

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: Housing and Social Benefits

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 **Housing and Social Benefits**, 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.

The participants stressed that access to dignified housing and social benefits is a prerequisite for refugee integration. It was emphasized that asylum-seekers find themselves in a more precarious situation; nevertheless international protection beneficiaries also

face significant obstacles in securing decent and affordable housing and accessing social assistance.

Over the course of the discussion, the group identified and prioritized three key challenges and submitted three key recommendations with regard to access to **Housing and Social Benefits**.

Key challenges:

- Limited availability of accommodation: landlords do not wish to rent to refugees.
- Insufficient amount of rental subsidy to refugees and asylum-seekers: refugees receive just 10% higher subsidy than asylum-seekers.
- Lack of access to student benefits: impeding refugee children's access to higher education.

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:

- Ensure registration with the labour office and, if needed, access to social assistance and benefits during attendance to Greek language classes.
- Facilitate access to student, as well as child benefits by counting in the required five-year residency, the years of residence as asylum-seekers.
- Fund projects for the housing of refugees (including the utilizing of empty buildings owned by banks) which could be managed by municipalities. The rent should be at the level afforded through General Minimum Income (GMI) and the tenants could also benefit by orientation and other integration projects of the respective municipality.

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