

The Integration of Refugees in Cyprus - Opportunities and Challenges  
11 December 2019, Hilton Park Hotel, Nicosia

**A Call to Action!**

**The Integration of Refugees in Cyprus: Education and Language**

**Who we are**

On 11 December 2019, the undersigned agencies/organizations/individuals came together at **UNHCR's Conference on the Integration of Refugees in Cyprus** to discuss specific gaps in the integration process, including by participating in the workshop on **Education / Language**, one of four parallel thematic workshops that took place at the conference.

**Pressing needs**

Whilst the public sector has invested increasingly in integration projects and initiatives over the past few years, there are persisting gaps in the integration process along with increasing obstacles and therefore an enhanced response by the State and all other stakeholders is required.

Over the course of the discussion, the group identified and prioritized three key challenges and submitted three key recommendations with regard to access to **Education / Language**.

**Key challenges:**

- Refugee children, including unaccompanied and separated minors, in mainstream education may face difficulties in adjusting to the education system, especially whilst trying to learn the Greek language in order to effectively take part in lessons.
- Refugee teenagers aged between 15-17 who are placed in one of the special reception classes at specific Lyceum or Technical schools, which provides basic education to individuals who are at varying levels of education, are rarely mainstreamed. There are reported instances of students who have been forced to leave school, prior to obtaining their diploma, because they turned 18. Most refugee teenagers who attend the reception classes do not reach the required level in Greek and in other subjects in order to continue and obtain a high school leaving certificate.
- Many adults, including mothers and single parents, lack the opportunity to access language courses and information as regards any potential options for language learning is absent. Inadequate language skills lead to diminished employability prospects.

**What you can do**

Refugees and asylum-seekers need our support. The implications of incomplete or ineffective integration policies can be severe, both for the refugees themselves and for the host society. Pressing human needs must be addressed and support given to long-term strategies that will ultimately improve the prospects for refugee integration, inclusion and participation. Social cohesion and security depend on these processes.

**Key recommendations:**

- All children should be provided comprehensive orientation and guidance as regards the school system. Social workers and cultural mediators placed in schools can facilitate communication between the schools, the new students, and their families or guardians, which will enable a better understanding of the school system and allow for feedback and concerns to be heard.
- The education level of all refugee children who arrive in Cyprus between the ages of 15-17 must be assessed before placement, including in Greek language programs. In addition they

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must be provided with meaningful opportunities to access mainstream education and obtain a high school leaving certificate, which must include access to intensive Greek language classes. Access to evening schools should be facilitated for both children who reach the age of maturity before graduation, as well as children who may not be enrolled in regular school due to the shortage of available places.

- Improve access to intensive language lessons for adults in both Greek and English. The effectiveness of these courses needs regular evaluation, and should be linked to language certification. There should be a needs analysis of the target population (e.g. language needs, suitable time slots, factors that might hinder participation) for appropriate actions to be taken prior to the commencement of the language courses. Furthermore, stakeholders should strive for an appropriate definition of the teacher's profile and academic qualifications and skills, including the ability to teach specific age groups. Community feedback needs to be taken into consideration in the design and implementation of language learning programs. The connection between language learning and employability must be factored into adult language courses. Access to language courses, and to information on such courses must be facilitated, especially for refugees and asylum-seekers residing in remote and rural areas. More opportunities and incentives for language learning are needed for all age groups.

#### **SIGNATORIES**

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