

A Call to Action!

The Integration of Refugees in Cyprus: Social Inclusion and Discrimination

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 **Social Inclusion and Discrimination**, 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 **Social Inclusion and Discrimination**.

Key challenges:

- Negative rhetoric in the political and public discourse, including negative portrayal of refugees in the media, tend to enhance stereotypes and prejudices against refugees. The rhetoric is often perceived by refugees as hate speech.
- Discrimination at the workplace, public services and public spaces severely impairs the potential of refugees to feel they are included in all aspects of life. In the case of vulnerable groups this is even more acute e.g. for women, women with children, people with disabilities. Social inclusion becomes more difficult for people of African origin, because of their colour. Discrimination is inextricably linked to lack of acceptance of diversity, which was acknowledged as a major obstacle to social inclusion. Incidents at work and school where the hijab or other headscarves are not accepted (e.g. it has to be removed in order to be hired) is evidence that more needs to be done in promoting respect to cultural diversity. Lack of naturalization paths for refugees, lack of recognition of qualifications, lack of civic participation as well as lack of student grants were additional manifestations of discrimination felt by the refugee participants.
- Refugees and governmental services often lack information concerning laws, policies and procedures relating to refugees, hence hindering access to rights. While information leaflets and online platforms do exist, these are not well known, hence the need for better dissemination, including in different languages.

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.

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

Key recommendations:

- Develop intercultural programs/campaigns/activities targeting media and schools. Through these actions the objective is to project facts and figures; portray the human story that lies behind the numbers as focusing on the numbers tends to dehumanize refugees; show the success stories. Ultimate aim is to portray refugees not as a threat, not as victims but as survivors and people who want and can contribute to their new countries, if they receive the necessary support from the host society.
- Enhance anti-discrimination mechanisms through the creation of a network of non-governmental organizations. Improve transparency and criteria in the procedures for the examination of naturalization applications.
- Encourage the employment of refugees by providing hiring incentives to employers, and support refugee entrepreneurship by enabling refugees' access to relevant schemes. The provision of accessible and effective vocational, mentoring, cultural orientation and other support programs is essential, including programs for single mothers who lack access to child-care facilities.

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