

Stakeholder Partnerships for the Integration of Migrants - INTEgreat

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Table of Contents

SECTION I. PUBLIC POLICIES ANALYSIS.....	3
1. CONTEXT	3
2. PRIORITY AREAS	5
2.1. Legal framework for Immigration Policy	7
SECTION II. LITERATURE ANALYSIS.....	19



Section I. Public Policies Analysis

1. Context

The current National Strategy for Social Integration was issued in July 2019, incorporating the revisions of the National Social Integration Strategy of 2013¹. This Strategy is based on the specifications from the European Council and the European Union about what a successful social integration policy requires, among others, the active participation of the State, Institutions, and civil society.

Local communities in Greece are very important for the efficient implementation of social integration policies. Local Greek government administrations involve and engage local communities and, furthermore, the successful implementation of the strategy also requires the collaboration of local government administrations with the central government administration. It also depends on the active involvement of civil society entities, such as associations or unions for migrants and refugees and non-governmental organizations, in social integration initiatives.

Regarding the Greek model for social integration and according to this strategy, the main objectives of the Greek model for social integration are:

- Create and maintain an open society that respects diversity.
- Protect the rights and outline the obligations of third-country nationals in a non-discriminatory manner that ensures social equality.
- Foster interaction, collaboration, dialogue, and constructive criticism between culturally or ethnically diverse communities, promulgating democracy and equality.
- Promote diversity, tolerance, and social cohesion.
- Motivate all individuals to protect the common good and encourage the contribution of all individuals to the development of the country.

The current National Strategy counts on a series of strategic goals, and it includes the new international, European and local, socio-economic landscape. The basic tenets of the current strategy are, as described by the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum²:

- Enable the integration of beneficiaries of international protection and applicants of international protection who temporarily reside in the country, and/or will remain in the country-if they are granted international protection.
- Assist migrants who struggle to maintain their lawful residence status due to the economic crisis.
- Involve more the local government administrations and enhance their role in the formation of social integration policies.

¹ Εθνική Στρατηγική για την ένταξη των πολιτών τρίτων χωρών https://www.ypes.gr/UserFiles/f0ff9297-f516-40ff-a70e-eca84e2ec9b9/ethnikisratig_30042013.pdf

² <https://migration.gov.gr/en/>

- Raise public awareness with regards to the importance of social integration and inclusion.
- Coordinate and align the activities of all governmental and state bodies towards the implementation of a common national strategy.
- Collaborate and align with international and private state bodies as well as civil society.
- Modernize and digitize the administration processes for resident permits and international protection status.
- Promptly and thoroughly inform migrants with regards to new national developments in migration policy, activities, and programs, as well as their rights and obligations in the context of social integration.

Additionally, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum³ describes a number of action pillars in this strategy that are linked to their corresponding policy actions and measures, and which we summarised below:

- **Collaboration with the local government administration to promote integration on a local level**, including: enhancing the collaboration between the central administration and the local government administration, enabling the participation of local administration bodies in integration initiatives, improving reception services offered to applicants of international protection, improving local reception and integration services, offering accommodation services to beneficiaries and applicants of international protection and enhancing the operation of Migrant Integration Centers (M.I.C.).
- **Access to necessary goods and services**, which involves actions and measures such as: informing third-country nationals about their access to goods and services, upgrading the operation of immigration services offered by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, upgrading public services and local administration services that cater to third-country nationals and enabling third-country nationals' access to the healthcare system.
- **Promote inclusive education**, which involves actions such as: supporting the integration of children in the educational system and encouraging the participation of adults in continuing education courses.
- **Promote labour market integration**, which involves actions and measures such as: identifying and recognizing the skills and qualifications of third-country nationals, enabling their access to the job market, and promoting entrepreneurship.
- **Enhance Intercultural Mediation**, which involves actions and measures such as: developing and expanding the profession of intercultural mediation and encouraging intercultural interaction and dialogue.
- **Encourage civic participation**, which involves actions such as: enabling third country nationals' civic and community participation via involvement in community athletic activities and volunteerism.
- **Combat racism and xenophobia**, which involves identifying and monitoring phenomena of racism and xenophobia and raising awareness with regards to such phenomena.
- **Implement targeted integration policies for vulnerable groups** such as promoting the integration of women or integrating individuals with special needs as well as the elderly.
- **Implement targeted policies for second-generation citizens** to enhance their integration in Greek society.

In this strategy, we observe two actors who play a key role in its implementation: the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and the Local Government Administrations. On one hand, the Ministry has to collaborate with other Ministries, local government administrations and entities of civil society for the implementation of social integration strategies for third-country nationals (beneficiaries or applicants of international protection, unaccompanied minors, and migrants). On the other hand, the Local Government Administrations aim to follow the Common Principles of the European Union for social integration³, which state that integration must take place foremost at the local level of communities, be a part of everyday life and engage everyone. It is essential, therefore, to identify opportunities for third-country nationals to participate actively in Greek society and get involved in the reception communities.

In Greece, Community Centers of municipalities and Migrant Integration Centers⁴ try to respond to the individual needs of third-country nationals by offering “One Stop Shop” services in collaboration with each local administration, and they connect third country nationals with all social service programs offered in each municipality. In particular, M.I.C. and Community Centers offer information and guidance on programs such as information and support to apply for the Social Solidarity Income and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and information and support to apply for social services such as the “Home Aid,” “Daily Care for the Elderly,” “Daily Care for Individuals with Special Needs,” the educational seminars of the General Secretariat of Lifelong Learning, as well as other professional training courses and educational seminars.

Additionally, the Migrant and Refugee Integration Council, which serve as counseling bodies in municipalities on migrant and refugee issues (Law 4555/2018⁵, “Klisthenis” program), has the mission of promoting third-country nationals’ civic and community engagement and participation.

2. Priority areas

The National Strategy for Social Integration reflects a revised strategy for the integration of immigrants, asylum seekers and applicants for international protection and its beneficiaries in the country, and it is aligned with the new data that have been developed both locally and at European and wider international level⁶. The main priorities of the National Strategy are:

1. The integration of beneficiaries of international protection and its applicants who temporarily reside in the country and/or will remain in it after the recognition of their protection status with the aim of their smooth entry into Greek society.

³ Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/common-basic-principles-immigrant-integration-policy-eu_en

⁴ Migrant Integration Centers. Hellenic Republic – Ministry of Migration & Asylum <https://migration.gov.gr/en/migration-policy/integration/drasis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/kentra-entaxis-metanaston/>

⁵ Νόμος 4555/2018 <https://www.lawspot.gr/nomikes-pliories/nomothesia/nomos-4555-2018>

⁶ Civic Participation. Hellenic Republic – Ministry of Migration & Asylum <https://migration.gov.gr/en/migration-policy/integration/drasis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/symmetochi-sta-koina/>

2. The facilitation of the return to legality of immigrants who, due to the economic crisis, are unable to maintain their legal residence status, with the goal of completing their integration in the country.
3. The strengthening of the role of the Local Government, as an integral co-shaper of the integration policies and as a basic executive mechanism in their implementation, as well as the creation and ensuring of a favorable framework for the participation of municipalities and regions in the integration process.
4. Raising the awareness of the host society and the wider public regarding the importance of the integration of third country nationals, strengthening the positive sign of integration and its significant benefits for the Greek state and society, while ensuring social cohesion.
5. The creation of a common coordinating framework, of a horizontal nature, which will inspire the actions of all state bodies involved in the integration with the aim of the coherence of the integration policy as well as the strengthening of the influence of the planned actions.
6. Coordination and cooperation with transnational, international and private bodies as well as of Civil Society with the goal of coherence and complementarity of the accession process.
7. The modernization of the process of issuing residence permits and international protection status, following the national objectives for the radical transformation of the existing procedures and the upgrade of the services provided to value-added services, in line with the Strategy for Electronics 2014-20. In addition, the digitization of the process of issuing residence permits is crucial as it serves other purposes, such as faster service to citizens, further ensuring the procedures for issuing permits, etc.
8. The timely and comprehensive information of immigrants on new national developments in the field of immigration policy, national and local actions, and programs from which they can benefit, as well as their rights and obligations in the context of integration, and of their participation in the Greek state and society.

Thus, the aforementioned objectives are reflected in the following projects, as stated in chapter 3 of the Strategy:

- Language programs, specifically of Greek and English language, elements of Greek and European culture for immigrants and applicants and beneficiaries of international protection 15-18 years old as well as for adults over 18 years old.
- Mapping and recording of the professional and educational profile, as well as the skills of the beneficiaries and applicants for international protection residing in the Greek territory.
- Pilot program of seasonal employment of beneficiaries of international protection in the rural economy.
- Pilot program of integration interventions in two municipalities for beneficiaries of international protection so that the beneficiaries gradually gain their autonomy and integrate into the local community.
- Strengthening the staff of the residence permit issuance services to ensure the national initiative for the restoration and safeguarding of legality as well as the faster and improved service of the immigrants who are already living in the Greek territory.

- Initiation of the process of revision of the Immigration and Social Integration Code with the aim of evaluating its results and suggesting better legislative regulations.
- Promoting the formation of the conditions for the creation of a database where the benefits available to asylum seekers and applicants for international protection will be recorded, with the goal of creating the conditions for the issuance of a stand-alone document in the form of an electronic card, which will be attributed to them.
- Enhance the digitization of the residence permit process by introducing the possibility of electronic filing and of an electronic appointment.
- Design and maintenance of an electronic portal for integrated real-time information of immigrants/beneficiaries regarding their obligations and rights and their active integration programs (education, health, work, housing, residence permits, etc.).

2.1. Legal framework for Immigration Policy

Legislative framework on immigration

For the management of those who entered illegally and stayed for a long time in the Greek territory, during the last years, a total of extensive legalization procedures was carried out, starting from 1997 and ending in 2007 (PD 358/97 and 359/97, Law 2910/2001⁷, Law 3386/2005⁸ and Law 3536/2007⁹). The stability of legal residence is a key element of the social integration of third-country nationals and is ensured only by obtaining long-term residence permits, as holders of these titles are not individual and social rights that ensure and promote their social inclusion.

The codification of immigration legislation with the Code of Immigration and Social Integration (Law 4251/2014¹⁰), as amended and in force, was drafted with the aim of:

- a) compiling the provisions of immigration legislation,
- b) harmonization with EU legislation, and
- c) rationalize the existing institutional framework and address the shortcomings identified in the implementation of existing legislation.

In particular, the Code further simplified the procedures for issuing residence permits, reduced the categories of residence permits and increased their duration, re-examined the conditions for access to the labor market, cultivated a friendly investment climate and facilitated access to long-term residence. In addition, a child protection network, and a special favorable residence regime for the second generation of immigrants have been adopted, in order to facilitate its integration perspective and not to remain trapped by the general procedures and conditions for renewing residence permits,

⁷ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b209fd54.html>

⁸ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c5270962.html>

⁹ Natlex – International Labour Organization

http://ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=81314&p_count=96243

¹⁰ Natlex – International Labour Organization

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=100567

at the risk of losing the legality of their stay. At the same time, with Law 4018/2011¹¹, the Foreigners and Immigration Services were transformed into One-Stop Services.

The Code also establishes a protective framework of rights, so that third-country nationals can enjoy enhanced protection in accordance with the principles of equality and non-discrimination on grounds of race, sex, language, or religion, and with respect for their individual rights, which is based on social justice, with particular emphasis on children's rights.

In addition, there has been a change in the terms and conditions of access to long-term residence permits, with the aim of promoting long-term residence permits, which due to increased rights and equal treatment in a number of areas of social and economic life, is a kind of "reward-orientation" for those immigrant people who prove that they have developed strong ties with Greece, residing and working in Greece legally for a number of years. As for the long-term national regimes, i.e., ten-year, and indefinite residence permits of the previous legislation, they were kept in a parallel trajectory, but with the abolition of their automatic renewal and their transition to the EU status of long-term resident with more favorable.

Further with Law 4332/2015¹² and the incorporation of Directive 2011/98/EU¹³ "on a single application procedure for the issuance of a single residence permit to third country nationals and in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for workers from third countries legally resident in a Member State" a set of common rules governing the procedure for issuance of the single residence permit efficiently and transparently, in order to ensure the appropriate level of legal certainty for those concerned.

An important piece of legislation is the operation of a parallel system of restitution or legalization of third-country nationals through an individualized process (exceptional reasons), who have either had a final residence permit for the last decade or have resided in the country for more than seven years from relevant documents that they have developed links with it.

In addition, a set of rights has been established for the equal treatment of Member States and third country nationals who have not yet acquired long-term resident status but have either been admitted and accepted in the territory of a Member State in order to work, reside and work legally in it, or have been admitted to it for reasons other than work (e.g. family reunification) and have subsequently been granted access to the labor market of the Member State in accordance with other provisions of national law.

In particular, the right to equal treatment with nationals granted to third-country nationals holding a single residence permit, subject to the provision of specific derogations or reservations of specific

¹¹ Natlex – International Labour Organization

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=89632

¹² Natlex – International Labour Organization

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=102283

¹³ Directive 2011/98/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011L0098&rid=8>

national legislation, covers the following areas:

- a) **Employment conditions**, including the minimum working age, working conditions, including pay and dismissal, working hours, leave and holidays, and workplace hygiene and safety.
- b) **The right to strike and to take trade union action**, in accordance with national law, the right to associate and to join an organization of workers or employers, or any member of which these organizations, including the right to negotiate and conclude collective agreements, without prejudice to the provisions on public policy and public security.
- c) **Education and vocational training**. The right to equal treatment is granted to third country nationals who work or have worked in the past and are registered as unemployed and does not include study and living allowances and loans or other allowances and loans granted for educational purposes. Regarding access to university and higher education and vocational training not directly related to the specific employment, special conditions apply, including adequate knowledge of the language and payment of tuition fees, in accordance with national law.
- d) **The recognition of diplomas, certificates, and other professional qualifications**; in accordance with the relevant national procedures.
- e) **The social security sectors** as defined in Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 of on the coordination of social security schemes for employed persons, self-employed persons and members of their families moving within the European Union. The competent services may not restrict these rights to third-country workers who have worked or worked for a minimum of six months and are registered as unemployed.
- f) **The tax advantages**, provided that the employee is a resident for tax purposes in the Greek territory. The competent services provide equal treatment in cases where the registered or usual place of residence of the family members of the third country worker for whom benefits are claimed is located within the Greek territory.
- g) **Access to and acquisition of goods and services offered to the public**, including housing procedures in accordance with national law, without prejudice to freedom of contract in accordance with Union and national law. Competent services provide equal treatment to third-country workers who work and may not apply equal treatment regarding access to housing.
- h) **Counseling services** offered by employment agencies. A key element in the process of issuing and renewing residence permits was the replacement of the residence permit in the form of a stand-alone document and the use of biometric data.

At the same time, in 2016, Law 4368/2016¹⁴ and ΚΥΑ Α3(γ)/ΓΠ/οικ. 25132/4-4-2016¹⁵ establish the right of free access to all public health structures for the provision of nursing and medical care in uninsured and vulnerable social groups, including immigrants and applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. The health coverage guaranteed by the new framework is complete and

¹⁴ Natlex – International Labour Organization

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=104200

¹⁵ Κ.Υ.Α. αριθ. Α3(γ)/ ΓΠ/οικ. 25132/ 4.4.2016 Ρυθμίσεις για τη διασφάλιση της πρόσβασης των ανασφάλιστων στο Δημόσιο Σύστημα Υγείας - Κωδικοποιημένα <https://www.taxheaven.gr/circulars/23270/k-y-a-ario-a3g-gp-oik-25132-4-4-2016>

includes their nursing, diagnostic and pharmaceutical coverage.

Additionally, law 4375/2016¹⁶ further strengthens the importance attached to social inclusion issues as the Social Integration Directorate is re-established, which aims to study, plan and implement the integration policy of beneficiaries of international protection and immigrants in the Greek territory. Law 123/2016¹⁷ establishes a Ministry of Migration and Asylum which aims at the administrative, institutional, and symbolic upgrade of the management of immigration, asylum and the promotion of social inclusion.

Law 122/2017¹⁸ establishes the Directorate for the Protection of Asylum Seekers, which has as its strategic goal the implementation of the national policy for the reception of asylum seekers/applicants for international protection, mainly through the design, monitoring and implementation of protection programs, with special emphasis on vulnerable groups.

Lastly, Law 122/2017 establishes the Strategic Planning Council (SSC), a body for consulting on issues of formulation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that compose the mission of the Ministry, in order to promote as fully as possible complex issues to the decisive political leadership.

Legislative framework for asylum

The legal framework governing the establishment, organisation, and operation as well as the implementation of the work of the Asylum Service, consists of the following legislation:

The Asylum Service was established by article 1 of Law 3907/2011 (A'7)¹⁹ and had its operation on June 7, 2013. Currently, the Service is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and operates as an independent service directly subordinated to the Minister. The local competence of the Service extends throughout the territory. The mission of the service is the implementation of the legislation on asylum and other forms of international protection of aliens and stateless persons, as well as the contribution to the design and formulation of the national asylum policy. The Asylum Service is also responsible for enforcing the New York Convention of 28 September 1954 on the Legal Status of Stateless Persons.

The Asylum Service applies the Presidential Decree 141/2013 (Government Gazette A 226-21.10.2013)²⁰ which adapted to national law the recast Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 (L 337)²¹ on the requirements for recognition

¹⁶ Law No. 4375 of 2016 on the organization and operation of the Asylum Service, the Appeals Authority, the Reception and Identification Service, the establishment of the General Secretariat for Reception, the transposition into Greek legislation of the provisions of Directive 2013/32/EC

¹⁷ Προεδρικό Διάταγμα 123/2016 <https://www.lawspot.gr/nomikes-plirofories/nomothesia/proedriko-diatagma-123-2016>

¹⁸ Προεδρικό Διάταγμα 122/2017 - ΦΕΚ 149/A/10-10-2017 (Καταργημένο) <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-allodapoi/proedriko-diatagma-122-2017-fek-149a-10-10-2017.html>

¹⁹ Natlex – International Labour Organization

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=89452&p_country=GRC&p_cou

²⁰ Presidential Decree 141/2013 (State Gazette 226A' /21.10.2013) https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/presidential-decree-1412013-state-gazette-226a-21102013_en

²¹ Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32011L0095>

and status foreigners or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a single regime for refugees and refugee women or for

persons entitled to subsidiary protection and for the content of the protection provided in conjunction with Law 4337/2016²², which transposed into national law the provisions of the recast Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and the Council²³ on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection status, and revised provisions on the work of beneficiaries of international protection and other provisions. By the same law, the Asylum Service was reorganized.

In the context of the implementation of the European legislation for the provision of international protection, the Asylum Service applies the recast Regulation (EU) no. Regulation (EC) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in a Member State by a third-country national or a stateless person and Regulation (EC) No 603/2013²⁴ of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing a "Eurodac" for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective implementation of Regulation (EU) 604/2013²⁵.

Institutional framework that further supports the implementation of the Immigration Policy

Over the last two years, there have been several legislative initiatives that have created a new strengthened institutional framework, which supports, *inter alia*, the pursuit of Immigration Policy. Among them are:

- a) The establishment of the **National Mechanism for Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Inclusion and Social Cohesion Policies** (law 4445/2016²⁶) with its main purposes:
 - To identify the social needs of citizens, to coordinate policy-making social inclusion and cohesion.
 - To monitor and evaluate their implementation, to identify its priorities, to develop social solidarity based on the emergencies, contribute to enhancing information, transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of the social protection system.
 - To document and specify policies and actions based on the cumulative characteristics of individuals at risk of poverty, extreme poverty, and social exclusion.

²² Νόμος 4337/2015, κωδικοποιημένος με τον ΠΝΠ24.12.2015/2015 <https://www.taxheaven.gr/law/4337/2015>

²³ European Union asylum procedures <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/LSU/?uri=celex%3A32013L0032#:~:text=It%20sets%20up%20common%20procedures>

²⁴ Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R0603>

²⁵ Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32013R0604>

²⁶ Law N° 4445 of 2016 on the National Mechanism of Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Social Integration and Social Cohesion Policies, on regulations regarding social solidarity, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=104673

- To plan, supervise and evaluate the institutional framework of the full national implementation of the Social Solidarity Income (paragraph 2.5.3, par. C, article 3 of Law 4336/2015²⁷).
- b) The establishment of the **National Council against Racism and Intolerance** (Law 4356/2015), with the responsibilities:
- Designing policies to prevent and combat racism and intolerance to ensure the protection of individuals and groups targeted by race, color, ethnicity, pedigree, social origin, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation, sex, or gender.
 - Overseeing the implementation of legislation against racism and intolerance and its compliance with international and European law.
 - Promoting and coordinating the action of stakeholders to deal more effectively with the phenomenon, as well as strengthening cooperation with civil society on these issues.
- c) The establishment of the **National Mechanism for the Preparation, Monitoring and Evaluation of Action Plans for the Rights of the Child** (art. 8-12, of Law 4491/2017²⁸), with the following responsibilities:
- The development of National Action Plans for the Rights of the Child, including these baseline reports.
 - The consultation with the Civil Society during the formulation of the Action Plans. The National Mechanism ensures the participation of children in the consultation process (law 4491/2017²⁹, article 10, par. 1.b).
 - The promotion and promotion of the Action Plans.
 - Monitoring the implementation of the Action Plans and the preparation of intermediate ones reports on their implementation.
 - Overseeing the implementation of legislation against racism and intolerance; and its compliance with international and European law.
 - The evaluation of the Action Plans and the degree of their implementation as well as their overall effectiveness.
 - The preparation of each subsequent Action Plan.
- d) The recommendation of the **Government Council for Social Policy** (Act of the Council of Ministers 38 of 2-11-2015 (A'137), as amended by Act of the Council of Ministers 3 of 24-1-2017 (A'8), which is responsible for:
- The elaboration and promotion of the Government's social policy program; and relevant reforms, in cooperation with the relevant ministries.
 - The formulation of policies for social inclusion and social protection.
 - Systematic monitoring and control of the implementation of the Government's social

²⁷ Νόμος 4336/2015 - ΦΕΚ 94/Α/14-8-2015 (Κωδικοποιημένος) <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/suntaksiodotika/n-4336-2015.html>

²⁸ Νόμος 4491/2017 <https://www.lawspot.gr/nomikes-plirofories/nomothesia/nomos-4491-2017>

²⁹ Ibid.

policy program and related reforms.

- Evaluating the results of the promoted policies on the basis of pre-defined objectives, indicators and timetables.
- Examining the financial forecasts and data of the promoted policies and reforms in order to ensure an adequate resource for their continuation.
- The planning of inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral social policy actions, with the co-responsibility of several ministries, as well as the cooperation with other governmental bodies.
- The systematic and structured information of the citizens about the governmental priorities and reforms in the field of social policy.
- The formulation of policies for social inclusion and social protection, upon his suggestion priorities and reforms in the field of social policy.

3. European Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027

As mentioned above, the Local Government Administrations aim to follow the Common Principles of the European Union for social integration in order to identify opportunities for third-country nationals to participate actively in Greek society and get involved in the reception community. Therefore, we can find many sections from the European Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027³⁰ reflected in the Greek National Strategy for Social Integration.

In the document of the Greek National Strategy, we can see many of the points made in the new European Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027. For instance, regarding the principle of “inclusion for all” and “targeted support” stated in the EU Action Plan, we observe that the Greek plan makes constant reference and establishes concrete policies for vulnerable groups such as migrant people, women, (unaccompanied) minors, LGBTQ+ and disabled people, victims of torture-ill-treatment, the elderly, victims of human trafficking, survivors/victims of gender-based violence and other minorities.

Moreover, the Greek National Strategy establishes concrete policies and mechanisms in the sectoral areas described in the European Action Plan, such as education and training, employment and skills, health, housing. Most of these mechanisms and policies have been mentioned in the previous sections. Regarding the actions supporting effective integration and inclusion in all sectoral areas, Greece has followed the European guidelines in the field of building strong partnerships for a more effective integration process (especially among public institutions and administrations) and fostering participation and encounters with the host society (as detailed above).

Additionally, as stated by the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum³¹, Greece takes part in different European integration activities, such as the **European Integration Network of the European**

³⁰ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0758&qid=1632299185798>

³¹ European Policy for Integration https://www.google.com/url?q=https://migration.gov.gr/en/migration-policy/integration/politiki-entaxis-se-eyropaiko-kai-diethnes-epipedo/&sa=D&source=apps-viewer-frontend&ust=1693381464618286&usg=AOvVaw2Dw528P7NldChC_GxWY4Lt&hl=it

Commission. This Network resulted from the 2016 Action Plan on Integration of third-country nationals and met for the first time in October 2016. Greece is represented by the Director of the Directorate of Social Integration. The main responsibilities of the European Network with regards to integration are: providing advice, expertise and services to the E.U. with regards to third-country nationals' integration; informing the E.U. and Member States on integration policy developments at a national level and promoting the collaboration of national, local, and regional authorities with bodies of civil society as well as other networks of E.U. Member States in relevant policy fields such as employment, education and equality.

4. Role of the local authorities and third sector

4.1. Cooperation with local authorities

The Local Government is the main executive mechanism of the integration initiatives. At the same time, it is a co-shaper in the formulation of accession policies, which are supervised and coordinated by the central administration, thus promoting a close, open, and constructive cooperation between the public administrative structures of the state. The Greek National Strategy depends on two fundamental conditions: a) the coordination of policies both at the inter-ministerial level (horizontally) and between the central and decentralized public administration (vertically) and b) cooperation between all actors involved in the field of integration. For the purpose of this research, we will focus on the cooperation and coordination with the local authorities, civil society and third sector.

Coordination of the various levels of government of integration is an equally crucial factor in the implementation of this National Strategy, given that integration takes place at local level. The logic of "decentralization" of integration, gradually and under certain conditions, can lead to a universally participatory model of integration, in which integration becomes a matter for all citizens, immigrants, applicants for international protection and of its beneficiaries.

Following other European models of cooperation between the central and decentralized administration of the country, the municipalities can develop a comprehensive local integration policy, through an Integrated Action Plan, following the lines of action of the National Strategy, based on the mapping of population and their needs, immigrants and asylum applicants and beneficiaries of international protection they host. In the same context, municipalities can be called upon to prioritize their policies and actions, to cost them and to evaluate them.

In the second stage, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum can include in its program for the Asylum, Immigration and Integration Fund actions that will be implemented at local level and prepare invitations addressed to the Local Government, following the example of the European Social Fund funding in the framework of the Regional Operational Programs. With the municipalities that will proceed to an integrated local policy for the integration of the target groups, this Ministry can:

1. Sign cooperation protocols.
2. Set the operation of joint committees for monitoring, evaluation and exchange of data, information, and opinions, involving representatives of competent Ministries that participate in the committees of the central administration.

3. Develop a set of tools to facilitate the design and implementation of local policies and share nationally gained experience and knowledge.
4. Encourage, with the assistance of the Ministry of Interior, the networking between the municipalities that have developed integrated integration policies for the exchange of good practices in other municipalities of the country.
5. Start a regular cooperation with the Central Union of Greek Municipalities (K.E.D.E.) and the Union of Greek Regions (EN.PE.) for integration issues, starting with the notification of the National Strategy and the consultation with the municipalities and regions of the country.
6. Inform municipalities about the financial means they can use to achieve their goals, as well as about the conditions they must meet to access them.

The rationale for co-operation between national and local level on reception and integration issues is to promote a holistic approach within the guidelines and strategic goals of the National Integration Strategy. This policy of cooperation is promoted by the European Union through the Urban Agenda Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees.

4.2. Cooperation with civil society and the third sector

Civil society includes Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), associations and civil society organizations, immigrants and refugees and volunteers. Civil Society has been particularly active during the two years 2015-2016, assisting the State in welcoming and meeting the basic needs of the population that gathered in Greece. To a large extent, it remains active with a significant presence in the field and in the field of reception and "early integration" of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection.

The fact that their action is more noticeable during the aforementioned period does not mean that both the ordinary citizens and the previous years did not have an active participation in the reception and integration of immigrants. However, cooperation between the public sector and civil society has so far been fragmented between the Ministries responsible for integration of NGOs in some areas, and also due to the asymmetric geographical distribution.

In this context, the Ministry has established since 2016 the National Register of NGOs working on immigration, asylum and integration which aims to record all the organizations active in these sectors, their spatial (and sector/action-level) distribution as well as their sources of funding, given that the EU (through DG ECHO) directly finances some of them and that, during the last three years, the presence of foreign NGOs in Greek territory has increased significantly. The ultimate purpose of recording and mapping is to certify those who have not already been certified by other government agencies and, mainly, to cooperate, monitor and coordinate them to serve national objectives, including those of the National Integration Strategy.

This cooperation starts with the announcement of the National Strategy and the open exchange of views and can continue with the conduct of a regular dialogue with the most active NGOs. in the field of integration, as well as with the Associations and Communities of immigrants and beneficiaries of international protection.

The cooperation with the associations, organizations and the communities of immigrants and refugees is designed to move in the same direction: the information about their problems and needs in the field of integration and the expression of their views for their treatment by the Ministry and supporting associations and organizations so that they can access national and European funding for the implementation of integration programs at both national and local level, in cooperation with the Local Government.

In any case, cooperation with civil society is essential as it is an important (and highly flexible) body for implementing integration policy actions, considering that migrants themselves and beneficiaries of international protection of their representatives are entitled and must have a say in the process of their integration into Greek society.

5. Main tendencies in public policies related to the Integration Strategy for Migrants

In 2020, 15,696 refugees and migrants arrived in Greece. This marks a decrease of 78.9% compared to 2019 (74,649 arrivals). From those, a total of 9,714 persons arrived in Greece by sea in 2020, compared to 59,726 in 2019³². The majority originated from Afghanistan (35.2%), Syria (27.7%) and DRC (10.3%). More than half of the population were women (23.3%) and children (35.5%), while 41.2% were adult men. Moreover, 5,982 persons arrived in Greece through the Greek-Turkish land border of Evros in 2020, compared to a total of 14,887 in 2019. Nevertheless, the figure of entries in 2020 may under-represent the number of people attempting to enter Greece, given that cases of alleged pushbacks at the Greek-Turkish border and at the Aegean Sea have been systematically reported in 2020. Additionally, the Asylum Service received 40,559 asylum applications in 2020 (47.52% decrease compared to 2019). Afghans were the largest group of applicants with 11,514 applications, followed by Syrians with 7,768 applications.

After the July 2019 elections, the new government led by New Democracy announced a more punitive policy on asylum, with a view to reduce the number of people arriving, increase the number of returns to Turkey and strengthen border control measures³³.

Following the elections, the Ministry of Migration Policy has been repealed and subsumed to the Ministry of Citizens Protection. In January 2020, however, the Ministry for Migration and Asylum was re-established.

A new law on asylum was issued in November 2019 (Law 4636/2019³⁴) and was repeatedly criticised by national and international human rights bodies including the Greek Ombudsman, the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR), UNHCR and civil society organisations, accused of being an attempt to lower protection standards and create unwarranted procedural and substantive hurdles for people seeking international protection. According to UNHCR, the new law reduces safeguards for people seeking international protection and creates additional pressure on

³² Operational Data Portal – Refugee Situations <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>

³³ Overview of the main changes since the previous report update https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/overview-main-changes-previous-report-update/#_ftn1

³⁴ Νόμος 4686/2020 <https://www.taxheaven.gr/law/4686/2020>

the overstretched capacity of administrative and judicial authorities. “The proposed changes will endanger people who need international protection [...] [the law] puts an excessive burden on asylum seekers and focuses on punitive measures. It introduces tough requirements that an asylum seeker could not reasonably be expected to fulfil” [...] “As a result, asylum seekers may be easily excluded from the process without having their international protection needs adequately assessed. This may expose them to the risk of refoulement”.

After an increasing number of cases of alleged pushbacks at the Greek-Turkish border of Evros during the previous years, allegations of pushbacks were also reported during 2020. Different international and national organizations like UNHCR, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the UN Committee against Torture, the Greek National Commission on Human Rights and civil society organisations have reported persisting practices of alleged pushbacks, both at the land borders with Turkey and in the Aegean Sea. In June 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees invited Greece to investigate the numerous complaints for illegal refoulement operations in the land and sea borders of the country: “UNHCR has continuously addressed its concerns with the Greek government and has called for urgent inquiries into a series of alleged incidents reported in media, many of which corroborated by non-governmental organisations and direct testimonies. Such allegations have increased since March and reports indicate that several groups of people may have been summarily returned after reaching Greek territory”³⁵.

6. Main ideological changes experienced in the last years

Greece is a Parliamentary Republic, where the President (currently, Katerina Sakellariopoulou), elected by Parliament every five years, is Head of State and the Prime Minister (currently, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, from the party New Democracy) is Head of Government. The Ministerial Council, consisting of the Prime Minister, Ministers, Deputy Ministers, and Ministers without portfolio, is the collective decision-making body that constitutes the Government of Greece. Legislative power is exercised by Parliament and the President of the Republic. Executive power is exercised by the President of the Republic and the Government. Judicial power is vested in the courts of law. General elections are normally held every four years unless the Parliament is dissolved earlier.

In the early 21st century the major political parties included New Democracy (Nea Dimokratia; ND), the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima; PASOK), Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left), and the Communist Party of Greece (Kommunistiko Komma Elladas; KKE). New Democracy, founded by the veteran conservative politician Konstantinos Karamanlis, consistently supported “neoliberal” policies that aimed at limiting the power of the state and encouraging private initiatives and market economics. The PASOK retained a strong commitment to an independent foreign policy and a modified form of socialism³⁶.

In January 2015, Greece elected a government with a clear anti-austerity mandate, consisting of a

³⁵ UNHCR calls on Greece to investigate pushbacks at sea and land borders with Turkey

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-calls-greece-investigate-pushbacks-sea-and-land-borders-turkey>

³⁶ Greece – Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/place/Greece/Local-government>

radical left-radical right coalition between Syriza and Anel. New Democracy came second with just over 27.8% of the vote. As Halikiopoulou states in her article “Economic Crisis, Poor Governance and the Rise of Populism: The Case of Greece”³⁷, the result was a landslide for Syriza, which attracted broad support from voters who punished mainstream parties – especially Pasok – for their failure to manage the effects of the crisis. Support for the party soared from 4.6% in 2009 to 26.9% in June 2012, and 36.3% in 2015. Syriza won the election on a left-wing populist narrative that attributed blame to outside exploitative powers and their collaborators and sought to restore sovereignty back to the Greek people. Anel, an offshoot of New Democracy, received 4.8% of the vote by also campaigning on a populist platform.

As Halikiopoulou analyzes in her article, the rise of Syriza and Anel was indicative of the rise of a type of populism in Greece that was adopted by most parties in the system in an attempt to divert political accountability through populist blame-shifting. While populist parties were divided on key social issues, including religion and immigration – for example, the Macedonian question, Cyprus, and Greece’s relationship with Turkey – they still shared a nationalist rhetoric of liberation, restoration of national sovereignty, a strong rejection of external involvement and resistance to foreign domination.

As happened in other European countries during the last decade, Greece did experience an increase in the support of far-right values and policies by the population, which has been especially problematic for the vulnerable groups and minorities about whom we have discussed in the previous sections of this research. One of the most significant and recent issues regarding the far-right movement in Greece happened in October 2020, when the Golden Dawn’s neo-Nazi leaders, including the party’s self-styled ‘Führer’, Nikos Michaloliakos, were imprisoned after being handed lengthy jail terms following a historic five-year trial hailed as a pivotal point in Greek political history³⁸.

³⁷ Halikiopoulou, D. (2020). Economic Crisis, Poor Governance and the Rise of Populism: The Case of Greece. Forum. 55:34-37. <https://www.intereconomics.eu/contents/year/2020/number/1/article/economic-crisis-poor-governance-and-the-rise-of-populism-the-case-of-greece.html>

³⁸ Smith, H. (2021, October 25). ‘This is their time’: post-Golden Dawn, is the far right reviving in Greece?. *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/25/this-is-their-time-post-golden-dawn-is-the-far-right-reviving-in-greece>

Section II. Literature Analysis

Status Quo Ante and Status Quo

Greece is an immigration country. To be more accurate, the country is, to a large extent, a transit country on the route of the Balkans, Africa, and Western Asia to reach Western Europe (Triandafyllidou and Mantanika, 2016). The European Commission estimates that more than 850.000 persons transited through the country in 2015, and 63.000 of them are stranded in Greece (European Commission, 2016). As the frontier of immigration, waves are the first “step and hope” for refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants to enter Europe. The third and most recent immigration flow that Greece experienced and continues to do so was after the economic crisis in 2010³⁹. However, the flows have been stabilised since the closure of the Balkan Route and the EU-Turkish agreement in March 2016. However, due to the recent events of the Ukrainian Crisis, Europe, including Greece, faces another refugee/immigration challenge. Greece was unprepared in 2015 when it became the primary entry point for more than 1 million people seeking protection in the European Union (EU). Since 2020, the number of new arrivals, pending applications, and people in camps has dropped significantly. The Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA) claims these figures indicate it has “regained control” of the situation⁴⁰. However, the situation may not be so regained and controllable as it may be presented as the main challenge lays not only in the reception but the integration of the migrant population that stays in Greece. In numbers, although 2021, according to the UN, has been recorded as the lowest level since⁴¹ the start of the refugee crisis in the Aegean some nine years ago, there are at least 50,000 refugees, most of whom are going to or have no other choice than remaining in Greece.

1. The main scientific debates on the topic of measures and services focused on migrants’ integration in Greece

Greece started in 2015 with a nascent Asylum Service and no reception capacity, which left people waiting for asylum decisions for months or years in inhumane conditions. The vast, pathogenic bureaucratic, economic, and social systems only worsen the situation. *Asylum-seekers and refugees themselves, in Greece or having crossed it, have been vocal about their experience, from poor living standards and arbitrary detention to excessively long procedures and uncertainty. Separately, and for diverse reasons, the European Commission and the other EU Member States, including those supporting a restrictive approach to asylum, have also criticised the conditions in Greece.* The economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the anti-symmetrical successive governments, and the corruption shaped a challenging, complex, and dysfunctional management approach to the problem in all its stages.

³⁹ Panayotatos, D. (2022, February 24). The Fallacy of Control: Tightened Asylum and Reception Policies Undermine Protection in Greece. *Refugees International* [https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/the-fallacy-of-control-tightened-asylum-and-reception-policies-undermine-protection-in-greece/#:~:text=Greece%27s%20International%20Protection%20Act%20\(IPA,claims%2C%20resulting](https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/the-fallacy-of-control-tightened-asylum-and-reception-policies-undermine-protection-in-greece/#:~:text=Greece%27s%20International%20Protection%20Act%20(IPA,claims%2C%20resulting)

⁴⁰ Νότης Μηταράκης: “Αποκαθιστούμε την εικόνα της Πολιτείας στα μάτια των τοπικών κοινωνιών”. (2021, December 16). Press Office, Press Release. <https://migration.gov.gr/en/notis-mitarakis-apokathistoyme-tin-eikona-tis-politeias-sta-matia-ton-topikon-koinonion/>

⁴¹ Papageorgopoulos, S. (2021). Asylum in Greece: A Situation Beyond Judicial Control? <https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ECRE-Legal-Note-9-on-Asylum-in-Greece-A-Situation-Beyond-Judicial-Control-June-2021.pdf>

They portrayed refugee reception as a temporary challenge, not considering the inhumane circumstances that these people and the local communities were facing but not even the integration procedures and needs. For instance, in terms of integrating migrant, and refugee children into the Greek educational system were really challenging back in 2015 because educators were not trained⁴⁴, and local communities were “aggressive” towards this integration. Seven years have passed, and the landscape has been improved. A ground for the integration capacity has been settled; however, the situation still needs to be evaluated. A better evaluation system is required as the most active on the domain report. On both the islands and mainland, asylum seekers remain confined in increasingly restrictive and securitised settings, marginalised instead of welcomed. The government narrowly delimits displaced people’s access to aid and stymies civil society efforts to help. The ones that have left the camp still face many problems studying, finding a job, being a part of the community etc. Although in 2020, Greece announced it would build new facilities with \$276 million in EU grants, the question and the debate remain on how the management, evaluation and connection with the local communities will be mended. Triggering more conversation on replacing the camp model with a decentralised, community-based reception and accommodation system while locals from the areas most weighted from the flows make strikes and protest against the construction of new facilities.

However, along with the grant, The Operating Plan⁴² was agreed upon by the European Union Agency of Asylum (EASO) and Greece on 17 December 2020, for a duration of one year to offer technical and operational assistance to Greece from 01 January until 31 December 2021.

As the experts suggest, the newly arrived assistance should focus on establishing a more systematic monitoring model and applying lessons to the involved ones. Also, high priority should be on increasing the capacity and ensuring access to special protections and help for marginalised groups. Last but not least, a topic that all sides would agree on that is critical in the resolution of many problems, from the reception to the integration, is fostering a more constructive operating environment for all stakeholders. EASO will provide technical support to experts participating in this Plan with the aim of ensuring that all deliverables make good use of the expertise and information already available to EASO. EASO implements a structured Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) methodology allowing evidence-based measurement of progress, corrective action taking and reflective reviews.

2. Problems, and obstacles faced by the target group migrants in the access to services in your country (material, physical, social, ideological obstacles)

2.1. Reception: Healthcare and Accommodation Conditions

The living conditions in reception and identification centres (RICs), especially in Moria on Lesbos and Vathi on Samos, are dramatically below any international standards. Overcrowding coupled with a shortage of staff is the major issue hampering the delivery of services. PHC is provided by the

⁴² Operating Plan agreed by EASO and Greece
https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/20201211_Greece_OperatingPlan_FINAL.pdf

Emergency Health Response to Refugee Crisis (PHILOS I and II) programme with the support of the Hellenic Army and several national and international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). However, the capacity to properly deliver health services is severely challenged.

2.2. Language Barrier and Employability

There are not enough teachers trained to teach Greek as a foreign language. That can be one of the main problems for someone's integration into the Greek community and labour market⁴³. Additionally, because Greece is usually a transit country, most people hoping to move further in Europe do not have the motivation to learn and participate.

2.3. Locals Opposition

Although many locals are accommodating and willing to help the vulnerable groups, there is a portion of local populations, especially the ones in the most weighted areas, which because of the poor management both for the migrants and the locals' living conditions, oppose the construction of more camps⁴⁴. On the other hand, in different areas that were chosen for migrants and refugees to be replaced as a plan of equal distribution, locals also oppose it for the same reasons. This opposition can also be spotted in schools making even more demanding the integration of migrant, refugee children in the Greek Educational System.

2.4. Healthcare

Access to the health care system⁴⁵ can be challenging without the needed papers⁴⁶. Additionally, for the ones in the camps, the health care system lays in the hands of the organisations having access there⁴⁷. Survey data on 267 adult asylum seekers at Greek refugee camps in 2016 estimated determinants for unmet medical needs in Greece. The most prevalent reported NCDs in Greece were back or neck pain (26.6 per cent) and severe headache (24.7 per cent). The prevalence of most NCDs (Non-communicable Diseases) in the migration phases followed decreased during migration and increased after migration to Greece; thus, new cases of NCDs after arrival in Greece made up the vast majority of all cases. Reportedly medical-care needs were 41.3 per cent, with one NCD after arrival in Greece. Compared with young adults, adults aged 51+ years were in an increased risk of reporting unmet medical needs in Greece. However, this kind of awareness of the situation and the needs of the migrants is not consistent and available in or outside the camps. For unaccompanied minors, specifically medical support, and psycho-social assistance: payment for medical treatment and prescriptions and psychological counselling to address any pre- or post-arrival trauma the minor

⁴³ Greek Council for Refugees. (2023, June 6). Access to the labour market <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/reception-conditions/employment-and-education/access-labour-market/>

⁴⁴ Συλλαλητήρια με μικρή συμμετοχή σε Λέσβο και Χίο κατά των νέων δομών μεταναστών (2022, February 23) <https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/1215141/sullalithiria-me-mikri-symmetochi-se-lesvo-kai-hio-kata-ton-neon-domon-metanaston/>

⁴⁵ Access To Healthcare. UNHCR. <https://help.unhcr.org/greece/living-in-greece/access-to-healthcare/#:~:text=Access%20to%20healthcare%20services%20for,secondary%20and%20tertiary>

⁴⁶ Greece: assessing health systems capacity to manage large influx of refugees and migrants in an evolving context. World Health Organization <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/337563/9789289055093-eng.pdf>

⁴⁷ Jeverlund et al. (2019). Non-communicable Diseases among Refugee Claimants in Greek Refugee Camps: Are Their Health-care Needs Met? Journal of Refugee Studies. 32:36-51 https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/32/Special_Issue_1/i36/5688810?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false

had experienced are available along with community assistance. The last one can be considered part of the individual reintegration plan if it positively impacts the reintegration conditions of the child. However, in general, the target population relies most of the time on the initiatives of other non-governmental stakeholders.

3. The main approach to migrants' integration

The ESTIA (Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation)⁴⁸ project is one of the pillars of immigration reception and integration in Greece. It was initially managed by UNHCR and funded by the EU. Numerous NGOs implement it as the main actors in both procedures. The project is divided into two parts:

1. ESTIA Accommodation Component provides asylum seekers with a natural home in apartments or hotels located in numerous cities. As a result, 73.000 people have been housed in 16 cities and seven islands.
2. ESTIA Cash Assistance: in the process of integration and inclusion, it is undoubtedly necessary to provide financial support to face the daily expenses.

Thus, via ESTIA project, asylum seekers directly have a cash share to manage their funds according to individual priorities independently. The project is crucial for the lives of many refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers and their first step to a form of “normality” because they are allowed to live in an apartment, with their family in the local community, near the market, the school, the hospital etc. However, in May 2021, the management, and cash assistance of the ESTIA Accommodation Component passed from UNHCR to the Migration Ministry of the Greek government. Since then, apartments' number of available places has drawn an abrupt fall. There has been a lack of food and many difficulties affecting all the aspects of the target group integrations to the local community. To link the ESTIA project's impact in all domains, including employability, the following abstract from the Greek Council for Refugees sheds light on it: *“Since Greece to the end of 2019, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants had access to the labour market as employees or service or work providers from the moment an asylum application had been formally lodged. They had obtained an asylum seekers card.] Applicants who had not yet completed the entire registration and lodged their application (i.e., applicants who were pre-registered), did not have access to the labour market. The average period between pre-registration and complete registration across mainland Greece (registration via Skype) was 44 days in 2019. Following the entry into force of the IPA on 1 of January 2020, a 6-month time limit for asylum seekers' access to the labour market has been introduced. Difficulties in accessing the labour market have been more marked for applicants residing in open mainland camps and/or informal accommodation. As of the end of 2020, less than 33% of the resident adult population had managed to obtain an AFM (Greek Tax Number), and even fewer of the residents above 15 years of age had managed to get an unemployment card from OAED (the public service for unemployment in Greece) (10.57%). Moreover, as opposed to the previous year, the situation reported for those residing in accommodation under the ESTIA II scheme in 2020, did not significantly differ compared to residents of the camps, potentially on account of the pandemic and*

⁴⁸ Menegus, G. (2022, February 18). The ESTIA Program is a glimmer of hope, but it's fading away <https://openculturalcenter.org/the-estia-program-is-a-glimmer-of-hope-but-its-fading-away/>

concomitant measures that impacted on the renewal of documents. As of 28 December 2020, only 33% of eligible ESTIA II residents had managed to obtain an AFM, and 13% had been registered with OAED. The challenges were more pronounced for applicants (AFM: 28%; OAED: 11%), compared to beneficiaries of international protection (AFM: 43%, OAED: 20%)⁴⁹.

Apart from the empowerment that the ESTIA project provides holistically, the employability and training of refugees are dependent on the NGOs and other stakeholders that focus on this domain. In their turn, these stakeholders are dependent on the funds government's support. Considering that in Greece in general, the unemployment rate was last February 11.9%, there are many challenges to insert the Greek Labour market in general and vulnerable groups are even worse.

4. Main ideological positions in the literature

The ideological positions balance around the social contract between the citizens of Greece and the obligations of Greece as a fair state towards human rights. The current government declares, *"We are not against refugees, migrants or people that face real danger. We are against the illegal immigrants."*⁵⁰. However, due to poor long-term management, the succession of asymmetrical governments and the corruption of national and international stakeholders, the conditions for both migrants and citizens, especially in hot spots, are tense. The integration of the newly arrived refugees is one of the biggest challenges that the Greek society is facing and still learning. The Greek society that is still recovering from the economic crisis and the COVID-19 are factors that challenge the community to be more flexible in the refugee crisis. The communication barrier is one of the most important ones on the government's side due to COVID-19 and the acceleration of digitalization; the migrant and refugees can find all the information in 18 languages. On the other hand, the lack of specialised teachers to teach Greek as a second language and the consistent institutional help on the topic make it difficult for the target group and the host community to communicate. Another critical problem is the access and information of the target group to public services; thus, there is difficulty in building a functional state -citizen relationship.

Social cohesion, connections and cultural sensitivity are key factors for the integration of the target group since integration at the end of the day has to do with respect and tolerance.⁵¹ Refugees and migrants are often treated with discrimination and prejudice of the host community based on their culture and religion. Especially the ones physically isolated from cities in a camp with the same monotonous routine every day causes social isolation and psychological problems. Family reunification, community bonding, mental health support and cultural education can be the keys. However, this can be difficult even for experts that offer these services and have the resources to access the camps, or the vulnerable target groups is even more challenging from a policy perspective.

Greece, like other transit countries, seems to have low-quality governmental integration. However, many NGOs, STEMs, organisations, and other stakeholders are willing with the right collective plan

⁴⁹ Νότης Μηταράκης: "Αποκαθιστούμε την εικόνα της Πολιτείας στα μάτια των τοπικών κοινωνιών". (2021, December 16). Press Office, Press Release. <https://migration.gov.gr/en/notis-mitarakis-apokathistoyme-tin-eikona-tis-politeias-sta-matia-ton-topikon-koinonion/>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Kanaris, G. (2017, May 9). Refugee Crisis and Integration. *Solidarity Now* https://www.solidaritynow.org/en/integration_article/

and already offer their service despite the challenges. Ideas for better integration need to involve refugees themselves and local communities so they feel a sense of ownership, and all cooperate for the community.

5. Types of governance between vertical and horizontal approaches

The succession of governments with asymmetrical measures on migrant integration has brought instability and delay to the measures that should have been implemented all these years in Greece. The few examples of the limited success of refugee integration, remain an exception to the general rule and are primarily driven by the engagement of local authorities and NGOs. The current Greek government since, 2019, has tried to activate both in reception and integration a balanced strategy between securitisation and human rights. However, in the integration part, especially, procedures are slow and not well-instrumented. All the stakeholders to work together, and all the human and material resources to be used properly. “However, what the new government tends almost entirely to neglect so far is the integration of both the recently arrived refugees/asylum seekers and the rest of the immigrants legally residing in the country.” (Tihomir Sabchev, City of Refuge Research)

In all the areas of integration, the main initiatives and actions seem to be through non-governmental and local initiatives. On a governmental level, the administration tries to reach and make instrumentation of the system through funding from the EU or governmental resources and new strategies from external sources like the European Union Agency of Asylum Operation Plan. Similar strategies and operations have also been implemented in Education and Employability from the relevant ministries in cooperation with European Institutions. Most of these strategic plans appear to have as a core objective the development of standard operating procedures for assisted voluntary return and evaluation systems to be available to the Greek State to enhance its efforts.

6. Examples of relevant actions/programs (potential good practices) already implemented in the local/city context adopting an interconnected approach to migrants’ integration

ACCMR⁵²

Especially in Athens Coordinator Center for Migrants and Refugee issues, the network gathers and maps all the local initiatives, good practices, and services offered to the target population in all the domains. It works as a coordination hub for the fruitful exchange of good practices and know-how between local and international NGOs, international organizations and municipal bodies on issues ranging from temporary accommodation to integration of newcomers. The main goal of ACCMR is the efficient coordination between the municipal authorities and stakeholders operating within the city in order to shape the necessary conditions for the smooth integration of migrants and refugees currently living in Athens, promote social coherence and deal with emergencies linked with future migration flows.

⁵² <https://www.accmr.gr/en/>

CNI⁵³

To an extent, there is also the Cities Network for Integration inter-municipal network of Greek municipalities working together to organize and implement coordinated activities and interventions at the local and national level, promoting the social integration of migrants and refugees and strengthening social cohesion. Both actors run websites available in Greek and English, aiming at institutional representatives, policymakers, civil society organizations, professionals working in the field of support and protection of vulnerable groups, as well as the general audience. The social facilities, services, and programs can also be found supporting and empowering migrants and refugees in each municipality.

6.1. Employability

The career week “WELCOME”, is an event organised at the initiative of the Employability & Livelihoods Committee of the City of Athens Coordination Center for Migrant & Refugee issues (ACCMR), the participation of its member – organisations and the support of IOM under HELIOS program. The initiative aims to create a channel of communication between the private sector and candidates from a migrant or refugee background and enhance their equal access to the labour market, but without excluding the participation of the local population. More specifically, through the *job interviews* in Athens and Thessaloniki, the participating companies will have the opportunity to meet with potential employees with expertise in different fields and explore further cooperation. In addition, within the framework of the career week, a *digital conference* is held in Athens with the participation of key organisations to offer essential information about the employment prospects in the field of Hospitality.

6.2. Social Cohesion: Housing and Urban Life in Athens

A Guide for current and prospective tenants living in the city of Athens.⁵⁴

Catholic Relief Services designed the Guide in the framework of Curing the Limbo, which has tested an innovative model of affordable housing in Athens through its Housing Facilitation Unit based in the Serafio building. The Guide is the product of a series of workshops offered to participants from 2019–to 2020.

6.3. Capacity Building

The rationale behind refugee integration is to strengthen their skills, obtain language proficiency, and get involved in different forms of creative expression. The Capacity Building Lab⁵⁵ based at Serafio of the City of Athens hosts empowering workshops under the academic and research supervision of the teaching staff of the University of Athens.

The Capacity Building Lab will provide:

⁵³ <https://www.cnigreece.gr/en/news/>

⁵⁴ Curing the Limbo <https://curingthelimbo.gr/athens-urban-living>

⁵⁵ Capacity Building Lab – Curing the Limbo <https://curingthelimbo.gr/capacity-building-lab-en>

- Greek learning courses as a second language, on different proficiency levels, using innovative teaching methods, such as experiential learning, problem-based learning, and literacy development.
- English learning courses
- Beginners and advanced ICT courses aiming to promote communication skills and create professional opportunities.
- Audiovisual expression and creativity workshops (photography, animation, creative recording, video art, digital art etc.) enhance participants' true potential, cultivate their creativity and co-working skills, and help them express themselves emotionally.
- Workshops for cultural mediators will act as ambassadors, bringing together refugees and local communities.

6.4. Healthcare

Babel Day Centre⁶² has provided mental health services to migrants (individuals, families, children, adolescents, and groups since 2007 in Athens, Greece and instead in Kipseli, maybe the most multicultural neighbourhood of the city. Babel's primary mission is the mental healthcare of migrants (regardless of their legal or residence status) living in Athens and distinguished with the triple scheme of the migrant or refugee condition, a different ethnocultural background, and mental disorder experience. Babel endeavours to create a home (including assistance for material conditions) where people can be heard, understood, and supported as individuals, as a couple, family, or group with a mental health request. Within that home, every person can retain or make their meaning for the loss of the original house and the expectations for a new personal, family, or social life.