

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: Employment and Vocational Training

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 **Employment and Vocational Training**, 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 **Employment and Vocational Training**.

Key challenges:

- There is lack of awareness on the part of employers regarding the employment rights of refugees. Refugees also face difficulties in accessing information about available employment positions commensurate with their qualifications, vocational training schemes they can benefit from, and information about their rights as workers.
- The language barrier is another challenge faced by many refugees and asylum-seekers in accessing the labour market. At least a conversational knowledge of Greek and/or English is required by many employers.
- There is a lack of gender mainstreaming in policies and programs, and many refugee women are constrained in accessing jobs due to the lack of affordable childcare, reliable public transportation and discrimination based on cultural and social norms. The challenges refugee women face in accessing language training are based on the same constraints.

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:

- Efforts should be made to enable refugees to build support networks, with a view to share experiences regarding access to employment and labour rights. Schemes and events, facilitating structured meetings between refugees and employers, such as high-profile work fairs for refugees should be developed and implemented.
- Language training should be accessible to all asylum-seekers upon arrival and should not be approached in isolation, but linked to vocational and technical training. Future plans for

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language classes should model those that have proved to be successful in terms of attendance and outcomes. More intensive language courses are needed.

- The participation of refugee women in language and vocational training programmes should be supported through planning classes, and trainings at convenient times with the provision of childcare arrangements. Free and accessible childcare should be made available preferably seven days a week, especially for mothers who work during weekends. Access to public transportation should be improved. Refugee women's, and especially mothers' inability to work for employers at distant or isolated locations, where they have been referred to by the Labour Office, should not result in discontinuation of State assistance. Efforts should be made to empower, inform, and enable refugee women to build support networks both within the refugee community, and within society at large. Furthermore, raising public awareness about the specific issues refugee women face is essential.

SIGNATORIES

Afxentis Afxentiou, Center for Social Innovation

Antonia Diikiti, Hope for Children CRC Policy Centre

Aristos Theocharous, Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus

Catherine Germain, Cyprus Stop Trafficking

Faika Deniz Pasha, UNHCR

George Ailiotis, UNHCR

Heather Lewis, OASIS

Katarzyna Evripidou, Cyprus Refugee Council

Maria Angeli, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS),

Paula Tamarit Segui, Refugee Support Europe – Dignity Center Nicosia

Xenia Papadema, Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus