, while also facilitating international travel.

The EU recast Long-term Residence Directive of 2011¹⁵ would have addressed this problem, but it was transposed in Cyprus in a very restrictive manner making it almost impossible for refugees to meet the legislated requirements. These include possession of a valid passport; income tax payments and social security contributions covering the past five years; private health insurance coverage, and a Greek language proficiency certificate.

These requirements do not take into consideration the rights refugees enjoy or the specific situation of refugees. For example, refugees should not be required to have enrolment in a private health insurance scheme since they have the same rights as nationals in relation to health care, and have access to the public health system, unlike third country nationals who do not and who may require private insurance.

The economic requirements relating to tax payments and social security contributions are difficult to meet due to the restrictive employment policies. Many refugees have resided in the country for several years before a decision was made on their status. During those years, they were mostly unemployed or could only obtain informal and irregular jobs. Because they had not had the opportunity to pay taxes and social security contributions for the required five-year period, they do not qualify for long-term residency despite having completed the requisite five years legal residence in the country. Likewise, they are asked to demonstrate Greek language proficiency without adequate support and assistance to learn the language. Given these challenges, UNHCR is aware of only one refugee who has thus far succeeded in obtaining long-term residence status.

¹⁵ Directive 2011/51/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2011 amending Council Directive 2003/109/EC to extend its scope to beneficiaries of international protection Text with EEA relevance - <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32011L0051>

In relation to mobility, travel documents support the freedom of movement of refugees, thereby contributing to the facilitation of livelihoods and education opportunities, the promotion of family unity, and facilitating access to durable solutions. Access to travel documents further reduces the risk of refugees resorting to irregular movement, including through dangerous land and sea routes, exposing them to abuse, exploitation and other life-threatening risks at the hands of smuggling and trafficking networks.

The Convention Travel Documents (CTDs) Cyprus is issuing to refugees are not machine readable and thus do not meet the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Moreover, subsidiary protection beneficiaries only receive a one-page *Laissez-Passer* for a single journey, which meets none of the minimum security standards of the ICAO or EU Regulations. Subsidiary protection beneficiaries are therefore very restricted in their right to undertake international travel.

The Ministry of Interior is in the process of negotiating a contract for the issuance of travel documents with biometric identifiers for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. However, despite this process being underway since 2010, the issuance of such documents has yet to materialize.

Recommendations

1. *Long-term residence requirements should be applied flexibly, taking into consideration the specific situation of refugees.*
2. *Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection should be issued with machine-readable travel documents (MRTDs) without further delay; UNHCR is renewing its offer to provide to the authorities any technical, practical and/or legal advice they may require.*

7.4 Family reunification

People who flee persecution and seek asylum in Europe often arrive, by force, without their spouse or children. Once recognized as refugees, they can apply to bring their immediate family members to join them. However, they frequently remain separated for prolonged periods or indefinitely, due to policies and practices that block or delay family reunification.

Long delays increase risks to the family members remaining behind, who may be in conflict zones or refugee camps; it should be remembered that families are often subject to the same risk of persecution that caused their spouse or parent to be granted protection in an asylum country. Long separations also bring a heavy psychological toll. Prolonged family separation has its most dramatic impacts on children.

Another major barrier to family reunification is the narrow definition of “family” that does not take into account different cultural contexts. While extended family structures have become less central to family life in western countries, in most non-western nations, a wider network of relationships are recognized as integral to what is considered to be family. It is imperative to respect culturally diverse interpretations of family members, as long as they are in accordance with human rights standards. A broader definition of “family” should therefore include persons who may be dependent on the family unit, particularly economically, but also socially or emotionally dependent. This includes children who have reached 18 years of age, or who are married but remain in the family unit.

Family reunification policies and procedures in Cyprus are problematic. In fact, there are no formal procedures for the submission and examination of a family reunification application by refugees and this impacts the integrity and transparency of the process. There are often very long delays in processing applications. But the single most serious impediment to the enjoyment of family life is the different treatment afforded to persons granted subsidiary protection, which is the case for nearly all Syrians and other nationalities who have sought asylum in Cyprus. In all other EU member states except for Cyprus and Malta, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have full or partial access to family reunification.

The authorities justify denying beneficiaries of subsidiary protection the right to bring and live in dignity with their family members on the ground that the 2003 EU Family Reunification Directive excludes from its scope of application this group. It should however be noted that firstly, the 2003 Family Reunification Directive precedes the adoption of EU legislation governing subsidiary protection. Secondly, all recent legislative developments at the EU level have been geared towards the convergence of refugee status and subsidiary protection. Thirdly, the Family Reunification Directive must be interpreted and applied in conformity with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights regarding family life, the principle of non-discrimination and the rights of the child.

Protection of the family is not only in the best interests of the individuals concerned, but is also in the best interests of the State. Families facilitate economic adaptation and promote social adjustments in a new environment. Families have better prospects for achieving self-sufficiency by pooling their resources together. Families can also play a positive role in recovery from physical and emotional stress caused by flight. Conversely, family separation can have debilitating psychological impacts that can hamper integration.

Recommendations

1. *Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection should have equal and immediate access to family reunification procedures.*
2. *The authorities should employ a flexible interpretation of the concept of 'family' so as to include other dependants.*

7.5 Acquisition of citizenship

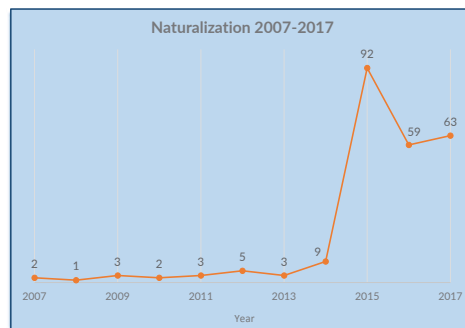
The acquisition of citizenship remains the most potent measure of integration into a host society by foreign nationals. Article 34 of the 1951 Refugee Convention requires State Parties to make every effort to facilitate the naturalization of refugees. This provision implies that the State should make good faith efforts to assist refugees to meet the requirements for naturalization by reducing waiting periods and naturalization fees. Stringent language tests and examinations on the history and culture of the host country may penalize certain categories of refugees. Similarly, requirements to demonstrate integration or self-reliance before submitting an application for naturalization may also be difficult for some refugees to meet.

Obtaining Cypriot citizenship has been extremely difficult for many refugees who otherwise meet the requirements set out in the relevant legislation - Civil Registry Law 2002 (as amended).¹⁶ For example, refugees have been arbitrarily required to complete seven years of legal residence in the country in order to qualify for submitting an application for naturalization, instead of the general requirement of five years. Those who file an application often wait up to six years or even more

¹⁶ These are found in Civil Registry Law 2002 (as amended) s. 111 and Third Schedule.

to get a decision. A number of recognized refugees with more than ten years of residence in the country have been denied naturalization on the grounds that the Republic has “no gain” from their naturalization.

Until 2014, Cyprus rarely granted its citizenship to refugees. Since the beginning of 2015, however, the government has taken steps to fast track some applications and more refugees have acquired citizenship in the last three years than all the previous years combined.¹⁷ This is an encouraging development, but is still no up to the desired level.



Recommendations

1. *Adopt policy measures to effectively facilitate the naturalization of qualifying refugees as provided for in Article 34 of the 1951 Refugee Convention.*
2. *Applications for naturalization should be decided on within a reasonable period of time.*
3. *Financial obstacles to the attaining of citizenship should be lifted.*
4. *Refugees would benefit from objective, measurable and transparent procedures and criteria for the acquisition of citizenship.*

¹⁷ Data provided by the Civil Registry and Migration Department.

8. Refugee Women



Women and girls everywhere still face greater obstacles claiming and enjoying their rights than do men and boys. Armed conflict often serves to exacerbate discrimination and violence against women and girls. Such violence is endemic not only in conflict, but during its aftermath, as women and girls try to re-establish their daily lives. Too often then, gender, armed conflict and violence, displacement and other factors combine to amplify discrimination against women and girls. As acknowledged by UNHCR's Executive Committee, "while forcibly displaced men and boys also face protection problems, women and girls can be exposed to particular protection problems related to their gender, their cultural and socio-economic position, and their legal status, which means that they may be less likely than men and boys to be able to exercise their rights." There is also, in this day and age, a massive culture of neglect and denial about violence against women and girls. That culture of neglect and denial exists everywhere, and societies must face up to it. The key issue remains the empowerment of women and girls.

The international community has made particularly concerted efforts since the early 1990s to promote and protect the rights of women and girls. Of critical importance has been the recognition that women's and girl's rights are human rights. Violence against women and girls, whether in war, in peace, at the hands of family members, the community or the State, is a human rights violation that should incur individual criminal responsibility. States and other actors have clear responsibilities to ensure that these are respected; the extent to which women and girls are able to enjoy one right or a set of rights often affects their enjoyment of other rights.

Certainly, the international community has made significant achievements on the road to gender equality and the participation of women in social, economic and political life. But there is still a long way to go to fully eradicate gender-based discrimination and exclusion in many parts of the world. In times of displacement, the problems women and girls have to contend with escalate. Becoming a refugee is always an ordeal, but for most women and girls being a refugee is a double jeopardy.

On top of the horrendous abuses from which they flee, refugee women and girls find themselves further abused and endangered along their journeys as well. Far too many women and girls are exposed to sexual violence at the hands of unscrupulous smugglers or traffickers, or are at great risk when they travel along insecure routes, having to stay in places that lack basic security, such as parks, bus or train stations or at the road side. Trafficked women and girls may be unaware of their rights, may lack access to information and advice, and may face obstacles to gaining access to mechanisms that protect those rights. If they are able to seek asylum, they may find that procedures are not sufficiently age- and gender-sensitive to recognize their claim. Their often uncertain status exposes them to a further risk of trafficking.

For refugee women and girls, simple matters such as access to information pose a considerable challenge. Yet, the right to access information is essential if women and girls are to be able to access and enjoy other rights. Access to information allows them to make informed choices regarding their rights, gender roles, power relations, their current situation, and their future. It allows them to protect themselves and represent their own interests more effectively.

In a situation like in Cyprus where refugees and asylum-seekers often find it extremely difficult to find affordable and suitable accommodation, women and girls face even greater protection risks. Groups of unrelated families, including single men and women, may share one flat or room with no privacy. In such circumstances, women and girls who are alone or who head families are at great risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), either by those with whom they are living or by landlords. And their inability to meet their basic needs and those of their families may also render them vulnerable to forced prostitution and trafficking.

When women and girls are unable to enjoy other rights, the risk of exposure to SGBV increases.

The consequences of SGBV are devastating and can lead to a whole range of further rights violations. Women and girls exposed to SGBV face possible death, including from HIV/AIDS, or acute and chronic physical injury, reproductive health problems, emotional and psychological trauma, stigmatization, rejection, isolation, increased gender inequality, and further exposure to other forms of SGBV.

The dangers and uncertainties of displacement place great strains on families and communities. These can, in turn, provoke domestic violence. Women and girls may feel obliged to stay in violent and abusive relationships simply because they and their children have no place to go, or have no

other way of surviving independently; they may also feel there is social or religious pressure to remain in a family, or stay because divorce is not permitted under traditional justice systems. Compounding the problem, domestic violence is rarely reported and generally remains hidden. It is often regarded as a private matter, and this makes it more difficult to intervene on behalf of the women and children concerned.

Recommendations

1. *All refugee programmes should include a gender perspective, so that the specific needs of women and girls are effectively addressed.*
2. *Raise awareness amongst women on their legal rights and available mechanisms for reporting incidents of discrimination, sexual and gender based violence and harassment.*
3. *Ensure adequate measures for the prevention of and effective response to gender discrimination and gender-based violence against women.*
4. *Special measures are needed to encourage and support women's participation in programmes aiming at increasing employability, including language classes, internship and apprenticeship programmes and vocational training programmes.*
5. *Availability of state-funded childcare, better parental leave provisions will enhance the employability of refugee women.*
6. *The Government should adopt positive measures aimed at alleviating the particular situation of refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls living in inadequate housing so as to ensure their security from harassment and violence in the home, as well as provide protection from illegal forced eviction.*
7. *Adequate measures should be in place to ensure access to age-sensitive reproductive health care, HIV information and education, and other special health care needs of women and girls.*

8. Unaccompanied and Separated Children



Forced displacement exacerbates children's exposure to neglect, exploitation and sexual and other forms of violence and abuse. Children are at particular risk and require special attention due to their dependence on adults to survive, their vulnerability to physical and psychological trauma, and their needs that must be met to ensure normal growth and development. Children who find themselves without parental protection are dependent on States to uphold their rights. Some are unaccompanied, meaning that they are separated from both parents and other relatives, and are not being cared for by an adult. Others may be separated from both parents or from their previous legal or customary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives.

Over half of the world's refugees are children. Many will spend their entire childhoods away from home, sometimes separated from their families. They may have witnessed or experienced violent acts and, in exile, are at risk of abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, trafficking or military recruitment. They may experience and witness disturbing events, or be separated from their family. At the same time, family and other social support networks may be weakened and education may be disrupted. These experiences can have a profound effect on children – from infancy and childhood through to adolescence. In displacement, girls face particular gender-related protection risks.

Children are also highly resilient and find ways to cope and move forward in the face of hardship and suffering. They draw strength from their families and find joy in friendships. By learning in school, playing sports, and having the creative space to explore their talents and use some of their skills, children can be active members of their community.

Children who leave their countries and travel alone are particularly vulnerable. Unaccompanied and separated children leave their countries of origin for a variety of reasons. They may be fleeing from persecution, armed conflict, exploitation or economic deprivation. They may have been sent by members of their family or decided to leave on their own – be it to ensure their survival, or to obtain an education or employment. They may have been separated from their family during flight, or may be trying to join parents or other family members. They may have become victims of trafficking. Often it is a combination of factors.

However, regardless of the circumstances and reasons they are on the move, all unaccompanied and separated children share two fundamental characteristics. First and foremost, they are children, and should be treated as such. Secondly, as children temporarily or permanently deprived of their supportive family environment, they are entitled to special protection and assistance as provided for in international law, most notably by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

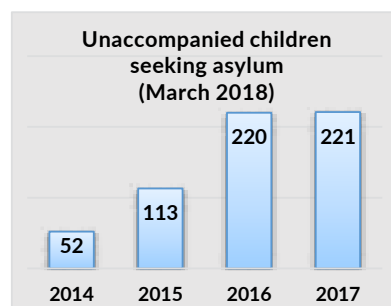
The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* embodies four general principles: the best interests of the child (Article 3); non-discrimination (Article 2); the right to life and survival and development (Article 6); and the right to be heard (Article 12). In addition to these four principles, the Convention provides for a number of fundamental rights which include, among others, the need for protection from abuse, exploitation and neglect, and the importance of the physical and intellectual development of the child. It gives particular attention to the special protection needs of children deprived of their family environment and those of asylum-seeking and refugee children.

In all actions concerning children whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration.

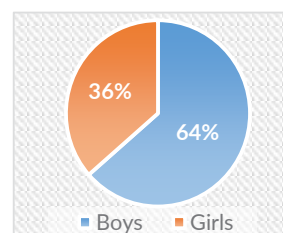
Establishing the best interest of the child requires a holistic approach, considering all the characteristics of the child and his/her circumstances and needs. This implies making efforts to ensure that the processes are child-friendly, including through the provision of child-friendly information; giving children the opportunity to be heard and participate in all matters affecting them, in accordance with their gender, age, maturity, and capacity; seeking all relevant information about the child with the child and from relevant sources as early in the process as appropriate, for the early understanding of the child and his or her circumstances; actively seeking the early establishment of trust; seeking a joint vision for the child across the many actors, which the

unaccompanied or separated child encounters; and considering actions in the short, medium, and long term, which enable the child to develop into adulthood in an environment which will meet his or her needs as well as fulfil his or her rights, and will not put the child at risk of persecution or serious harm.

In Cyprus, the numbers of unaccompanied and separated children seeking asylum have been on the rise in recent years. There are four special reception facilities to house them: one boys-only centre in Nicosia managed by an NGO, and three state-run centres in Larnaca and Limassol. The four shelters have a total capacity of around 120 persons, and are presently full. The reception standards differ significantly between the NGO and the state-run shelters, including the accommodation standards and recreational/educational activities.



Whilst the Social Welfare Services assist and represent the unaccompanied and separated children to be able to access asylum, medical care and education, and provide for their day-to-day needs, the children remain somewhat segregated from life in Cyprus and face immense difficulties in transitioning to independent living upon reaching the age of maturity. The children often report feeling isolated, frightened and unable to cope once they turn 18 and have to leave the shelters. The lack of effective support and assistance for family tracing and reunification is another major problem.



Further challenges faced by unaccompanied children relate to their education. Unaccompanied children enter the Cypriot education system with a variety of previous school experiences, and may have large gaps in their education, or may even have never previously attended school. The unaccompanied children, the vast majority of whom are above 15 years old, attend education programmes apart from the local school population, even when they share school hours and facilities; in some cases, these programmes take place in second shifts, after local children have gone home. The children are assigned to these programmes based on availability of places, rather than learner needs, choice, skills and inclination. They are not even offered any diplomas or certificates upon completion of the programme.

Educated children and youth stand a greater chance of becoming adults who can participate effectively in civil society in all contexts.

Ministry of Education officials report that these separate arrangements for the schooling of unaccompanied and separated children of upper secondary age were instituted due to the lack of interpreters, classroom assistants, language learning resources and teachers trained to include second language students and their academic needs.

According to the children in question, however, the separate schooling system affects their ability to learn Greek, and reinforces feelings of isolation and 'difference.' As a result, half of the unaccompanied children are not regularly attending these special programmes. Drop-out rates are also high.

While the the current response to provide protection to unaccompanied and separated refugee and asylum-seeking children through the provision of educational services is greatly appreciated, the benefits of educational activities that do not lead to sustainable educational and social inclusion will be lost. In order to 'catch up,' these children need additional support, including

alternative, more flexible options, such as one-to-one tuition, additional language support and age- and level-appropriate pedagogy and learning materials. These should normally be offered within the mainstream education system, but this is not the case in Cyprus.

Recommendations

1. *Central to effectively meeting the protection and long-term needs of unaccompanied and separated refugee children is the establishment of a best interest determination procedure involving a trained multifunctional team from the Asylum Service, Social Welfare Services, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.*
2. *Ongoing training and professional development for staff working with unaccompanied and separated children.*
3. *Placement of unaccompanied children in education programmes (including technical courses and lyceum placement) should be determined through a mixture of assessed knowledge and the informed desires of the child, i.e. children should not be placed in lower levels due to language barrier alone.*
4. *Family tracing must be carried out for all separated children at the earliest possible opportunity; even if immediate family reunification is not possible, tracing is important for restoring links with their families.*
5. *Develop a plan and timeline for inclusion of all refugee and asylum-seeking children, including unaccompanied and separated children, into formal, mainstream education.*
6. *As an interim measure, adjust the school timetable for the current special programme for unaccompanied and separated children so they can be mainstreamed in some classes where knowledge of Greek is not an imperative, including sport and art classes.*
7. *Provide supplementary lessons and other forms of assistance such as ‘catch up’ classes in literacy and numeracy, in order for unaccompanied children to be able to smoothly participate in mainstream education; engaging volunteers from the local community, including retired teachers, may be a cost-effective way of providing this assistance.*
8. *Provide accelerated education programmes, aligned to the Cypriot educational system, that allow transition of unaccompanied children who have received none or little formal education in their country of origin into the formal system.*
9. *For those children of lyceum or technical school age who have pending applications to transfer to other EU countries under the Dublin Regulation, schooling options should be considered in light of the child’s individual circumstances, i.e. age, level of education, and imminence of transfer from Cyprus; it may be useful to provide English language classes and/or classes in the language of the country that the child will be transferred to.*
10. *Develop measures to support the transition to independent living for unaccompanied and separated children reaching adulthood and having to leave the special shelters; areas of needed support include continuing education, accommodation, employment, etc.;*
11. *Provide opportunities for host community children and youth to engage with the unaccompanied and separated children outside of formal classes, and include asylum-seekers in non-academic classes such as art and gym, and to reinforce their experience of belonging in the school environment.*
12. *Funding for such schemes can be sought from European bodies such as the European Investment Bank, the Central European Bank (CEB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.*

10. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships, Coordination and Funding



The key to a successful integration programme, at a reduced financial cost, is a multi-stakeholder partnership, involving government funding, active engagement of employers and the business community, non-governmental organizations, the media, refugee associations and the refugees themselves as connectors and the principal actors for their integration. The main challenge is to coordinate the actors and develop links between them.

Comprehensive strategy and dedicated authority

As noted above, the integration of refugees is an important part of the commitments of States under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Yet in Cyprus, as in a number of other countries in Europe, integration remains the weakest link of the national asylum system and not enough efforts have been made to address the situation. For example, Cyprus does not even have a national refugee integration strategy and action plan. There is no single central authority (service or department) with the responsibility for drawing up an integration strategy, programmes and projects, or for overseeing their implementation, and ensuring effective coordination among all relevant actors.

Internal coordination

Enhanced coordination between government departments is necessary in order to fill gaps that are found in the provision of integration services to refugees. This will help improve both the timeliness and quality of services offered as well as the complementarity and joint efforts of the different ministries and departments. The need for enhanced collaboration and coordination between State institutions is evident across different policy areas such as education, employment and health:

- In the field of **education**, systematic communication between the Ministry of Education, the Asylum Service and the Social Welfare Services is imperative in order to ensure timely school enrollment of children. A shared, common database is also essential.
- Effective cooperation between the Asylum Service, the Social Welfare Services and the Ministry of Health can further allow for the timely identification and monitoring of **vulnerable individuals**, by employing a common guidance as to the different types of vulnerabilities, ways to screen these, as well as recommended courses of action for each type of vulnerability. A proper referral system should also be established.
- As regards **employment**, the involvement of the Department of Labour can enable the mapping of the skills refugees have, which can inform the planning of vocational trainings, language courses and job placements in cooperation with the Cyprus Productivity Centre, the Human Resources Development Authority, the Ministry of Education and local authorities.

Local authorities

Local authorities can play an extremely important role in strengthening community relations through programmes that promote inclusion and integration of all people residing within the urban context, including refugees. The proximity and direct contact with refugees and migrant communities puts municipalities in a better position to understand the challenges and issues, and identify solutions appropriate to the local context.

In most European countries, municipalities have the autonomy both on a political and financial level to design and implement programmes of integration, as well as to finance civil society organizations and NGOs in carrying out such projects. These range from providing information to refugees by establishing one-stop shops, for example, to offering civic orientation and language classes; identifying and providing housing support and implementing anti-discrimination campaigns. Most importantly, local authorities could help reinforce the political participation of refugees. In Cyprus, the role of local authorities is limited, although many municipalities have been carrying out various useful projects such as the ones by the Nicosia Municipality under its Multifunctional Foundation. Supporting and reinforcing the role and structures of local authorities would allow for longer term planning and systematic implementation of projects at the ground level, with the involvement of the refugee communities themselves.

Refugees as the main actors

All actors should recognize the importance of perceiving refugees themselves as the principal actors in the process of integration; schemes should involve refugees actively, identifying their skills and making use of them in order to promote self-sufficiency. This could be a motivating factor, as well as improving their self-esteem. Projects allowing refugees to be central actors in the integration process and encouraging self-sufficiency will allow refugees to be seen increasingly as resourceful members of the community. Refugee resources should be identified, highlighted and put to good use. These resources include social skills, organizational skills, technical and manual skills, business skills (negotiating, selling and buying), intellectual skills, artistic skills, the will to succeed, and time that is put to good use.

The role of refugee organizations/associations

Refugees and migrants in general have a tendency to look first at personal connections, e.g. families and friends, who could assist them with various aspects of integration, from securing a job to finding housing. Given this important facilitating role played by fellow refugees and established migrant communities, it is logical to look at how partnerships can and indeed should be established and strengthened between these and the government in both identifying the needs and in providing services for refugee integration.

Partnership with civil society

In many countries around the world, NGOs are effective implementing partners of governments in wide-ranging areas of refugee programmes, from reception, information, orientation, social counselling and legal advice, to assistance in accessing housing, health care, language/vocational training and employment. The business sector also plays a crucial role when it comes to job creation for refugees and immigrants alike.

Funding

The availability of comprehensive integration programmes and services varies as a function of the economic wealth and social organization of the host country. Some countries may have more budgetary limitations than others to provide adequately for the reception of asylum-seekers and integration of refugees. However, not all integration programmes and services require a large injection of financial resources. This is especially the case with what may be termed as 'soft' integration programmes or 'preparatory' interventions: language training, social and cultural orientation, vocational training and employment counseling. It is likewise with the granting of citizenship. "Hard" integration programmes, such as housing support and credit schemes for small business development, may put more demands on State budgets.

What is clear from experiences across Europe is that a longer-term approach to the reception and integration of refugees is needed. The money spent on such programmes and services is an investment for the future. If certain groups of the community become marginalised, excluded and impoverished, the long-term losses to the State – whether socially, economically and security-wise – could far outweigh the required investments.

There are several European funding sources available to complement and strengthen national efforts for the integration of refugees and other third-country nationals in Cyprus. One is the European Union's *Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) 2014-2020*, which has been supporting NGOs and local authorities, as well as government departments for the implementation of a number of integration projects.¹⁸

¹⁸ http://www.moi.gov.cy/MOI/eufunds2015.nsf/index_gr/index_gr?OpenDocument.

Another funding source is the [European Social Fund \(ESF\)](#),¹⁹ which is one of the European Structural and Investment Funds. The ESF is Europe's main instrument for supporting jobs, and as such, improving access to employment is one of its top priorities. This can provide an important source of funding for vocational training and lifelong learning opportunities to give refugees new skills and thus improve their access to employment. ESF funding is available to a wide range of organizations – public bodies, private companies and civil society – and is provided through the Member States and regions.²⁰

[The Erasmus+ programme](#)²¹ constitutes another potential source of funding for programmes and projects in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. Mention should also be made of the [European Programme for Integration and Migration \(EPIM\)](#),²² which provides funding and support to civil society organizations active in the field of migration and integration through grant-making, capacity development and networking. Finally, European bodies such as the [European Regional Development Fund](#), the [European Investment Bank](#), the [Central European Bank](#) and the [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#) all provide funding for the development of social housing schemes for refugees.

Recommendations

1. *Establish a dedicated integration authority (directorate, department, service or unit) within one of the relevant ministries; once set up this authority will have the responsibility to develop and oversee the implementation of the national refugee integration strategy and plan of action proposed in this paper; it will also serve as the main governmental coordinating body in all aspects of refugee integration.*
2. *Establish an inter-ministerial committee for the coordination of the cross-government implementation of the integration strategy and assist the participating ministries to develop their respective action plans and monitor the progress of their implementation.*
3. *Strengthen the role of municipalities through delegated authority and multi-annual funding for the design, implementation and evaluation of integration programmes.*
4. *Establish a National Integration Forum that includes representatives from a range of refugee and migrant communities in Cyprus, NGOs, employers' associations and other relevant civil society organizations; the role of the Forum will be to advise the Government on all integration-related matters.*
5. *Ensure sufficient and timely allocation of resources for effective integration programmes and projects identified following participatory needs assessment.*

¹⁹ For more information please refer to: <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp?langId=en>

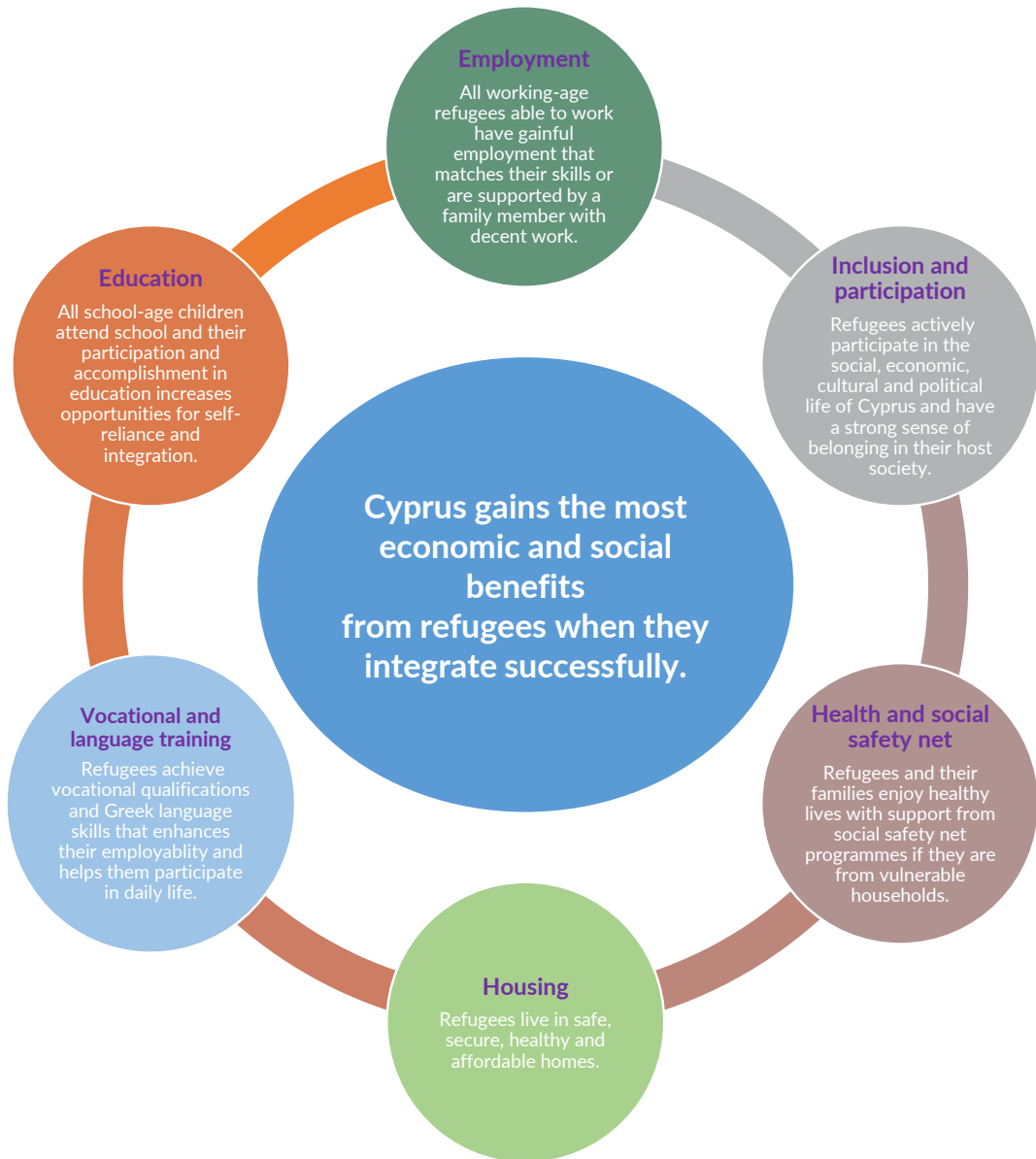
²⁰ For information on the relevant national authority please see: <http://www.structuralfunds.org.cy/>

²¹ For more information please refer to: <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/> and:

<http://www.erasmusplus.cy/default.aspx>

²² <http://www.epim.info/>

11. Conclusion



In the Republic of Cyprus, the arrival of refugees is a relatively new phenomenon. Yet, the country has achieved a lot in establishing and strengthening its asylum system over the last fifteen years. Legislation is, for the most part, up to European Union and international standards, though there is room for improvement in certain areas.

Refugees are by law entitled to the same socio-economic rights as Cypriot nationals; a good number of them are doing well economically in their new society and some have become citizens. But far too many others have not been integrated economically or socially. Unemployment and underemployment is endemic, while many who want to naturalize find barriers to citizenship or to long-term residency. The severe economic crisis Cyprus fell into at the start of 2013 has had a disproportionate impact on refugees and asylum-seekers. They have lost jobs, struggled to find even low-wage employment and seen access to social protection curtailed.

Employment is key for the integration of refugees. But employment is also closely related to many other important areas of integration; these include measures to ensure that all refugee and asylum-seeking children attend school; the availability of language and orientation courses, and vocational training and job placement programmes. Schemes linking language to vocational training may prove more motivating to refugees and more cost-effective for the host community in the long-term.

Family reunification is also essential to integration. Families facilitate economic adaptation and promote social adjustments in a new environment. Families have better prospects for achieving self-sufficiency by pulling their resources together. Families can also play a positive role in recovery from physical and emotional stress caused by flight. Conversely, prolonged family separation can have debilitating psychological impacts that can hamper integration. It is, therefore, difficult for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection alike to rebuild their lives without the support of their families.

Likewise, civic integration aims to achieve the conditions for, and the actual participation of, refugees in the civic life of the host country and it is promoted by access to citizenship and political rights. Naturalization indeed remains the most potent measure of integration as expressly pronounced in Article 34 of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The conditions in which asylum-seekers find themselves during the immediate reception stage are of key significance as regards the future possibilities for integration for those accepted as refugees. A reception policy that combines effective and adequate services with a swift asylum procedure, and that is based on giving asylum-seekers as much autonomy as possible by promoting active participation and social inclusion, rather than isolation and separation from host communities, would increase the chances of successful integration.

Effective integration policies also necessarily require sustained efforts to eliminate discrimination and to combat xenophobia and intolerance against people perceived as “aliens.” This would include effective strategies and educational programmes to promote the virtues of tolerance, inclusion, multiculturalism, diversity, and mutual respect. The Government, politicians and their parties, the media and educational institutions all have a role to play in fostering understanding and solidarity, and ensuring accurate and balanced public information on refugee issues and to convey diversity as a positive development rather than a threat.

At the same time, UNHCR recognizes the legitimate Government concerns over the cost of integration. But many experts in the economics field agree that the best way to reduce the fiscal burden of receiving and integrating refugees is to integrate them as fast as possible into the labour market so that they can generate tax revenue. In the long-term, therefore, their integration could contribute to addressing negative demographic trends, improving the ratio of active workers and contributing to innovation, entrepreneurship and GDP growth.

Summing up, the following are some of the key considerations in developing an effective integration policy:

- (1) Integration should involve multi-dimensional projects since the various areas of need for integration (i.e. affordable housing, employment, vocational training, language education, family reunification, naturalization) are inter-linked and one factor affects another. Effective measures need to be taken in each of these areas.
- (2) Refugee integration programmes should be mainstreamed into existing State services and facilities. Addressing the needs of refugees separately in specific schemes may have isolating effects. In certain areas, however, there may be a need for some refugee-specific programmes to supplement mainstream services.
- (3) It is essential that refugees themselves take an active part in the integration process. Refugees are resourceful individuals, some of whom have survived on their wits during long and treacherous journeys to the country of asylum. They are therefore in the best position to identify their own integration needs and potentials.
- (4) Skilled members of refugee communities should be trained as counselors, mentors and primary health educators. They can offer a good bridge to their communities, particularly as regards culturally sensitive issues.
- (5) Host communities should be included in any refugee integration programmes, either as co-beneficiaries or through inter-cultural activities.
- (6) Integration should also include effective strategies to improve community relations, such as educational programmes to promote inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue; programmes to orient refugees to accepted ways of life in the host society; conflict mediation programmes, and vigorous prosecution of hate crimes and similar offences committed against refugees or immigrants.
- (7) The key to a successful integration programme, at a reduced financial cost, is an effective partnership between all concerned societal actors: relevant State institutions, local authorities, the business community, non-governmental organizations, religious leaders, the refugees themselves, refugee community associations and the media.
- (8) Integration policies and programmes should meet the special needs of refugee women, children – including unaccompanied and separated children – and persons in a potentially vulnerable situation, including victims of gender-based violence, torture or human trafficking.



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