

# MOBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT OF REFUGEE POPULATIONS IN THE GREEK REGION

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AMA</b>	Security Registration Number
<b>AMKA</b>	Social Security Registration Number
<b>ANKA</b>	Development Agency of Karditsa
<b>AFM/ ΑΦΜ</b>	Tax Identification Number
<b>GSEVEE/ ΓΣΕΒΕΕ</b>	The Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants
<b>GSEE/ ΓΣΕΕ</b>	General Confederation of Greek Workers
<b>ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ/ ΕΛΙΑΜΕΡ</b>	Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy
<b>ESEE/ ΕΣΕΕ</b>	Hellenic Confederation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship
<b>ΕΝΠΕ/ΕΝΠΕ</b>	Association of Greek Regions
<b>ΕΣΡ/ ΕΣΡ</b>	Greek Council for Refugees
<b>ΕΦΚΑ/ ΕΦΚΑ</b>	Unified Social Security Fund
<b>ΙΝΕ/ΓΣΕΕ, ΙΝΕ/ΓΣΕΕ</b>	Labour Institute/ General Confederation of Greek Workers
<b>ΜΚΟ/NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>ΟΑΕΔ/ ΟΑΕΔ</b>	Manpower Employment Organization
<b>ΡΑΑΥΡΑ/ ΠΑΑΥΠΑ</b>	Foreigner's Temporary Insurance and Health Coverage Number
<b>ΡΟΧ/ ΠΟΞ</b>	Hellenic Hoteliers Federation
<b>ΣΕΒ/ ΣΕΒ</b>	Hellenic Federation of Enterprises
<b>ΣΕΜ/ ΣΕΜ</b>	Migrant Integration Council
<b>ΣΕΜΡ/ ΣΕΜΡ</b>	Migrant and Refugee Integration Council
<b>ΣΕΤΕ/ ΣΕΤΕ</b>	Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises
<b>ΑCCMR</b>	Athens Coordination Center for Refugee & Migrant issues
<b>CEEP</b>	Central Europe Energy Partners
<b>ETUC</b>	European Trade Union Confederation
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>RLS</b>	Rosa Luxembourg Shtiftung
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>UNCHR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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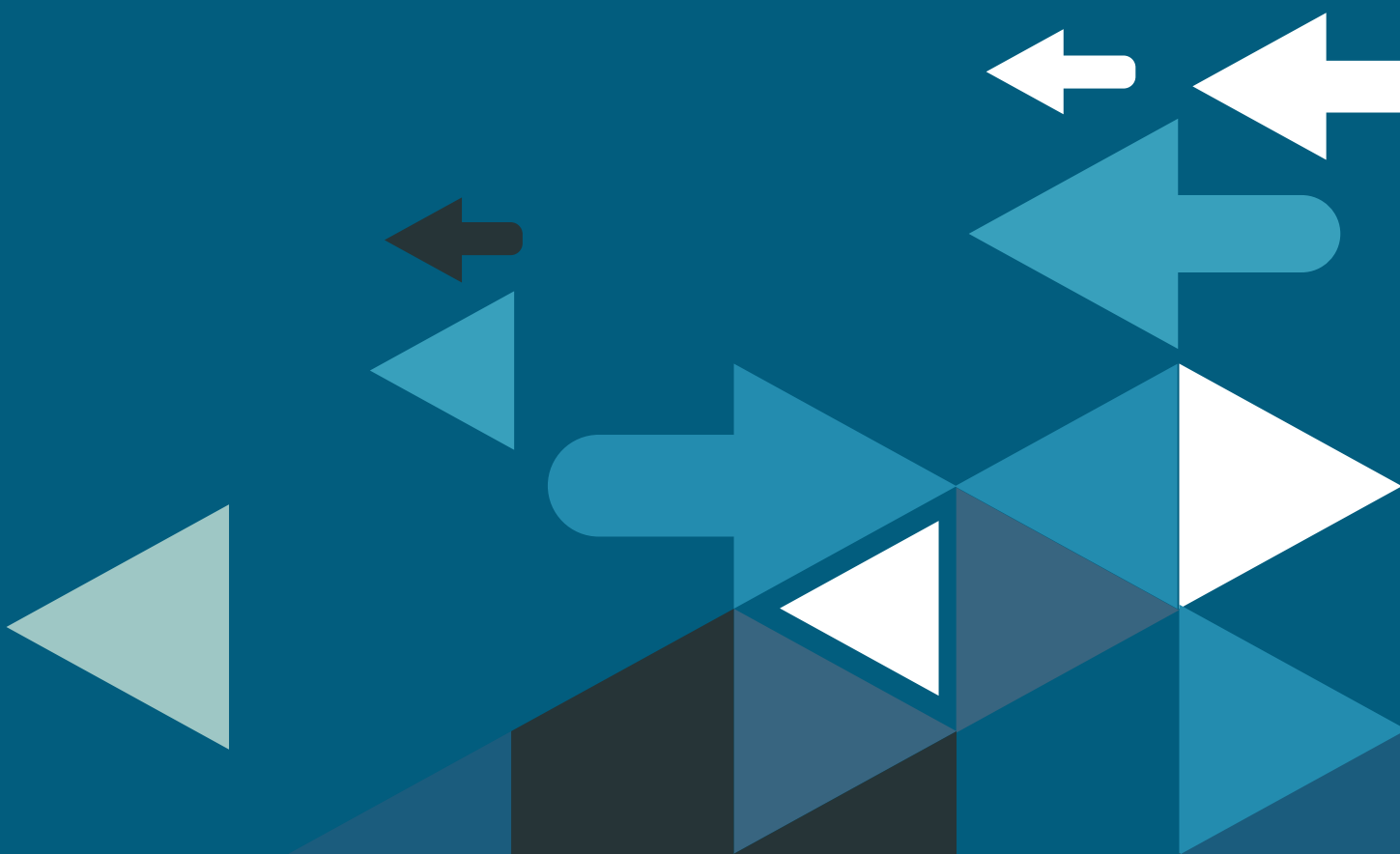
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# INTRODUCTION



The inclusion of migrant populations in the labor market is probably the most significant parameter for their integration into the host society. Authors like Hansen (2012) point out that emphasis should be given to the employment factor rather than the cultural as the basis of European migration policy, whereas the failure of all migration policies of Western Europe stems in their inadequacy to guarantee access to sustainable employment for migrant populations.

Conversely, full inclusion of migrants in the labor market could yield significant economic benefits, such as tax revenues, social security contributions and improve the national welfare in general (European Commission, 2020). Although the management of arrivals of asylum seekers is a short-term priority, it is necessary to develop a mid-term strategy at a local level to facilitate migrants' integration as inaccessible real estate markets and social housing shortages may not only limit their chances to find suitable accommodation but also those to integrate into the labor market in general (European Commission, 2016).

At a first stage, reception, housing and providing food to asylum applicants and migrants emerge as top priority needs, particularly when it comes to increased humanitarian migrant flows, similar to those in summer 2015 or spring 2022 in Europe, with populations from Syria, Afghanistan or Ukraine respectively. However, the employment of migrant populations subsequently becomes a major challenge both for themselves and for the communities they settle in, regardless of whether the initial causes of their migration were of “economic” character or not.

The migrant inclusion process inside host countries follows diverging geographical paths. Usually, a gradual move is observed from border areas and hotspots or accommodation facilities at suburban areas towards the residential areas, mostly within large urban centers, such as the capital and its surrounding areas.

Staying in metropolitan areas offers a sense of security and enhances the prospects of refugees to continue their relocation, considering that the initial country of destination rarely coincides with the country of their first choice or of their current location. In particular with regard to Greece, the impact of a discouraging –if not a deterrent factor for decentralization, that of hosting refugees in hotels on the inland, as manifested mainly in the middle and end of 2019, should also be taken into account. At that time, strong and sometimes organized protests by local bodies and residents were recorded in many areas, such as Kamena Vourla, Vrasna a village of the Volvi Municipality, or Mouries in Kilkis.



The aspiration for more employment opportunities, the feeling of solidarity based on the cohabitation with a large number of persons of the same nationality, sometimes friends or relatives, the direct assistance by NGOs, international organizations and civil society initiatives, as well as channels ensuring mobility towards other European countries are factors that entrap refugees in a state of acquiescent immobility (Schewel 2020; de Haas 2021) in large cities, which is interpreted as a waiting stage and occasionally as a preparation stage for the continuation of the journey. Besides, for refugees, such immobility in the first (European) country of entry entraps them in “waiting zones” within large urban centers, while on one hand it is translated as a kind of stagnation which gradually acquires characteristics of re-mobility, particularly for the purpose of employment (Kapsalis et al. 2021).

On the contrary, the decision to permanently stay in smaller urban areas of the region is likely to relate to a pursuit of more permanent settlement in the host country and often further guarantees a more secure access to sustainable employment and hence to complete social integration of refugees. In the specific case of Greece, the examination of the stay and employment of refugees requires the consideration of three fundamental factors.

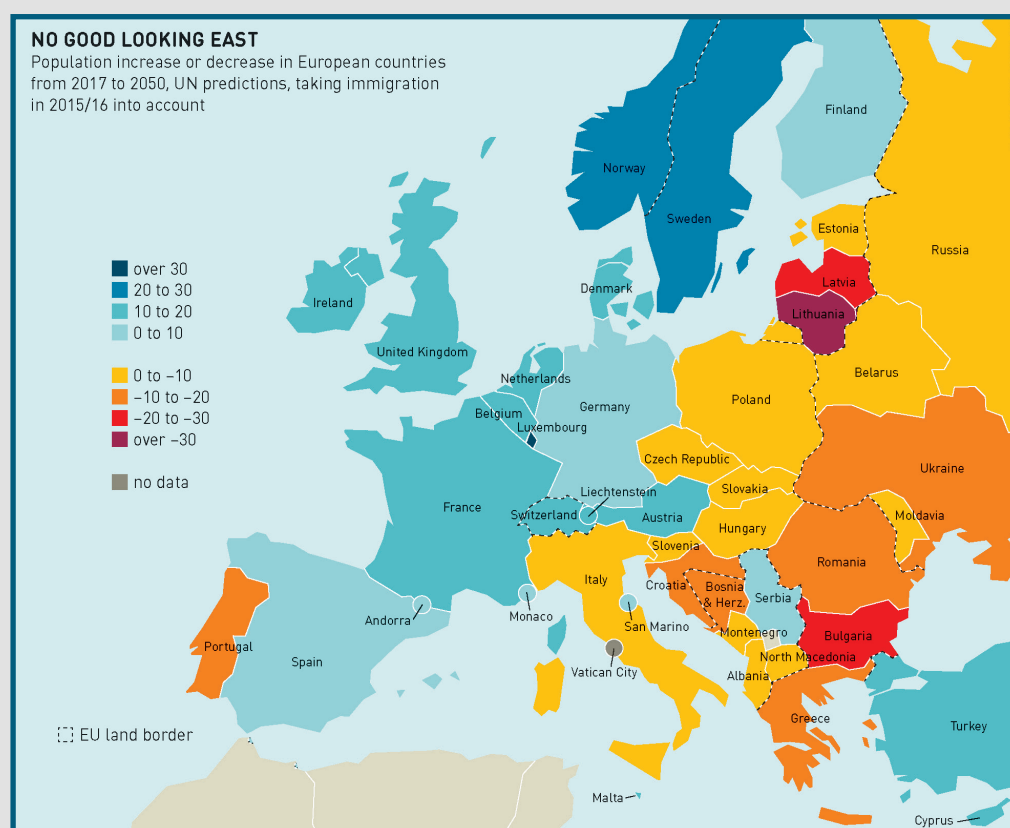
► First, the long tradition of urbanization that began to manifest itself already since the late '50s. Due to this phenomenon, the basic economic activity of the country is largely limited to the capital and only a small number of other large cities. The economic polarization has mainly favored the two large urban centers, Athens and Thessaloniki, which increased their population as compared to the periphery. Specifically, in the period 1961-2001, their population increased by 82% and 93% respectively. Athens attracted 35% of the country's population according to the 2011 census, whereas it is estimated that the actual number may even exceed 40% of the total population and 42% of the urban population. In other words, an overconcentration of the population is observed in an extremely limited part of the total territory, since almost three out of four inhabitants of the country live in one of the two large metropolises (Athens and Thessaloniki) and around ten other large urban centers and their close surroundings (Kotzamanis, 2018).

► Second, the aggravating desertification of the countryside and the general demographic shrinking of Greece in conditions of overlapping crises that the country has been suffering from since 2010. Based on predictions by international organizations, as well as the first findings of the 2021-2022 census, apart from the confirmation of the demographic ageing risk there are strong trends suggesting

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the further reduction of the country's population, from 10% to 20% in total until 2050 (RLS, 2019):

### POPULATION INCREASE OR DECREASE IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES FROM 2017 TO 2050 UN PREDICTIONS, TAKING IMMIGRATION IN 2015/16 INTO ACCOUNT



Picture 1. Πηγή RLS (2019)

In fact, such negative developments apply to almost all areas of the periphery. As it results from the relevant literature (Kotzamanis and Pappas, 2022) the demographic “atony” of our country characterizes, to any extent, the whole of the Greek country and not only parts of it; consequently, in the absence of earthshaking upheavals (a new mass migration wave and, secondarily, containment of youth migration outflows) the Greek population decrease rate shall not be halted. The best-case scenario is that the population of the country shall not exceed ten million in 2050, whereas in the worstcase scenario it will be no more than eight (Kotzamanis et al, 2016).

► Third, the large and rather hard-to-meet labor needs, especially in the regional areas of the country, in all sectors and not only agriculture or food and tourism. The phenomenon has recently dominated public debates and caused intense political conflict<sup>1</sup> on the occasion of the discussion of the bill of the Ministry of Labor entitled *“Jobs Again: Reorganization of the public employment agency and digitalization of its services, reform of the vocational training system and of the labor market needs diagnosis, and further provisions”*.

The discussion focuses on the different approaches of the phenomenon where unemployment rates remain high, despite the employment vacancies established in companies of almost all sectors of the economy<sup>2</sup>. Interviews conducted for this research, have confirmed that in the regional areas of the country the strong and persistent lack of labor is actually trans-sectoral and constitutes a phenomenon of strong interest even for companies that may currently not face serious problems.

...

That said, the examination of the prospects and benefits or obstacles to the safe resettlement of refugees in the countryside in view of employment, and that in the mid-long term, is now of special interest. The waiving of doubt regarding stay and employment in small cities and villages and overcoming the factors that attract refugee populations away from large cities (such as the capital and Thessaloniki in the case of Greece) has been studied sufficiently at an international level, but relevant literature in the case of Greece remains limited.

Therefore, this research focuses on the refugees’ and asylum-seekers’ mobility possibilities in view of permanently resettling in regional areas of the country in the pursuit of sustainable and decent employment. However, taking into account viewpoints of companies, an attempt is made to assess the scope and quality features of previous and current employment of refugees in companies, to locate drawbacks that would cancel or inhibit such prospects in the national economic and social context and to seek ways to overcome the inhibitory factors.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/boyli/339852\\_htypise-tabani-i-antiparathesi-gia-ton-oad-sti-boyli](https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/boyli/339852_htypise-tabani-i-antiparathesi-gia-ton-oad-sti-boyli).

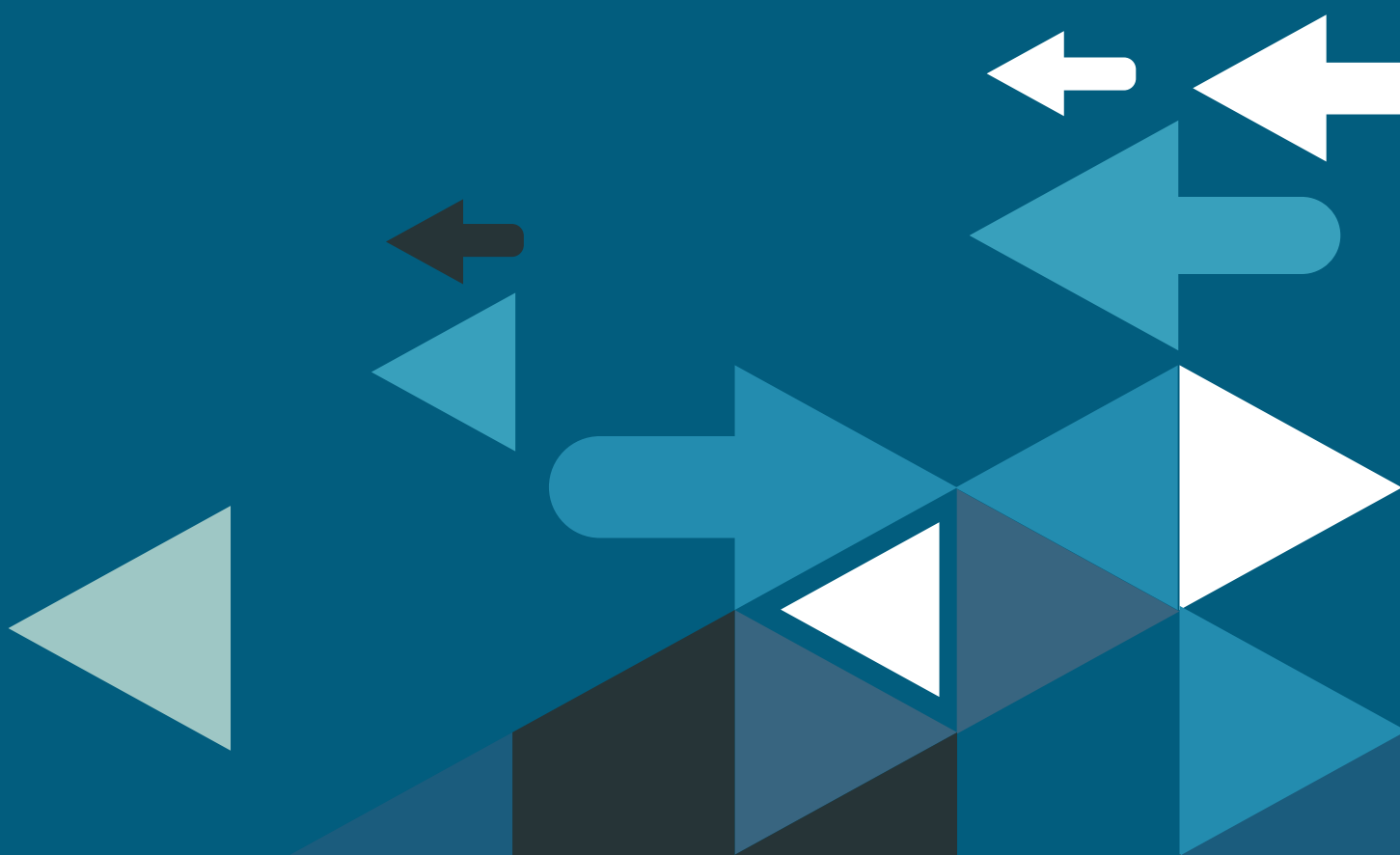
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kathimerini.gr/economy/561831085/perissoteres-kenes-theseis-ergasias-para-ti-meiosi-tis-anergias/> and <https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/561614938/anergoi-choris-doyleia-etaireies-me-kenes-theseis/>.

Specifically in this regard, the feasibility and characteristics of the elaboration and implementation of comprehensive synergy instruments is examined at a local level, by all stakeholders that guarantee the enhancement of sustainability and boost of refugees' employment in regional areas as an effective means of social inclusion.

The ultimate purpose of the research is the presentation of directly applicable policy proposals at the local-central government level, not only because challenges related to the recent periods of migrant flows remain timely, but mainly because there are serious indications of having the phenomenon perpetuated, mainly in Europe and more specifically Greece (Christopoulos, 2020).

The survey is structured as follows: after a summary review of the literature on the subject (chapter 2), the next chapters present the methodology of the survey (chapter 3) and makes an analysis of the results of the 41 interviews taken by company representatives from Crete, Thessaly and Epirus (chapter 4). Finally, before the presentation of the relevant literature (chapter 6), chapter 5 highlights a number of primary conclusions and the formulation of key policy proposals.

# LITERATURE REVIEW



Based on the priorities and the goal of the relevant action, this research is based on three sub-thematic areas, which are the phenomenon of mobility of refugee populations and in particular the decentralization from large urban and metropolitan centers to the periphery (2.1) the employment (2.2) and the issue of synergies and partnerships, especially at local level in matters of integration and, above all, access of refugee populations to employment (2.3).

## 2.1 Mobility and Decentralization

“The current refugee crisis could mark the beginning of a new era, even though it is always likely to mark the end of the European idea,” according to Zimmerman. The free movement of citizens and employees within the EU, as Zimmermann (2017) further clarifies, is a cornerstone of the European integration, whereas free labor mobility serves as a means for better distribution of shrinking human capital within the EU.

Besides, constant mobility of any kind is a structural feature of all modern transnational flows. Permanent, temporary and circular mobility of migrants is a fundamental part of various and/or overlapping socio-spatial mobility schemes of such populations (Papadopoulos and Fratsea, 2021). In cases of intra-EU mobility flows, paradoxically the informal stay status has proved to favor mobility, while legal status “obstructs” it. In Greece, even though entrants after 2010 had no intention to settle in our country but to move to more “attractive” EU countries, part thereof did stay in the country, which resulted in the increase of both foreigner population (+90,000<sup>3</sup>) and their weighting over the totality of the population in the period from 2015 to 2020 (Kotzamanis, 2018).

The trend towards further mobility is manifest, at least at an initial stage, in those settled in the general area of the center (Attica), as shown in a relevant survey<sup>4</sup> that took place in March 2016 (Association of Greek Regions -ENPE, 2016). 65% of the people stated that they did not intent to submit an application for asylum, even if they risked being permanently locked in the country. 68% stated that they wanted to reach Germany and 5.8% wanted to head for Sweden, whereas 64.5% of all participants in

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<sup>3</sup> According to official data from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, in Greece the beneficiaries of international protection (refugees and subsidiary protection status) living in Greece are estimated at about 60,000 and asylum seekers at 35,000.

<sup>4</sup> Field survey among 637 refugees in migrants' reception/accommodation facilities in Attica.

the research selected their final destination either based on the location of relatives or because they considered that in their country of preference the reception of refugees is better organized and the asylum procedure is easier (a total of 31.6%).

The same conclusion, i.e. that recent migrants do not see Greece as a country of final destination, is also reached by another, more recent survey<sup>5</sup> (Leontitsis et al, 2020). The vast majority of recent migrants from Afghanistan (58%) and Syria (65%) intend to move to another European country, usually Germany, Sweden and the UK. Finally, the

## INTENTION TO STAY IN GREECE AND SELECTION OF COUNTRY OF FINAL SETTLEMENT

**Πίνακας 6.1.** Τώρα, στην τρέχουσα κατάσταση σου, σκοπεύεις να παραμείνεις στην Ελλάδα; Εάν όχι, που σκοπεύεις να πας;

	ΣΥΝΟΛΟ	ΑΦΓΑΝΙΚΗ ΥΠΗΚΟΟΤΗΤΑ Ή ΚΑΤΑΓΩΓΗ	ΑΛΒΑΝΙΚΗ ΥΠΗΚΟΟΤΗΤΑ Ή ΚΑΤΑΓΩΓΗ	ΓΕΩΡΓΙΑΝΗ ΥΠΗΚΟΟΤΗΤΑ Ή ΚΑΤΑΓΩΓΗ	ΣΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΥΠΗΚΟΟΤΗΤΑ Ή ΚΑΤΑΓΩΓΗ	ΝΕΟΙ ΜΕΤΑΝΑΣΤΕΣ (0-4 ΧΡΟΝΙΑ)	ΠΑΛΙΟΙ ΜΕΤΑΝΑΣΤΕΣ (5+ ΧΡΟΝΙΑ)
Ναι, σκοπεύω να παραμείνω στην Ελλάδα	50,3	28,1%	70,8%	74,3%	24,4%	28,1%	71,8%
Όχι, σκοπεύω να πάω σε άλλη Ευρωπαϊκή χώρα	33,9	57,9%	13,9%	2,4%	65,4%	60,2%	8,3%
Όχι, σκοπεύω να πάω σε άλλη μη Ευρωπαϊκή χώρα	4,2	6,4%	5,9%	1,9%	2,9%	4,2%	4,3%
Όχι, σκοπεύω να επιστρέψω στη χώρα καταγωγής μου	7		4%	20,9%	2%	1,3%	12,6%
ΔΓ/ΔΑ	4,6	7,6%	5,4%	0,5%	5,4%	6,3%	3%

	ΣΥΝΟΛΟ	ΑΝΔΡΕΣ ΝΕΟΙ ΜΕΤΑΝΑΣΤΕΣ (0-4 ΧΡΟΝΙΑ)	ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ ΝΕΕΣ ΜΕΤΑΝΑΣΤΡΙΕΣ (0-4 ΧΡΟΝΙΑ)	ΑΛΛΟ ΝΕΟΙ ΜΕΤΑΝΑΣΤΕΣ (0-4 ΧΡΟΝΙΑ)	ΑΝΔΡΕΣ ΠΑΛΙΟΙ ΜΕΤΑΝΑΣΤΕΣ (5+ ΧΡΟΝΙΑ)	ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ ΠΑΛΙΕΣ ΜΕΤΑΝΑΣΤΡΙΕΣ (5+ ΧΡΟΝΙΑ)
Ναι, σκοπεύω να παραμείνω στην Ελλάδα	50,3	30,1%	24,5%	100%	73,5%	70,9%
Όχι, σκοπεύω να πάω σε άλλη Ευρωπαϊκή χώρα	33,9	60,2%	60,5%		11%	6,9%
Όχι, σκοπεύω να πάω σε άλλη μη Ευρωπαϊκή χώρα	4,2	4,2%	4,1%		5,9%	3,4%
Όχι, σκοπεύω να επιστρέψω στη χώρα καταγωγής μου	7	0,8%	2%		5,1%	16,5%
ΔΓ/ΔΑ	4,6	4,7%	8,8%		4,4%	2,3%

Picture 2. Leontitsis et al (2020).

fact that they see Greece as an intermediate stop, where they do not wish to remain, is a significant inhibitory factor for their inclusion in society and the labor market.

It is certainly to be noted that on several occasions, mainly in the first periods of their settlement in a country, newly arriving refugees in the context of mandatory

<sup>5</sup> Survey conducted by KAPA Research, in spring 2019 through personal interviews with 800 migrants and refugees from four different nationalities: Albanian, Georgian, the first flow of the '90s, and Syria and Afghanistan from the second recent flow of the previous decade. .

mass movements, express their opinions influenced by an overwhelming feeling of nostalgia and (still) strong expectation that their resettlement will only be temporary. As it has been precisely established for previous migration flows, the “decision making” process regarding departure for a foreign land in early ‘90s is dominated by the belief of short-term and temporary absence from the homeland is dominant (Kapsalis, 2018). However, the perpetuation of the phenomenon is reflected in the thousands of third-generation migrants, which makes it necessary not to address such new flows as merely temporary or even without any prospect of permanent settlement in the future.

In regard to mobility within the country of settlement, the relevant literature includes a recent study (Brell et al., 2020) establishing that the duration of stay in refugee reception centers, and even the duration of the examination of an asylum application negatively affect the perspectives and quality of employment in the developed countries of reception. In consequence, the expediting of the asylum procedure, the timely support for health issues and the facilitation of refugees to integrate in the labor market the soonest possible are key priorities for their future employment.

Refugees in Greece even resort to limited “secondary” mobility in the context of survival strategies, as they exit the reception centers for seasonal employment, occasionally facing administrative or other penalties or unfavorable implications in general (Hatziprokopiou et al., 2021). Other impeding factors to refugee mobility all over the territory are the consequences of changing the place of residence in obtaining the necessary administrative documents. As stated in relevant studies (Koubou et al, 2022), in case of change of location of residence, the tax authorities often request a special attestation issued by the Asylum Service for permanent stay in case such place is not verified by their documents or has changed.

At the same time, regarding refugee populations difficulty is seen in the use of the application of the Tax Office (Taxisnet), and in the change of data such as place of residence. Refugees are often referred to the tax authority that initially provided them with their AFM number (e.g. the islands) and not to that of their current place of stay, since the Temporary Foreigner Insurance and Health Care Number (PAAYPA) is not recognized by the system. Finally, for the completion of the asylum procedure and for the arrangement of significant procedures or even for the reception of the final residence permit, the asylum seekers are obliged to travel at their own expense, between their place of stay / work and the place where the application is submitted, obligingly requesting leaves by their employer.



However, for local communities as well as for the refugee populations themselves, the development of individual integration activity in small and medium cities<sup>6</sup> of the region produces significant advantages. The relevant literature and comparative case study at a European level reach the conclusion that the reversal of the trend for the settlement in large cities of the host countries based on (estimated) larger employment opportunities may prove to be beneficial (Gauci, 2020), in particular as a factor for the prolongation of the stay in decentralized areas beyond the limited timeline of seasonal or even circular employment.

Many European cities participate directly in the migrants' integration in the labor market, which shows that local actors play a decisive role in this process. Their integration takes place in various ways, of various degrees of participation and skills. In some cases, there is full local participation and responsibility, whereas in others the integration task is allocated to regional, federal and/or national actors. On the other hand, other cities prefer to participate in local association services, for example when they have no competence in migration policy issues. It is then possible for them to foster a social and cultural environment that would enable an easier establishment of national policies (Cocagne, 2018).

In a special survey of the Eurobarometer (2018) on the subject of integration of migrants, 90% of participants assess the role of local and regional authorities as "important", though it should be stressed that 50% consider that this dimension is "very important". For the European Parliament, the local and regional authorities are the main integration and social cohesion instruments. The Cities and Regions for Integration initiative launched by the Committee of the Regions in 2019, provides a political platform to share best practices concerning integration of migrants and refugees, promoting equal treatment and diversity and ensuring social cohesion (Orav, 2021).

A major factor that prevents the relocation of refugees to small cities is among others their own negative perception of the employment opportunities; however, due to the typically high homogeneity of permanent residents of such cities, knowledge of the national language and social networking may greatly facilitate integration in local labor markets (Fang et al., 2018).

The European Commission has suggested, already since 2016, that the selection of areas for hosting humanitarian populations should be made mainly based on the employment prospects and not purely on accommodation availability criteria or simply equal geographical distribution within a territory (European Commission, 2016). It also

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<sup>6</sup> Based on the allocation of the DEGURBA system, a medium-sized city's population ranges from 50 to 200 thousand, a small city's population ranges from 10 to 50 thousand and a rural area has less than 10 thousand residents.

urges member states to fully utilize EU funds, particularly the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund, to support projects and measures related to integration in the labor market, depending on the needs that have been identified at a national and regional level (European Commission, 2020).

Countries like Germany are pioneers in projects for migrants' and refugees' vocational training and mainly their distribution among local communities usually based on proportional quotas among city-states (Leontitsis et al, 2020). In the absence of a comprehensive national strategy, mainly on issues concerning integration in the labor market in countries like Greece, interventions at a regional and municipal level may dominate over national ones, ensuring faster policy planning.

If this is the case for certain European countries and specific areas like Catania Lucca in Italy, the heterogeneity of local bodies within a territory may, on the other hand, not guarantee the sustainable solution of problems emerging from state interventions of deregulating effect, that lead to economic vulnerability and labor exploitation (Carignani and Fontana, 2018).

Besides, especially in cases of countries like Greece, the particular ideological perceptions of the municipal political leadership may lead to the development of very different political responses at a municipal level as regards to the reception of refugees and displaced populations (Sabchev, 2021). The local administration, despite the lack of an institutional framework for the integration of migrant populations, it actually defines, to a great extent, how (un)favorable the local environment will generally be in developing prospects of integration (Anagnostou et al., 2016). However, the final result also depends on the activation and networking of NGOs as well as of any kind of collectivities and activists at a local level (Turam, 2021).

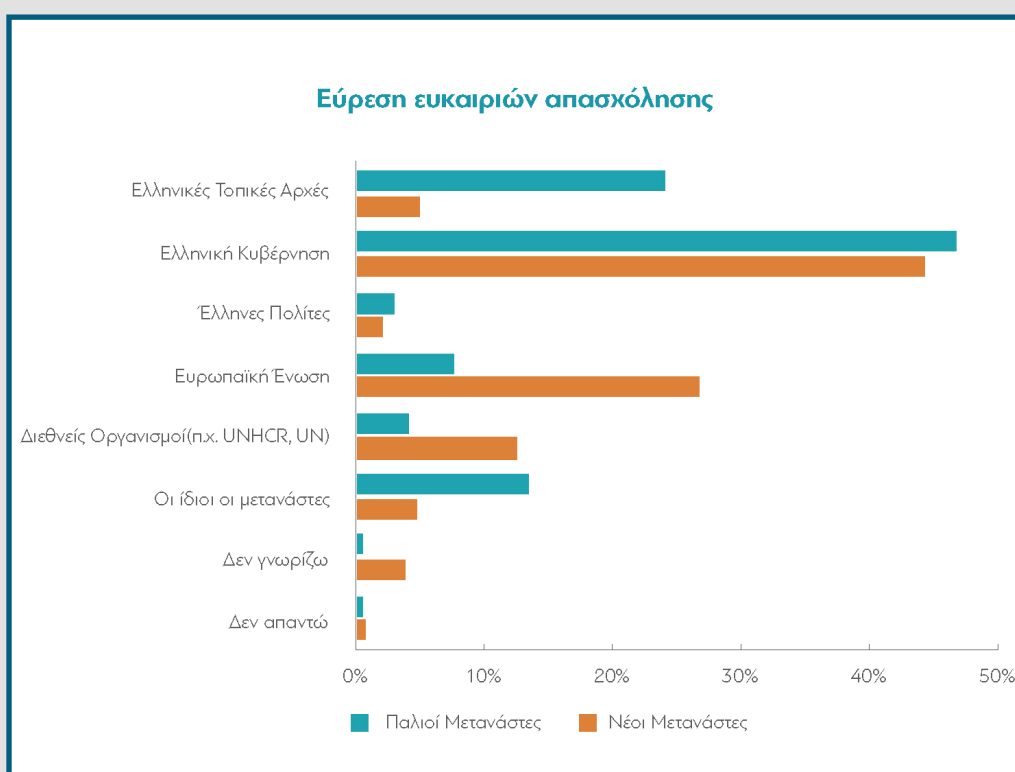
The Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils are bodies that might undertake the coordination and advocate for the integration of refugees in local communities. In Greece, they were first established by virtue of article 78 of L. 3852/2010, establishing the formation, operation and purpose of Migrant Integration Councils. Article 79 of L. 4555/2018 replaced the previous law and added the aspect of refugee population in the scope of such councils, hence called Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils. The same law also foresees changes in their operation and decision-making processes.

The role of the Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils is: a) to record and investigate problems faced by migrants and refugees staying permanently in the rural area of each municipality, regarding their integration in the local community, b)

to contact public or municipal authorities, c) to submit proposals to the municipal council regarding the development of local actions for the promotion of the smooth social integration of migrants, d) to resolve problems faced by migrants, mainly through the organization of advisory services by municipal agencies and e) to organize in cooperation with the relevant municipality, events aiming at the awareness raising and strengthening of the social cohesion of the local population. Even though their general efficiency and utilization has remained limited for a long time (Leontitsis et al, 2020; Kapsalis, 2018; Anagnostou and Gemi, 2015) the Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils can undoubtedly constitute a restructuring point for the refugees' integration interventions at a local level.

Of course, it requires a lot of effort and targeted actions to increase trust of the refugee population towards the local authorities, which is currently much stronger amongst migrants of older generations (Leontitsis et al, 2020), as seen in both following diagrams:

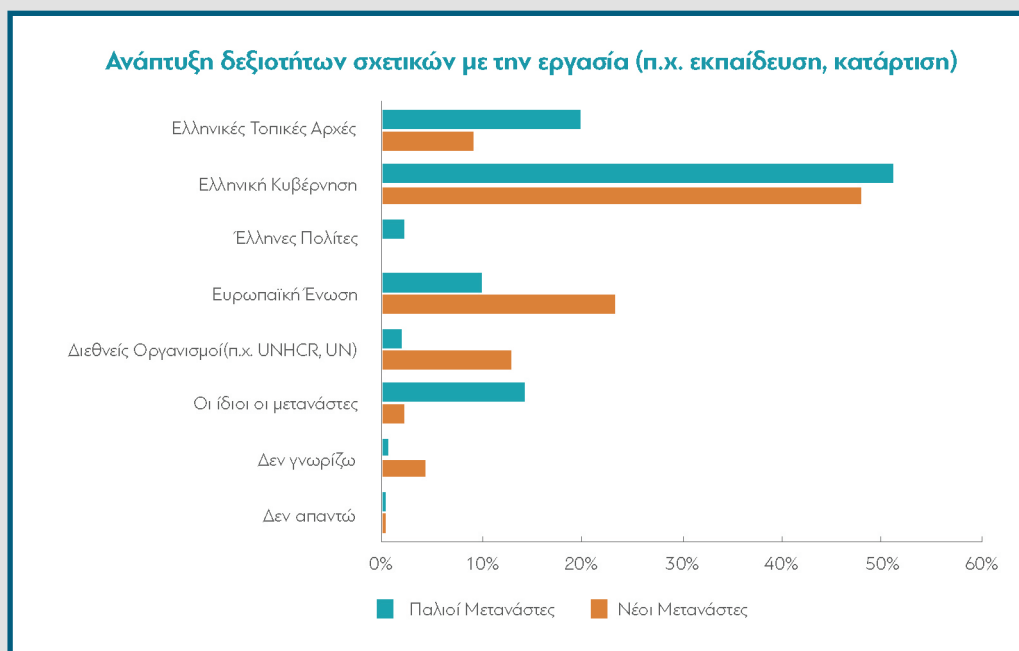
#### ALLOCATION OF COMPETENCES TO MAIN ACTORS CONCERNING VARIOUS INTEGRATION ASPECTS IN GREECE AMONG OLD AND NEW MIGRANTS (%)



Picture 3. Leontitsis et al (2020).

## MOBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT OF REFUGEE POPULATIONS IN THE GREEK REGION

### ALLOCATION OF COMPETENCES TO MAIN ACTORS CONCERNING VARIOUS INTEGRATION ASPECTS IN GREECE AMONG OLD AND NEW MIGRANTS (%)



Picture 4. Leontitsis et al (2020).

In related surveys conducted (ENPE, 2016), half of the interviewed refugees responded that that in case they finally settle in Greece, they would do so in the area of the capital, whereas 15.5% would choose another area as long as they would find employment. Besides, according to the 2011 census (Charisis, 2017) almost half of the third country nationals who live in Greece reside in Attica (44.5%) or Central Macedonia (12.8%) and to a lesser extent in other areas of the country, such as Crete (6.8%), the Peloponnese (6.9%) and Central Greece (5.7%). Moreover, 45% of the foreigners of Attica are concentrated in Central Athens, 12.3% in Eastern Attica and 10.5% in Southern Athens. Among foreigners who have settled in rural areas, trends for further mobility are mostly observed among refugees since in their mind, they expect to pursue a better life in other places (Papadopoulos and Fratsea, 2021).

In any case, based on the latest official data from April 2022, the asylum applicants who stay in Greece are distributed among regions as follows:

#### LOCATION OF APPLICANTS FOR ASYLUM, APRIL 2022

	ΔΟΜΕΣ	ΕΣΤΙΑ	ΞΕΝΟΔΟΧΕΙΑ	ΚΥΤ*	ΣΥΝΟΛΟ
ΒΟΡΕΙΟΥ ΑΙΓΑΙΟΥ	0	0	0	1.781	1.781
ΣΤΕΡΕΑΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΑΣ	3.196	157	0	0	3.353
ΗΠΕΙΡΟΥ	1.008	389	0	0	1.397
ΑΤΤΙΚΗΣ	3.156	6.965	0	0	10.121
ΚΕΝΤΡΙΚΗΣ ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑΣ	2.369	2.122	0	0	4.491
ΘΕΣΣΑΛΙΑΣ	598	484	0	0	1.082
ΠΕΛΟΠΟΝΝΗΣΟΥ	608	136	0	0	744
ΑΝ. ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑΣ & ΘΡΑΚΗΣ	468	0	0	278	746
ΝΟΤΙΟΥ ΑΙΓΑΙΟΥ	0	8	0	278	286
ΚΡΗΤΗΣ	0	302	0	0	302
ΔΥΤΙΚΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΑΣ	226	0	0	0	226
ΔΥΤΙΚΗΣ ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑΣ	0	0	0	0	0
ΙΟΝΙΩΝ ΝΗΣΩΝ	0	0	0	0	0
ΣΥΝΟΛΟ	11.629	10.563	0	2.337	24.529

Picture 5. Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

Whereas the distribution of applicants for asylum on a monthly basis in the period April 2021-April 2022 is as follows:

#### LOCATION OF APPLICANTS OF ASYLUM APRIL 2021-APRIL 2022

	ΔΙΑΦΟΡΑ %	ΔΟΜΕΣ	ΕΣΤΙΑ <sup>3</sup>	ΞΕΝΟΔΟΧΕΙΑ	ΚΥΤ* <sup>3</sup>	ΔΙΑΜΕΝΟΝΤΕΣ ΣΥΝΟΛΟ <sup>3</sup>
Απρ-21		24.285	20.978 <sup>3</sup>	0	10.194 <sup>3</sup>	55.457 <sup>3</sup>
Μαΐ-21	-3%	23.539	20.991	0	9.175	53.705
Ιουν-21	-8%	21.672	20.742	0	6.786	49.200
Ιουλ-21	-6%	20.591	20.029	0	5.760	46.380
Αυγ-21	-9%	20.020	17.387	0	4.774	42.181
Σεπ-21	-5%	19.162	16.723	0	4.176	40.061
Οκτ-21	-5%	18.147	15.477	0	4.327	37.951
Νοε-21	-7%	16.729	14.686	0	3.767	35.182
Δεκ-21	-7%	15.912	13.326	0	3.409	32.647
Ιαν-22	-3%	15.319	12.974	0	3.215	31.508
Φεβ-22	-8%	13.578	12.622	0	2.871	29.071
Μαρ-22	-6%	12.511	11.933	0	2.952	27.396
Απρ-22	-10%	11.629	10.563	0	2.337	24.529
Διαφορά 30/04/21 - 30/04/22	-56%					-30.928

Picture 6. Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

## 2.2 Employment

In all European countries the characteristics of refugee populations may be different from other categories of migrants in terms of demographics and skills, incentives to leave, settlement and long-term residence in the countries of origin and destination respectively. They also face obstacles above and beyond those encountered by migrants of all other categories in terms of successful access to the labor market (Brell et al., 2020; Konle-Seidl and Bolits, 2016; Desiderio, 2016). And of course, it is not a good idea to treat refugees exclusively as migrants in terms of employment, as is already the case in many developed host countries, where “humanism” is almost totally absent in migration policy (Ruhs, 2019).

The comparative analysis of national policies for integration in the labor market suggests the formation of a kind of “standardized” package of measures. The four main elements of such package are (Martin et al., 2016): 1) the early assessment of skills, 2) an “introductory” program including general cultural orientation and, sometimes, social-professional orientation or even some form of training as well, 3) intensive language courses and 4) access to general mediation services for employment.

The national strategy for integration, of July 2019, foresees, in relation to the labor market, certain actions for registration and recognition of skills and qualifications, which would facilitate access to the labor market (focusing on the agricultural sector) and promotion of entrepreneurship; however, too much emphasis is laid on the reception and early integration, without sufficiently covering longterm integration (Koubou et al, 2020). Similarly, in the draft National Integration Strategy for the social integration of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection that was submitted for consultation in January 2022, reference is made to a number of significant pursuits and actions as well as to the principles and recommendations of the Integration Action Plan of the European Commission, and to recommendations of international organizations, such as the OECD, even though the text of the Strategy does not seem to adopt all of those recommendations (GCR, 2022). As aptly stated in a relevant commentary (Generation 2.0 RED, 2022) the objectives and actions proposed per chapter are fragmentary in nature, while there is no deepening and analysis of tools and practices that will be used to achieve them, while some points do not clarify who the implementing bodies are.

The text of the National Strategy refers to the development of intensive programs for the facilitation of direct access to the labor market and specifically to two important actions: the first concerns the tripartite cooperation of the government, the professional and employer associations, in view of drafting an integrated program that would include guidance, assessment of skills, validation/acknowledgement of skills, job placements, as well as vocational and language training. The second action concerns the enhancement of employment and access to it, based on the needs of the country, through the provision of information on the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) and the access to it, familiarization with the social security procedures, information on alternatives in finding employment (web sites, employment agencies), assessment of skills and certification of qualifications acquired in third countries.

The asylum applicants' right to employment is a critical issue in European countries in the wake of the recent "refugee crisis". The UN Convention for Refugees does not oblige countries to grant asylum applicants the right to work, whereas each individual country is free to specify if it would grant such a right and to set the applicable conditions in this regard. However, the EU Directive on the conditions of reception of applicants (EU 2013), requires that member states to provide asylum applicants with access to the labor market no later than nine months of anticipation of a decision.

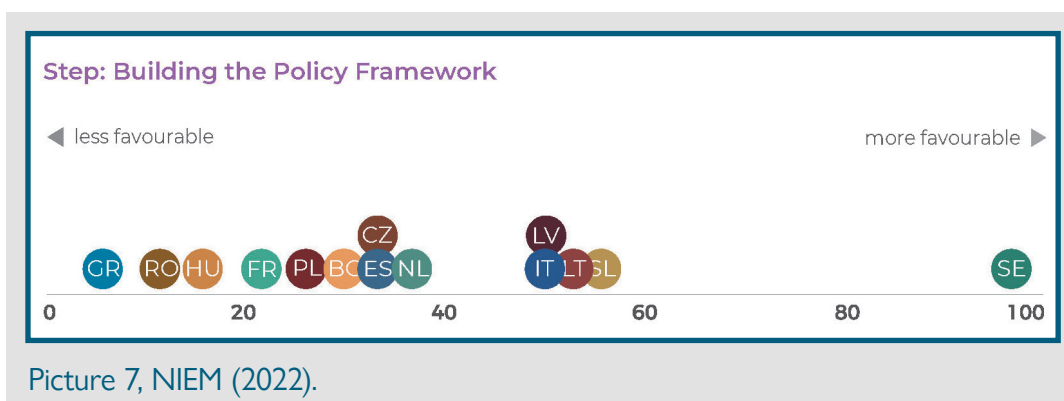
As regards to Greece, Law 4375/2016 has greatly improved the legal framework for employment and integration of asylum applicants and refugees in the labor market, through the waiving of past obstacles in obtaining a work permit (Kapsalis et al., 2021b). Nevertheless, such provisions remained mere formalities. Measures to support access to the labor market, including language courses, training and skills accreditation are not sufficiently developed and are fragmented into projects that are implemented by NGOs and supported through EU funds (Lodovici et al., 2017).

Further, based on article 53 of L. 4636/2019, applicants for international protection now have the right to essentially access the labor market 6 months after the completion of the procedure for the submission of the application for international protection, provided they have an "international protection applicant card" or a "foreigner's asylum application card", and throughout its term. According to UNHCR, such delay may on one hand lead to longer duration of a de facto prohibition of employment and, hence, doubts are raised regarding the extent to which the applicants may have efficient access to the labor market, and, on the other hand, it would also lead people to turn to undeclared work, thus enhancing labor exploitation phenomena (UNCHR 2019).

## MOBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT OF REFUGEE POPULATIONS IN THE GREEK REGION

Nevertheless, the system in place for relevant social security issues of third-country citizens who apply for international protection (INE/ΓΣΕΕ, 2022) has several administrative challenges to address. In practice, access to the labor market is only feasible if applicants submit to the National Social Security Entity (EFKA) an ERGANI registration certificate by their employer, so as to be given an EFKA number (former Social Security Registry No -AMA). Such procedure may discourage employers who do not have sufficient knowledge in this regard, whereas challenges also arise from the fact that the Temporary Foreigners' Insurance and Healthcare Number (PAAYPA) appears to be registered in the system as a Social Security Registry Number (AMKA) (Koubou et al, 2020).

For all these reasons, and despite the fact that at a strategic and legislative level significant progress has been made on the employment of refugee populations, Greece remains in last place among 14 comparable European countries in terms of creating the appropriate policy framework<sup>7</sup> to enhance employability. of the specific population group (NIEM, 2022):



Access to employment at a 58% rate is the fourth most important condition for migrants in Greece as seen in a relevant survey even though the contrast is obvious among various migration flows and nationalities (Leontitsis, 2020). While migrants of the first wave give primary importance to access to employment (94% for Albanians and 74% for Georgians), 51% of migrants of the second wave, from Afghanistan, state that they want to have access to the labor market, whereas only 13% of Syrians manifest similar expectations. It is thus obvious that a main obstacle for the participation of new migrants in the labor market is, in principle, the lack of willingness to participate in the first place.

<sup>7</sup> Assessed indicators: a) Access to employment for groups of special concern, b) Administrative barriers to accessing employment, c) Awareness raising about the specific labor market situation of beneficiaries of international protection, d) Assessment of skills, e) Job-seeking counselling and positive action, f) Targeted support for entrepreneurs.



As recorded in another relevant survey (ENPE, 2016), a significant part of refugees initially expresses some interest in entering the Greek labor market, whereas only a clearly smaller part of refugees consider that they may find in Greece some employment that would cover their basic needs. Out of the people interviewed, 28% state that if they do find a job in Greece, they are willing to permanently stay in the country, whereas only 22% of them consider that they may find some employment that would cover their basic needs, while professions that they might exercise are those of worker (22%), office employee (21%) or auxiliary workers in general.

From comparative econometric surveys conducted at a European level (Belegri-Roboliet al., 2019) it arises that at a sectoral level, the economy of Greece (and Switzerland) has the highest potential to “absorb workforce” among migrants and refugees, in the sense that all sectors of the economy are characterised by high potential to “absorb labor”. In Greece, the professions with high employability potential are skilled rural workers, operators and assemblers of facilities, machines and gears, and unskilled professionals.

Migrants of the first migration flow have fully integrated to the Greek society and labor market (Leontitsis et al., 2020). In employment, more than half of the new migrants (52%) had some sort of employment (full time/part time, salaried/self-employed) six months before leaving their country of origin. In addition, around one out of five (21%) stated that they did housekeeping work and only 8% that they were unemployed. According to another survey (ENPE, 2016) 11%, stated that they were unemployed in their country of origin, whereas their sectors of employment were industrial-manufacturing (20%), public sector (12.5%), trade (11%) and agriculture (8%).

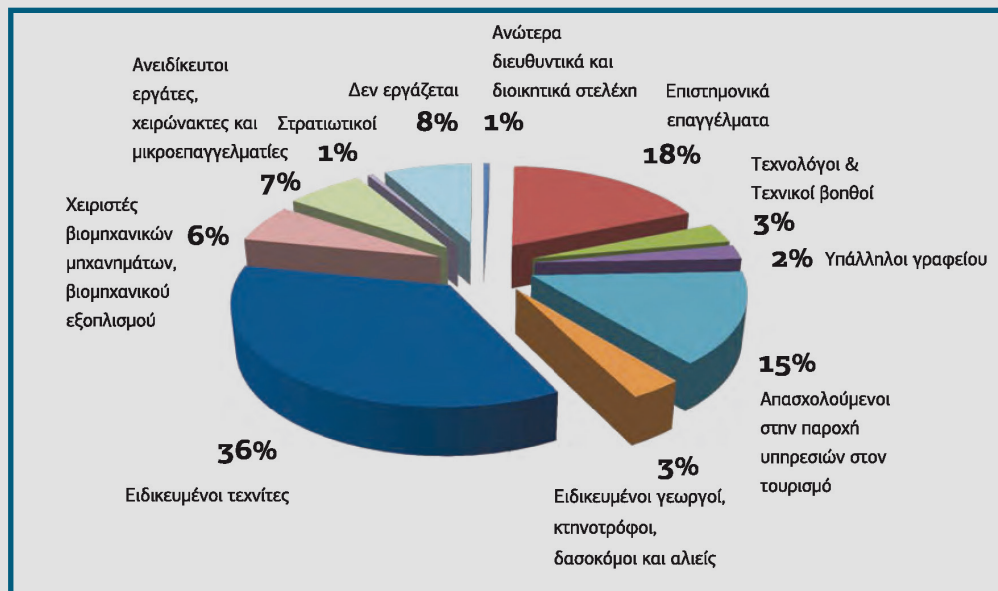
In another relevant survey (Baskozou, 2017) of similar characteristics,<sup>8</sup> it is interesting to observe the rate of those who stated that they were self-employed in their country of origin (43%) when only half of them worked as salaried. It is apparent from the next two diagrams that most of them worked as qualified technicians (36%), scientists (18%) or employed in tourism (15%), whereas in Greece they would wish to work as qualified technicians (48%), as scientific personnel (15%) and as unskilled laborers (10%).

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<sup>8</sup> Interviews with 600 refugees, among others in refugee reception/ accommodation facilities in Attica, in April 2016.

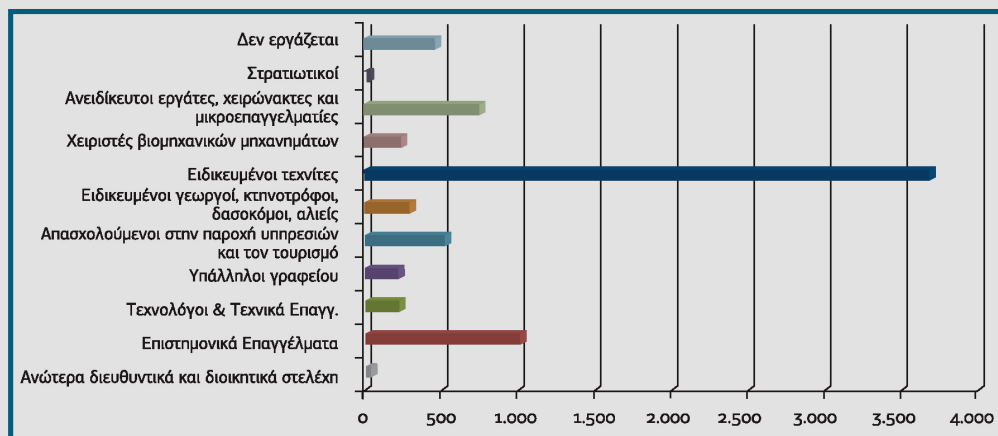
# MOBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT OF REFUGEE POPULATIONS IN THE GREEK REGION

## ΜΟΝΟΨΗΦΙΑ ΕΠΑΓΓΕΛΜΑΤΑ ΚΑΤΑ ISCO ΣΤΗ ΧΩΡΑ ΠΡΟΕΛΕΥΣΗΣ ΤΟΥΣ



Picture 8, Baskozou, 2017.

## ΕΠΑΓΓΕΛΜΑ ΕΠΙΛΟΓΗΣ ΣΤΗ ΧΩΡΑ ΕΓΚΑΤΑΣΤΑΣΗΣ

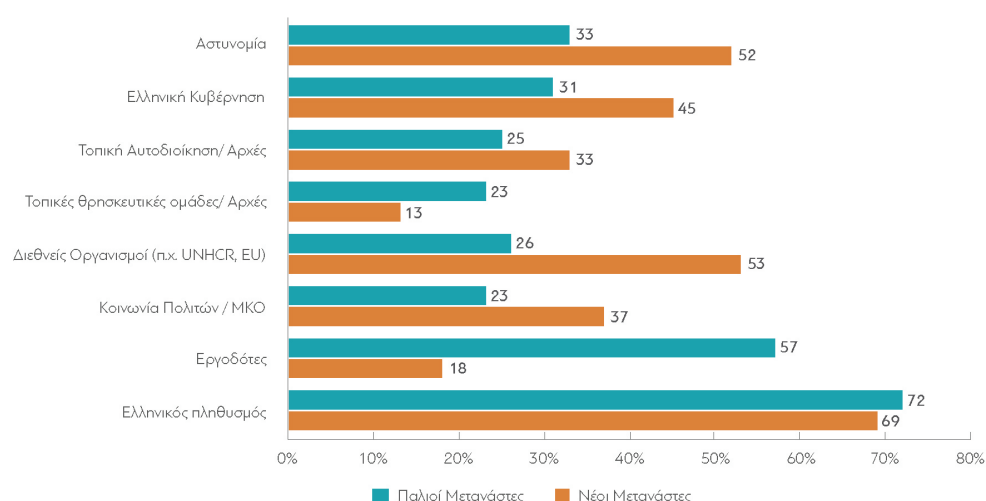


Picture 9, Baskozou, 2017.

As regards current employment of migrants in Greece (Leontitsis et al, 2020) the rapidly increasing unemployment rates among recent migrants clearly show how far from successful integration into the labor market these groups are, considering that only a small rate (9%) of new migrants has some sort of employment (full time/part time, salaried/self-employed), whereas the vast majority are unemployed (59%). The exact same picture is shown in one more relevant survey (Skleparis, 2018) suggesting a 53% unemployment rate (including people who are discouraged to seek employment), whereas of the only 9% employed, i.e. 53.3%, is not covered by social security, thus confirming the wide range of undeclared work among refugees, as well as migrants.

Unsurprisingly, the highest discontent rates among Afghans and Syrians are related to the lack of employment (90% and 86% respectively), which reflects their particularly limited access to the Greek labor market (Leontitsis et al 2020). A vast majority of both migrant flows stated that they are satisfied by the way they are treated at work (82% of refugees and 83% of previous migrants are satisfied or very satisfied). However, the varying degree of positive assessments regarding the development of relationships of trust or even of cooperation with employers, mainly by previous migrants is another indication that the specific category has been integrated more successfully into the labor market:

**Γράφημα 22: Θετικές Αξιολογήσεις των Βασικών Δρώντων Μεταξύ των Παλαιότερων και Πρόσφατων Μεταναστών (%)**



Picture 10, Leontitsis et al, 2022.

In a more general context, the matching of offer and demand in the labor market should take into account the asymmetries of information to both sides, as well as the failure of state services to facilitate the matching between refugees and potential employers. Refugees often have insufficient information regarding the new host labor market and insufficient personal networking to gain access to informal employment channels. On the other hand, employers have insufficient information on the productivity, the qualifications and competences of refugees and therefore hesitate to hire. Government employment services might be of help by providing reliable information to both sides. (Galgóczi 2021).

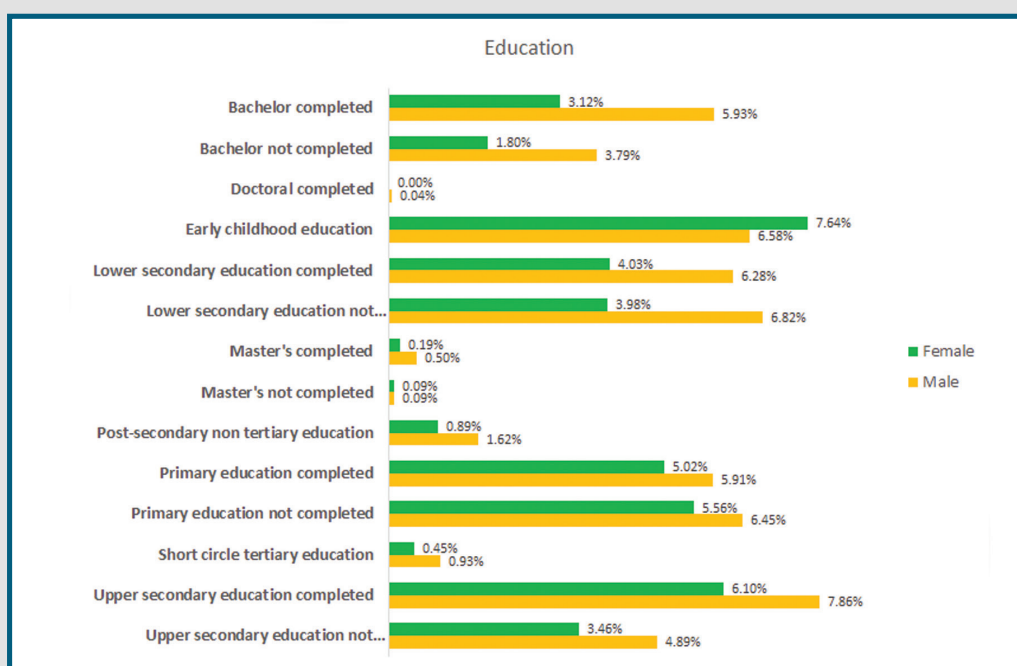
Specifically, in the case of Greece, a relevant survey (Koubou et al, 2022) suggests that only 20% of the refugees concerned were employed whereas 73% of them are unemployed. In addition, the five most significant obstacles to the access to employment are: a) unfamiliarisation with the Greek language (54%), b) absence of necessary documents (22.4%) since only half of them had an AFM registration number and 37% a PAAYPA, c) unequal treatment by companies (18%), d) lack of social networking (18%) and e) lack of work experience in Greece (15.8%).

The insufficient knowledge of Greek is the most significant challenge, for both refugees and migrants of the second flow, i.e., after 2015, but it is a common obstacle for all groups of third country nationals/stateless who live in our country (Leontitsis et al, 2020). A very important fact, from a political point of view, is that only a minority of migrants of all national groups and migrant flows wish to be provided with Greek language courses by the Greek State (42%). The relatively low rates for recent migrants from Afghanistan (47%) and Syria (35%) possibly demonstrate a conscious consideration of Greece as a transit point and not as a country of destination. The same conclusion is drawn, in an even more apparent way, as regards to the recognition of foreign academic degrees, which is sought by only one out of five migrants (20%), whereas it is of importance that such rates are even lower for Afghans (7%) and Syrians (8%).

Nevertheless, as regards to the level of education, it is noted that in Greece 32.5% of the refugee population has completed certain grades of primary school, whereas one out of five has attended or holds a university degree (ΕΝΠΕ, 2016). Another relevant survey (Baskozou, 2017) of similar characteristics shows that the educational profile is almost identical to that observed in the previous survey, even though the rate of those who have completed higher education studies among Iranians exceeds 26%.

As it has been more recently noted, (Leontitsis et al, 2020) only 12% of recent migrants have university education, where 14% of Syrians and 6% of Afghans state that they have completed higher education studies. The majority of recent migrants have completed primary (29%) or secondary (23%) training, whereas an important number stated that they have no degree or diploma (17%). A specific problem that recent migrants have to tackle regarding educational qualifications is the fact that they do not hold any document confirming their education. The absence of such attestations obviously poses significant obstacles to their integration in the Greek labor market or educational system.

For the period June 2019 – December 2021, according to the information gathered by the Employability Component of the HELIOS project implemented by IOM, based on a sample of 4621 beneficiaries of international protection, almost 15% reached or completed university studies while 23% attended primary education. Following the same data almost 43% reached or completed secondary education. Finally, only the 14,22% declared that has never been to school, with almost one percentage point difference between men and women, 6,58% and 7,64% respectively.

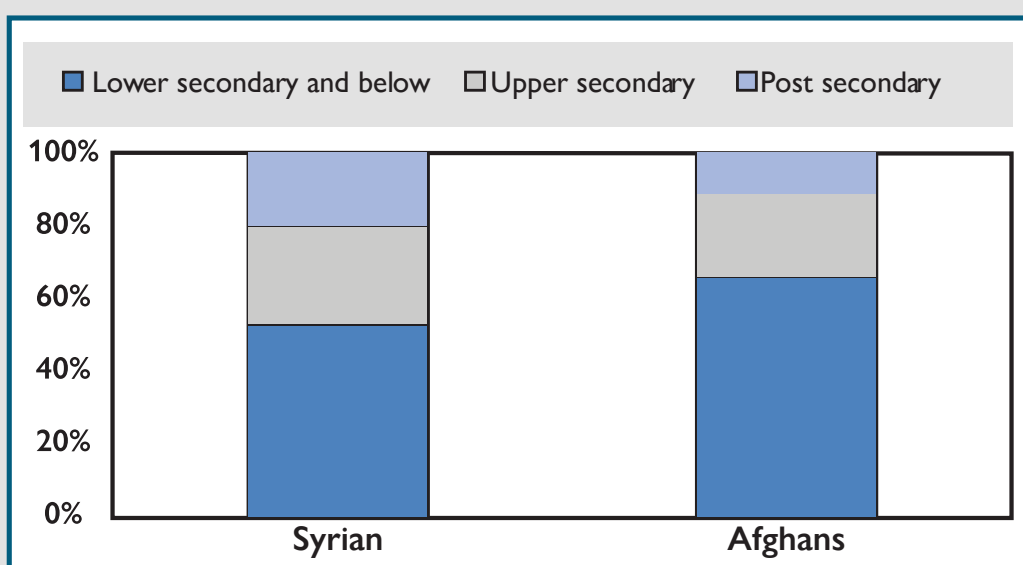


Picture 11. Source: HELIOS Project, IOM.

## MOBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT OF REFUGEE POPULATIONS IN THE GREEK REGION

Finally, based on OECD data, among those who entered Greece in 2016, the Syrian refugees have a higher educational profile compared to Afghans, as 20% have completed higher education studies in their country of origin, as seen in the following comparative diagram:

ALLOCATION OF EDUCATIONAL LEVEL BETWEEN SYRIANS AND AFGHANS IN GREECE



Picture 12., OECD, 2019.

## 2.3 Synergies

The issue of integrated interventions, mainly at the local level, in view of managing migration flows has recently attracted increasing interest in international literature, whereas a large number of case studies have been elaborated since 2016 for several areas of host countries in Europe. According to the International Labor Organization, already since 2016, the first of all relevant domestic priorities of states in the field of synergies for integration to employment is the enhancement of the role of the local administration, of regional organizations and particularly of regional economic committees, among others with the support of the ILO and other international organizations, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

(ILO, 2016). Informal local networks as well as formal synergies between the state and the public sector are capable of providing solutions, often by exceeding the thorny problem of insufficient funding in cases where state intervention has failed or has been absent (Gauci, 2020).

A recent survey conducted based on literature review (Dimitriadis et al., 2021) reconsiders the conceptual tool of “local battlegrounds<sup>9</sup>” to interpret the prospects and contradictions emerging from the horizontal and vertical interoperability of agents and actors intervening at the local level in migration and asylum issues, particularly when it comes to bodies of the public and the private sector or civil society collectivities. Such approach becomes of particular interest when on one hand the local initiatives do not coincide with central decisions and strategies and, on the other hand, when the intervention of the various actors or the attitudes of refugees themselves acquire diverging or contradictory features in space and time.

The advantages from the intervention of NGOs in refugee integration activities at the local level prove to be crucial, particularly regarding access to the local labor market. Based on findings of the abundant relevant literature that has formed the basis of a recent comparative study in four countries (Galera et al., 2018) it is recorded that, with the exception of the Greek case which is based exclusively on voluntary work and donations (Agalia, Lesvos), the third sector actors in other countries (Italy, France, Germany) draw a mix of resources including donations, voluntary work, grants, public contracts and income from commercial activity. At the same time, it is concluded that a possible option for the full utilization of the input of third sector organizations seems to be the formation of public and private sector synergies, among local public entities and local accredited organizations of the third sector, that are normally characterized by a collaborative and noncompetitive spirit.

In the case of Greece and the region of the capital, special mention should be made to the Athens Coordination Center for Refugee & Migrant issues – ACCMR, which was founded in 2017. It is the first coordination hub in Greece which facilitates networking and cooperation between the Municipality of Athens, civil society, international organizations and central administration, with the aim of drawing up effective integration policies. Among other committees, under the auspices of ACCMR, operates the Skills Development and Empowerment through Work - Livelihoods Committee, which focuses its action on initiatives to strengthen the integration of migrants and refugees into the Greek labor market.

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<sup>9</sup> Local ‘Battlegrounds’.

At the level of local administration, synergies and exchanges on know-how and good practices, such as the Welcoming Cities Network in Australia or the Cities Network in Greece<sup>10</sup> are frequent among various cities of the same country. A survey on the topic (Leontitsis et al, 2020) makes a short description of integration programs, selected by the European Website on Integration (EWSI) based on their applicability in Greece, which typically include actions at the local and self-administrative level in several European countries. Specifically, as regards to language teaching programs, good practices are drawn from initiatives and synergies within local administration in countries such as Finland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Canada and Germany, where a specific labor market integration target is set at 3 to 5 years.

In certain cases, the acknowledgement of refugees' professional qualifications and the enhancement of their access to the labor market are implemented through the joint participation of employers' associations, employee trade unions and the local administration in various areas of France and Denmark, as early as 2015 (JRS, 2021). In a guide of ten priorities issued in 2018 by the UNHCR, regarding the engagement of employers in the promotion of refugees to employment, the synergies among public entities, employers' associations and local communities emerge as the most vital condition (UNHCR, 2018).

Special reference must be made to the European Partnership for Integration, which was concluded between the European Commission and social and economic partners (ETUC, Business Europe, SMEUnited, CEEP, Eurochambres) who committed to encourage refugees' integration to the labor market. The partnership was initially concluded in December 2017 to enhance the timely integration of refugees to the labor market in a way that ensures that integration benefits both refugees and the economy and society in general, and restarted on September 7, 2020 with a renewed action plan. A positive disposition for cooperation among social partners to fight discrimination in employment is also seen in comparative studies in Europe, particularly at the level of small and medium enterprises (Antoniou, 2018), however little progress has been made in long-term partnerships regarding equal integration of refugees and migrants in the labor market.

Even though following the peak of migration flows from 2015 onwards, elements of resilience and continuity elements are observed in Greek trade unions as regards the protection of all rights related to salaried work, significant delay is seen at the level of negotiations and synergies with employer associations (Kapsalis, 2020). Other studies conducted in the framework of a comparative research (Karzi et al.,

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cnigreece.gr/>



2018) also conclude that it is necessary to establish extended and more regular cooperation among actors of local societies and the state, since it is seen that, despite the large number of individual good practices, stemming mainly from the activity of NGOs, although rarely in the employment field, the integration of refugees in Greece is far from complete.

In a special research based on an online field survey and interviews with representatives of Greek associations (Bagavos et al. 2020) the social partners examine integration to the labor market through a rather holistic perspective. Even though representatives of the social partners are well aware of the reality and obstacles relating to the integration of migrants and refugees to the Greek labor market, they consider that they dispose of extremely limited intervention and influence means to have current policies improved. On one hand, this relates to the limited powers attributed to them by the state in this regard and, on the other hand, to the general weakening of the bargaining power of trade unions, as it arose mainly during measures of austerity and deregulation of collective labor relations following 2010.

Even though immediate activation of employers' associations is a significant priority, the partnership among social actors and local authorities has proved to be equally beneficial, as the latter may put in practice permanent cooperation mechanisms and a coherent framework for the enhancement of access to the labor market (Desiderio, 2016). Besides, even in the rare cases where actions for refugee employment promotion are developed upon own initiative of businesses themselves, the cooperation with social actors soon becomes a necessity.

A typical example is provided by "Diageo" in Ireland, a business that launched the "Learning for Life for refugees" initiative in the food and tourism sector, and subsequently provided input to the association called "Refugee Council" providing assistance in intercultural communication and integration (Buczkowska, 2018). In the Netherlands, several municipalities and employers have adopted proactive measures to enhance intermediation for refugees including the establishment of company relations with other authorities. Particularly in sectors of the economy with insufficient labor force, private initiatives are developed by industry employer associations, which aim at developing specific actions and offer work practice, on-the-job training and sustainable jobs (Martin et al. 2016).

One of the very few surveys focusing purely on businesses in Greece (in this regard, a sample of 80 businesses in Attica) is conducted by Human Rights 360 (2021), which explores attitudes and perceptions of businesses concerning the employment

of refugees and migrants. The analysis of the most important findings of this very interesting survey leads to the following findings:

- ▶ One out of two businesses (49%) states that it is very or rather willing to offer a job to a refugee/migrant, 17% of them state that they would be negatively disposed, but one out of three businesses do not take a stand on the issue (35%).
- ▶ Long-term waiting and “bonds” with the country (e.g. family, language) enhance the credibility of job applicants by employers.
- ▶ The recruitment of refugees and migrants is considered to some extent to pose a risk for the business and may become occasional or provide a solution of a last resort. More than 3 out of 5 businesses that currently employ refugees or migrants, made this choice in the absence of any other applicants for a specific job (62%).
- ▶ An important condition is trust and proper understanding between the two sides, a factor that seems to outweigh the good knowledge of Greek language. Communication skills emerge as the most important factor – slightly more important than language which comes next in significance. These important findings need to be further highlighted and analyzed because, as according to relevant survey mentioned in the previous chapter, refugees believe that lack of knowledge of the language is the most important obstacle to integration into the labor market.
- ▶ An inhibitory factor in recruitment is the background check that is required, in order to ensure that the applicant has the necessary legal documents and no pending cases with the police. For almost 7 out of 10 businesses, the most important issue is by far the need to verify the legal status, which is followed by difficulties in communication.

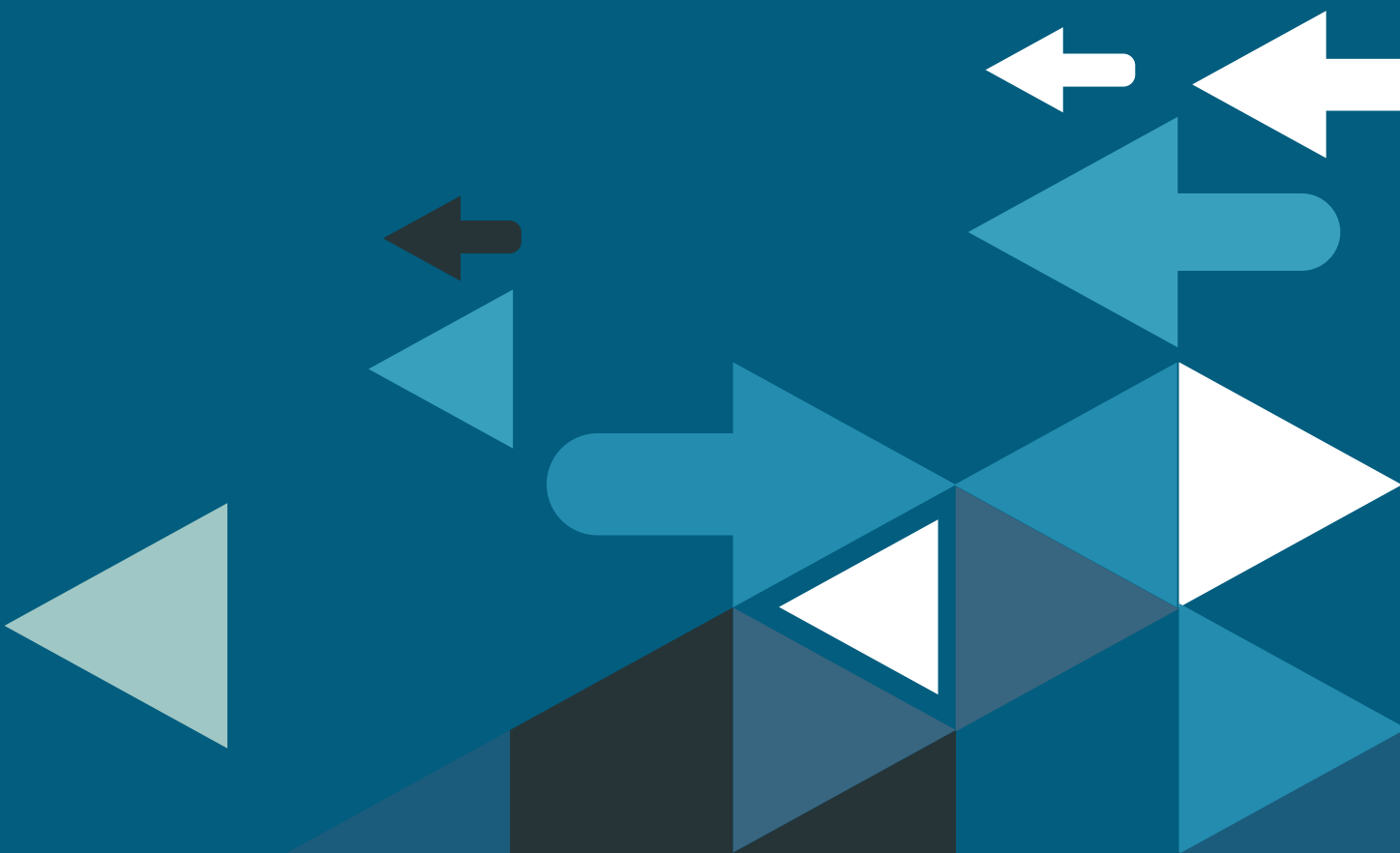
Besides, surveys conducted at the European level have shown that even when employers are willing to recruit refugees and asylum seekers, they still have to tackle several legal challenges, particularly when refugees or asylum seekers have not received a residence status yet (Eurocities, 2017). In a large-scale survey conducted in Germany, 70% of employers highlighted the importance of legal certainty regarding the duration of residence of employees who are not covered by a long term stay residence status (OECD, 2017).

- ▶ In a sense, employment of refugees/ migrants in Greek businesses requires their adaptation to the Greek reality. Diversity is respected in a general context, but not desired at work. Clothing seems to largely affect one out of three businesses while

references follow in importance. Religion as well as nationality are ranked last among criteria affect much less the decision for recruitment in a business. Professional qualifications and personality/attitude of the applicant are basic selection criteria.

► Finally, all proposals get high rates, though nine out of ten businesses would be found it easier if there were a body for the verification of legality and the applicants' documents in general. Followed by 84%, is the provision of information on potential candidate search pools and the establishment of an organization to undertake the bureaucratic recruitment procedures. It is exactly these fields that are in the core of this present research, which nevertheless attempts an innovative approach based on two axes. On the one hand, it covers three regions of the country, specifically Crete, Thessaly and Epirus. On the other hand, based on an in-depth qualitative research, special emphasis is placed on investigating the willingness of the businesses themselves to participate in initiatives aimed at overcoming difficulties (of an administrative/bureaucratic and legal nature) regarding the direct matching of needs and availability of work, but also with an emphasis on actions to enhance mobility at the local level and on the medium to long term.

# METHODOLOGY



## MOBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT OF REFUGEE POPULATIONS IN THE GREEK REGION

Surveys that focus on the views of employers and company representatives are rarer; however, they contribute to a better understanding of the operation of the labor market at a sectoral and local level. Consequently, at least at an initial phase, it was deemed appropriate to explore this demanding issue of mobility and employment of refugees at the premises of employers that are economically active in three geographical areas of the country, namely Epirus, Thessaly and Crete.

### RESEARCH AREAS



The specific areas were selected to represent various regions of the country, in which the economic activity covers several employment sectors during the calendar year. In parallel, the needs assessment conducted in the member- municipalities of the Cities Network for Integration, played an important role for this survey, as it indicated the regions where the integration of refugees and migrants into the labor market is perceived as a pressing need. The last criterion taken into consideration, was the possibilities arising from the intervention of the International Organization for Migration, through

the HELIOS integration project<sup>11</sup> and the synergy that has been recently developing on the domain of access to the labor market through the Cities Network for Integration.

The Cities Network for Integration (CNI) consists of 18 Greek Municipalities that share and develop good practices aiming at promoting social integration of migrants and refugees and strengthening social cohesion.

In this Network, which was established in January 2018 on the basis of a memorandum of cooperation between the two largest municipalities of the country – Athens and Thessaloniki – and is supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the basis of trilateral cooperation with the Municipality of Athens, participants include the Municipalities of Athens, Thessaloniki, Chania, Delta, Heraklion, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Kalamaria, Karditsa, Katerini, Larissa, Livadeia, Neapoli – Sykies, Nea Filadelfeia / Nea Chalkidona, Piraeus, Tilos, Trikala, Tripoli, Agios Dimitrios.

The pool of companies from which the candidates for the interviews were selected was done in a twofold way. On the one hand, they were taken from the database of the CNI and the HELIOS project of the IOM, i.e. from the relevant lists of companies, with which there is already contact on issues of employment promotion. On the other hand, they were primarily drawn from the lists of members of national labor unions at the local level (secondary unions-members, chambers) upon communication with scientific-study agents of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants (GSEVEE), the Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE), the Hellenic Confederation of Trade and Entrepreneurship (ESEE) and the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV). This second source of sampling has three additional advantages.

First, it significantly ensures that the sample is random, considering that the contact details concern all local organizations-members of employer confederations without exception and hence their primary members. Second, to the extent information providers had trade union activity or were at least active in the operation of local bodies of collective employers' representation, they could also have a more global view of the issue regarding the employment of refugee populations at a wider local-sectoral level beyond the limits of their own company, which is beneficial for the specific field research. Third and last, it is exactly such characteristic that has made information providers able to suggest, at the end of their interview, other co-employers that might essentially contribute their knowledge and relevant experience to the various reference sectors.

<sup>11</sup> <https://greece.iom.int/el/hellenic-integration-support-beneficiaries-international-protection-helios>

As a result, a total of 41 interviews were taken - apart from the first pilot interviews –by five interviewers among them experienced staff of IOM and the author of this survey, following an intensive training under constant cooperation and exchange during the interviews, which started on March 2nd and were completed on June 6th. Due to the nature and originality of the survey and in view of drawing qualitative conclusions, the method of semi-structured interviews was selected, precisely for the flexibility provided to the interviewer to adjust questions and direct the flow of the discussion depending on the particular characteristics of the interviewer and the course of the interview itself.

The structure of the questionnaire consists of four parts. The first part provides biographic and demographic data, and the second part examines former experience and knowledge in the field of refugees' employment in the company, the duration and nature of the cooperation, the network for finding candidates, as well as the advantages and difficulties that arose for the company from the employment of refugees. The third part focuses on the highlighted difficulties in meeting the needs of the company, particularly those related to the hiring of refugees in the area and/or the sector in general, as well as the initiatives (collective or not) to address them.

The fourth and last part focuses on the enhancement of mobility in the area of the survey, for refugees to be employed in companies of the informants' sectors. In this part, questions focused on one hand to identify the willingness the businesses to participate in activities or organized efforts – possibly upon initiative of local employer associations in cooperation with other bodies – in view of facilitating the movement of refugees in the reference area, in view of employment in companies of each sector. On the other hand, the interviewees were asked to assess a specific proposal, which includes two axes.

The first axis concerns a) the prospect of establishing a mechanism and/or an electronic platform for direct matching of the demand at the local/sectoral level on the one hand and on the other the availability for work by refugees already during their stay outside and within state accommodation facilities of the capital of Athens, and b) to the actors that would be suitable for the operation and/or cooperation in view of successfully establishing such mechanism. The second axis focuses on the inclusion of certain parallel/complementary actions in the general design of such a mechanism/platform, to attract and successfully integrate employed refugees and their families. Particular emphasis is laid on actions to enhance access to services relating to housing, education, professional training, language and professional terminology courses, assisting in bureaucratic issues in relation to residence and work, as well as possible sources of funding of such parallel actions and projects.

### **Restrictions and challenges of the survey**

Two kinds of challenges arose during the survey, the time frame for the completion which was initially narrow (February to May 2022) but was finally extended by one month (June).

The first type of challenge is related to the period in which the survey was conducted, considering that spring traditionally relates to the restart and boosting of several economic activities intertwined with the change of seasons, such as agriculture, tourism, food, construction and trade. In early 2022, as in the two previous years, several restrictive measures were still in force due to the pandemic, the progressive removal or relaxation of measures contributed to the general increase of economic activity. It should be noted that for the first time after three years Easter was celebrated in conditions of normality.

In such a context of increased obligations and feverish preparation, the available time of company representatives often proved to be limited, which hindered the possibility of an interview. In addition, in conditions of COVID-19 peak periods, online interviews were preferred, which certainly lack directness and effectiveness of meetings in person, especially on the company premises.

Another major difficulty relates to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine on February 24, at the end of the first of the four months of the project, and mainly to the economic impact it would have for businesses and households, which became more and more intense as the survey proceeded. Such development caused additional concern in the business world due to the soaring prices, thus decreasing the level of availability and willingness to participate in a survey. However, at the same time the refugee issue emerged at the forefront of current European affairs reframing the issue of the importance of employment and inclusion for all displaced populations, enriching the arguments and concerns of both sides of the interview.

In summary, due to all the above factors, even though the initial planning at the end of 2021 and early 2022 was for interviews to be conducted in person, most of them were finally conducted either online over web platforms or by phone.



## An abstract geometric pattern featuring various shades of blue, white, and dark blue. The design includes several triangles of different sizes and orientations, some pointing left and some right. There are also stylized arrows: a dark blue arrow pointing left, a light blue arrow pointing right, and two white arrows pointing left. The background is a solid dark blue.

The outcomes of the survey will be presented schematically along the sequence of the parts of the questionnaire, as detailed in the previous chapter.

## 4.1 Demographic and biographic data

### 4.1.1 Data concerning the informants

As regards the informants, they were usually selected following an initial standard contact, to arrange the date of the interview and the representative of the business who would provide it. It was usually the owner (27/41), though in certain cases the interview was given by the Human Resources Manager (7) of which one at the level of group of companies, the General Director (3), the Operations Manager, the Communication and event Manager, the Accounts Manager or the Production Manager. Finally, as regards the gender of the informants, they were in most cases male (29/41).

### 4.1.2 Economic activity sector

A satisfying number of the main economic activity sectors were represented in the survey and in particular: trade and carpet cleaning industries, pastry goods production and trade, agricultural supplies trade, food and restaurants, dry cleaning industries, hotels-tourism industries, pastry shops, accounting-real estate-insurance services, packaging industry, electrical installations, super market supply chains, taxi and car rental services, aggregates extraction / mines, food industry and trade, construction, agricultural manufacturing, furniture manufacturing, hydraulic installation, agricultural machinery manufacture, feedstock and agricultural supplies, meat production and processing, recycling, technical company, seeds and seedlings, kids' clothing – baptism goods trade, manufacturing of medical supplies, food canning industry, cultivation and processing of biological products, urban transportation.

### 4.1.3 Size of businesses

The size of companies in the sample in terms of permanent / regular personnel (not seasonal or temporarily increased personnel to meet extraordinary needs) ranges from only 1 to 780 employees. Except for the case of the single group of companies included in the sample, with 6,000 employees, the other 40 businesses of the sample employ an average of 120 people. Specifically, apart from five companies that employ 240, 270, 656, 700 and 780 persons each, the majority of companies employee less than 100 persons, whereas only 11 companies employee less than 10 persons.

## 4.2 Experience and expertise in refugee recruitment

A primary general conclusion is that refugee employment is very limited, since a very small number of companies currently employ or have at least employed in the past refugees or asylum seekers. A second general conclusion is that the employment of migrants is more frequent, mainly from neighboring countries and especially from Albania.

### 4.2.1 Current or recent refugees' employment in the company and in local companies of the sector

The group of companies of the sample currently employs a total of 50 refugees on six-month seasonal contracts, who come from Syria, Afghanistan and Sub-Saharan Africa, representing 0.8% of the total number of employees of the group.

In the recent past, a small number of refugees from Cameroon were hired on monthly contracts by one company, which on May 16 2022, hired two refugees from Congo on a probationary contract, in view of immediately transforming such contracts into indefinite ones. The employees came in touch with the aforementioned company in the framework of the recent initiative "Career4all" in Karditsa, on May 12 2022<sup>12</sup>. Through the same initiative, another business of the same area that already employs Albanian nationals, came in touch with interested candidates and is about to proceed with the recruitment of a significant number of refugees by the end of June.

In addition, a hotel in Crete is in the process of recruiting refugees for seasonal employment, but their exact number and nationality have not been fixed yet. A dry-cleaning business in Epirus that recently employed two asylum applicants from Pakistan and Bangladesh for only five months, is seeking to immediately hire a refugee through the HELIOS project. A mine in Thessaly has recruited a refugee from Iraq on an indefinite term full-time employment contract since November 2021, whereas a hotel at a mountainous area of Ioannina has been employed a refugee from Syria for 3 years on an indefinite term contract. Three Afghan refugees have also been employed on an indefinite term full time employment contract since 2020 at a packaging materials industry in Crete.

<sup>12</sup> <https://greece.iom.int/el/news/dom-imeres-karieras-se-karditsa-kai-irakleio-kritis>

Finally, three Kurdish refugees were recently hired by a carpet cleaning business in Ioannina for three-month seasonal employment, who initially stayed at an open accommodation facility and then at a hotel of the area and had former experience in their country of origin as furniture craftsmen. A Syrian refugee with the same specialization and long experience in the profession acquired during his long previous stay and work in Turkey, was employed at a furniture industry in Trikala for a short period in 2021.

Regarding the interviewees estimates on the frequency and extent of possible employment of refugees in other similar businesses of the sector at the local level, it is rather confirmed that in general foreign workers of the specific category are hired rarely and at a small scale, despite the established vacancies in almost all sectors of economic activity. Apart from the dominant view that no refugees are employed in businesses of the same sector at the local level, the following answers were also given:

*I know a few refugees from Syria who are employed in building construction here in Chania (interv. 11).*

*A nearby trade company employs a refugee whom they have hired through the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) (interv. 7, Epirus)*

*A small number of Iraqis and very few Syrians are employed in restaurants (interv. 16, Crete).*

*There is a small percentage, around 10%, who are foreigners, from Albania and Bulgaria, but no refugees. As regards refugees, there is very few of them (interv. 12, Crete).*

*Yes, the recruitment of refugees in the area of Karditsa is a fact and there has been some mobilization in this regard recently; refugees are employed in both hotels and restaurants (interv. 24).*

*In this sector [agricultural and livestock farming] refugees are only employed as land workers even though their number here in Lasithi has been reduced by 1/3 as compared to 2021 (interv. 30, Crete).*

Often, before the interviewers had the time to frame the relevant question, informants themselves made clarifications regarding the employment of third country nationals/stateless in their businesses, who are not refugees. In such businesses, as well as in similar local businesses of the sector, it arises that a large number of migrants from neighboring European countries is employed, mainly from Albania, at rates that may reach or even exceed 20% of the total number of employees of the company. With employment contracts ranging from a few months to even more than 20 years, such migrants come – apart from Albania – from countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

In their answers informants did not seem to manifest any strong or clear preference between refugees and migrants, however in certain cases they stated, by way of clarification, that the recruitment of migrant workers becomes necessary due to the reluctance of Greek workers or insufficient number of interested native workers to meet the needs of the business. Finally, in several occasions reference was also made to the eventual entry of a large number of displaced people from Ukraine who enjoy a special international protection status and to their potential future absorption by businesses of the country: “their prospects of employment is of particular interest, considering they know more languages” (interv. 24, Thessaly).

#### **4.2.2 Network for finding employees with a refugee background**

Business representatives who had given a positive answer to the question on recent and current employment of refugees were asked on one hand to clarify the ways or mechanisms through which they sought and finally found suitable employees and on the other hand to assess the efficiency of such networks. From the total relevant answers, the following double conclusion is drawn.

First, the exploration of the prospect for recruitment among refugee populations largely lies on personal networks of business representatives, which usually involve the engagement of an acquaintance-employee in an NGO of the area. Second, such personal networks often result in initiatives or projects by the International Organization for Migration, such as the HELIOS project, for the promotion of employment.

A clear description of the general picture is provided by an employer in Trikala, who had had a recent positive experience of short-term employment of a refugee from Syria:

*I do not know how to search amongst the refugee population, just like many other interested peers. We are fully ignorant of the specific pool and its prospects (interv. 17, Thessaly).*

In fact, the same person further clarified that he came in touch with the potential employee through an acquaintance who worked at an NGO of the area and who also provided proper interpretation during the interview via a development entity of the local administration (ANKA, Karditsa). The significance of interpretation assistance during the first contact/meeting and/or during the interview has been highlighted in several other occasions, where it was additionally stressed that it is important to organize employability events such as Job Fairs, Welcome Weeks and Career4all days.

There was only one case where the recruitment resulted from the response of the interested refugee to a relevant announcement of the company, whereas in other cases, personal networking related to the direct approach of either a refugee who worked already at another similar company of the area or a professional in the sector of employment (tour operator).

In the two cases where the OAED was addressed, no suggestion was made to the interested company, either for a specific refugee employee or for an employee research network from the specific population group. In fact, another informant (interv. 27) noted that the company turned to the Labor Inspectorate and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, who expressed their ignorance about the existence of any refugee employee search networks.

In one case only it was stated that an NGO in the area of Athens was directly contacted in view of the organic products company to come in touch with refugees who would eventually be interested in moving outside the capital, but with no avail:

*I was invited by an NGO to get in touch. I no longer remember the name of the NGO. We were supposed to meet here, at the company premises, to discuss the potential recruitment of refugees, however the meeting never took place (interv. 40, Thessaly).*

### 4.2.3 Advantages and disadvantages of refugees' employment

All informants, regardless of whether they employed refugees or asylum seekers in their business or not, were asked to provide the advantages and disadvantages of employing refugees, as compared to the other two main categories of labor force, i.e., nationals and "economic" migrants.

As regards disadvantages, the lack of stability in employment and the temporary nature of occupation are of concern to the majority of businesses, followed by insufficient knowledge of the Greek language and the bureaucracy around the stay and work regime of refugees. As typically stated by an informant from Crete:

*The main disadvantage is that most of them stay for only a while, as they often use employment as a way to leave for other countries. Unfortunately, there is no stability. This is a major issue. Other hindrances that also cause inconvenience is that many are those who do not speak Greek and the bureaucracy regarding their documents (interv. 1, Crete).*

A similar disadvantage relates to the sudden departure from the company, often with no timely notice to the employer, particularly after a relatively long period of employment, usually –as estimated by informants – in view of continuing their path to other Northern European countries of destination. Such event, which follows the training that the company has previously provided to a refugee employee – often with great difficulty due to the unfamiliarity with the Greek language, is surrounded by a feeling of vanity. Employment of refugees and asylum seekers implies some sort of further “investment” for employers as compared to long-staying migrants or native employees, which occasionally exceeds the typical contractual obligations of employers provided for by the employment relation.

*The two guys were good and they wanted to learn. I found accommodation for them and provided some meals, but they suddenly left. If they had intended to stay, I would have kept them. The problem is that they are at a transitional stage, Greece is a way through for them; they would not stay. The training I gave them was also pointless (interv. 2, Epirus).*

The employers' fear and concern as regards instability of employment and sudden or departure from the company, is relieved when there are signs of permanent stay in the area:

*If a refugee arrives at a place with their family, there is stronger security to employers as they feel that due to their family, the chances of them leaving are less (interv. 25, Crete).*

In this sense, the permanent settlement of the whole family of refugees in the area of the company is considered to facilitate integration into employment in general, since it thus makes it possible to cover different (seasonal) needs throughout the year at different sectors of economic activity.

The lack of qualification and training is only reported as a disadvantage for specific professional requirements of specific jobs, which would of course apply for any employee regardless of their origin. The difference though is that in the case of native employees they theoretically have the possibility to prove their necessary qualifications, which is not evident in the case of refugees.

The insufficient knowledge of the Greek language is very often mentioned in the responses of company representatives, but rarely as the main disadvantage of employing refugees. However, prioritization and mainly the extent of the negative effect of the unfamiliarity with the Greek language are closely connected to the object of each specific job and to the level of specialization it requires. As noted by one employer at a company that already recruits refugees:

*The main disadvantage is the language. They do not speak Greek and the Greeks do not speak English, so it is difficult for them to work together. Of course, our work is not difficult, it is manual work and if they knew the terminology of the profession in Greek they could communicate and work together (interv. 5, Crete).*

Indeed, in the entire of the sample, not only does it not result that language is an unsurmountable obstacle, but it is often considered to be of secondary importance even if there is an elementary knowledge of English:

*Usually refugees do not speak Greek, but if they speak some English, there is no problem in them working (interv. 16, Crete) (interv. 18, Thessaly).*

*Language is the only difficulty which in no way constitutes an inhibitory factor and is certainly not a problem (interv. 23, Thessaly).*

Besides, there are only a few jobs for which good knowledge of Greek or English is absolutely necessary (e.g., hotel front office), whereas for all other jobs the moderate knowledge of any of the two is sufficient (interv. 20, Crete). In fact, the knowledge of the mother tongue and another language (other than Greek and English) was reported in one case as an advantage for the hotel industry (interv. 35, Epirus).

Particularities that relate to different culture are reported most rarely in the informants' answers and when they are, they are not stated as an unsurmounted problem but as an issue to settle.



*I have heard of people who stop their work to have tea or to pray. Another disadvantage is that the Muslim holidays do not coincide with those of the Orthodox, so they may be absent from work. Of course, these issues are of minor importance I have just heard of them (interv. 8, Epirus).*

*As long as they are not manifest at the workplace, religious differences are not a problem in tourism either, where great discretion and tolerance is required regarding appearance and cultural diversity (interv. 20, Crete).*

Bureaucracy and essential legal document requirements are of concern to several companies, though only a few of them view them as the most important disadvantages as regards to employing refugees. At the same time, reference is also made to the fact that the absence of refugees from companies of the tourism sector in an area is fully due to bureaucracy around employment and social security documents (interv. 28, Crete). Other informants specify:

*The main problem relates to their documents. They may be incomplete; something may be missing, which makes it difficult for them to hire (interv. 16, Crete).*

*A reason for which certain employers might not proceed to the recruitment of refugees is that they feel insecurity as regards the legal framework governing recruitment, rights and obligations (interv. 24, Thessaly).*

However, it should be mentioned that the possession of temporary, all the more so of permanent residence documents, constitutes a stronger claim for legal employment on behalf of employees, which only appears to be a problem in rare cases, particularly in sectors such as agriculture where undeclared work is dominant:

*Another issue is that refugees want the labor stamp (ergosimo) as opposed to Greeks who prefer to work at the fields uninsured (interv. 40, Thessaly).*

An account manager at a business in Thessaloniki gives a negative evaluation of the fact that the refugees tolerate quite difficult circumstances because of their urgent need to work.

*Of course, this is precisely the reason why they are preferred [...] because they are willing to do the hardest work, the one that the natives refuse to*

*do. The nature of the work is difficult and dirty, but they work hard and they will not leave, as opposed to the natives who do not stay at work for long (Interv. 3, Thessaly).*

It is indeed worth noting that in almost all cases where the discussion resulted in comments such as “refugees take jobs that the Greeks avoid”, the specific remark served rather to interpret the urgent need to draw potential employees among refugees as well than to stress some sort of “advantage” in an implicit competition between foreigners and natives to cover job vacancies. As a hotel owner and member of a local employer association characteristically stresses:

*There is huge need for labor force and the main advantage is that refugees may precisely meet needs that are not easily met (interv. 13, Crete).*

*Consequently, they certainly cover gaps and needs (interv. 15, Crete).*

No clear preference of natives against refugees or migrants is established throughout the sample, even though national preference is expressed in certain few cases, for practical (language) or emotional/ideological reasons despite the well-known general unwillingness or inadequacy of Greek employees to cover vacancies.

*A basic disadvantage in employing foreigners in general, not necessarily refugees, might be the fact that it would not be good that foreigners to occupy positions where natives might possibly be employed [...] on the other hand though, there are numerous vacancies, so the main advantage is that foreigners cover needs that may otherwise not be met (interv. 32, Crete).*

“For me, they are all the same. They are all people and I do not see any advantages or disadvantages of a group against the other” states a representative of a technical company in Crete (interv. 31). The specific pattern has been demonstrated in a large number of answers regarding the relevant question, regardless of some sort of emphasis on “positive” or “negative” side effects from the employment of refugees. Reference was also made to “humanism” as a motive to employ refugees “since the employers of the country should help them in this transitional stage they are at” (interv. 24, Thessaly).

Informants who already employ refugees express themselves more often in a much more positive way:

*From my experience so far, I only have advantages to share. Everything is positive (interv. 4, Epirus).*

*I believe that there are no disadvantages. I could only think of advantages. A refugee might have a background in the food sector and bring new know-how and expertise, as well as to show us different ways of working. (interv. 8, Epirus).*

In fact, in certain cases, reference is not only made to the advantages, but efforts are made for a more comprehensive approach, which extends to various levels:

*Refugees expand our way of thinking, they are more willing to integrate in the team and be trained in the profession of hotel worker; they have sought-after knowledge, such as French, considering the increased flow of French visitors (interv. 25, Crete).*

## 4.3 Observation of difficulties concerning refugees' mobility and work

This chapter examines the extent to which there are jobs available in a business that might be also filled by refugees, as well as the reasons that would hinder such prospect. Specifically, it explores problems arising from the (re)settlement of refugees in the areas of the survey from the large urban centers of the country or possibly a reverse process of attracting refugees to them, particularly in the context of the pandemic. Finally, informants are asked to give a general assessment of the refugees' prospects of employment in businesses of their sector, at the local level, and to describe eventual coordinated and collective efforts at a sectoral (local or national) level for the enhancement of such prospects.

### 4.3.1 Efforts to fill vacancies in the company by refugees

In more than half of the businesses of the sample (22/41) there are or are going to be immediate needs for hiring workers, which could be met by refugees. In many of those cases, businesses have already focused their research on the specific population group of employees.

The three elements that characterize the scope of the survey are: positive opinion on and/or experience from the employment of refugees, insecurity due to lack of stability in employment and the absence of networking alternatives for employing refugees, which are mainly, through IOM, it is being reminded that the survey took place in spring of 2022, a period when every year the number of recruitments increases in numerous sectors throughout the territory.

The selection of a refugee employees was made based on objective criteria and on equal terms when it is possible to choose among several candidates. As typically stated in one of the answers:

*I always find Greeks easily; I am not interested in hiring refugees just to have them work with less money. If necessary, I know people at NGOs and I may contact them at any time (interv. 8, Epirus).*

In several cases, even though there are both vacancies and willingness on behalf of the company, the recruitment of refugees is hindered by the requirements of high-qualification jobs that demand good knowledge of Greek and specific training (interv. 6, Thessaly), all the more so when low-qualification jobs have already been taken, occasionally with the assistance of the International Organization for Migration (interv. 3, Thessaly).

In several answers, representatives of businesses clearly express their reservations for hiring refugees due to their strong suspicions that not only is their employment relationship not going to last long, but it will eventually be interrupted even with no notice before the end of the season:

*There are three vacancies in production. The problem is that there are no labor hands in general, though as regards the recruitment of refugees in particular, the problem is that they usually stay for short periods of time; we do not have the stability we need (interv. 1, Crete).*

*There is one vacancy for ironing and washing, but I would hardly hire a refugee in the business again. They are honest and hard-working but I could not trust them, they are here temporarily (interv. 2, Epirus).*

*There are many vacancies in all specializations and for the whole season, but their replacement would cause a problem to the business (interv. 28, Crete).*

Of course, it should be noted that only one informant (interv. 25, Crete), a hotel owner with many unskilled job vacancies (in sectors such as food, service, housekeeping), has mentioned the exact opposite problem, i.e., the seasonality of the employment offered, considering that interested refugees “prefer longer employment”<sup>13</sup>.

The dominance of personal contacts and networking with specific NGOs is confirmed by the responses stating that it is the only or at least the most suitable way for interested businesses to find personnel at the time when the survey was conducted. Half of the businesses that seek employees among the refugee population of the country make a direct reference to the HELIOS project or to IOM.

*From July to the end of October, there will be many jobs for greenhouse workers. I post ads in the local newspapers and the radio. If I do not find anybody, then I will contact IOM (interv. 33, Crete).*

Without any communication channels it is difficult to find refugees (interv. 26, Crete), so in absence of specific and organized ways to find interested refugees, the search takes place through word of mouth (interv. 16, Crete).

Finally, a basic problem mentioned regarding the recruitment of refugees is the difficulty in movement from the city of settlement to the village where the (hotel) business is located, due to the long distance. Specifically, when a job is permanent and not seasonal, the solution to the problem includes the decision to permanently relocate from the nearby town to the community where the business is situated (interv. 24, Thessaly). The same applies for the daily movement from the city center to the industrial area, in the absence of a private car (interv. 8, Epirus) (interv. 7, Epirus).

However, this issue is directly linked to the central concern regarding the general relocation of refugees to the countryside in search of employment.

### 4.3.2 Problems of refugee relocation in the areas of the survey

The same hotel owner-informant clarifies:

*Candidate refugees are not willing to relocate to the communities that are near the business because the employment offered may only cover one member of the family, whereas the other members may find employment in the urban center of the region (interv. 24, Thessaly).*

<sup>13</sup> This issue is further detailed in the next sub-chapter.

In addition, as already mentioned, the prospect of refugees being relocated to the countryside requires the certainty that comes with a longer-term employment relationship, which is definitely not provided by seasonal employment.

*It is definitely difficult, because for a refugee to relocate on the island, the employment relation offered must be of longer term (interv. 25, Crete).*

*It raises concerns to have less jobs offered in the countryside, which are often seasonal and do not provide the desired stability to refugees (interv. 33, Crete).*

*Refugees prefer large urban centers because of the longer duration of employment as compared to Crete for example where employment is typically seasonal (interv. 26, Crete).*

Yet, there is another major problem, which, although it concerns the whole working population of the country, is clearly more acute in the case of refugees: accommodation.

This problem<sup>14</sup> was reported by the vast majority of interviewees as the most important or one of the most difficult to solve as regards mobility of refugees to the countryside. In fact, such difficulty was related both to the lack of available accommodation and to high rental prices.

*The basic difficulty lies in finding accommodation. The houses that are available and relatively affordable in the area are not nice and old. I, myself found accommodation to the refugees I employed in the past near the business (interv. 2, Epirus).*

*The major problem is accommodation. There are no houses available. The problem is even more intense in touristic areas, where many of the houses that were available for residential lease are now only available for Airbnb (interv. 16, Crete).*

<sup>14</sup> It is emphasized that Objective 5 (Creation of housing opportunities) in the framework of the National Strategy for the social integration of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection envisages two specific actions: on the one hand linking housing opportunities with seasonal employment opportunities in the tourism or agricultural sector and on the other creating incentives for homeowners to lease real estate to beneficiaries of international protection.

*If a refugee comes without having already found a job or even without any specialization in a profession, it would be difficult to absorb them, considering there is a problem in accommodation and the rents are too expensive (interv. 37, Epirus).*

*It is certainly difficult for a refugee to settle from the center to an island because of accommodation. At first, the business offered accommodation to employees but then the number of employees increased significantly (interv. 27, Crete).*

Quite often, the lack of accommodation and the expensive rents in the city of the area, result in renting outside the urban areas (interv. 35, Epirus). In this case though, the problem of moving to the place of work arises, in reverse this time.

In villages and small towns of the area, another problem highlighted is not to the cost of rent but to the lack of houses that are suitable to accommodate a family (interv. 40, Thessaly and interv. 30, Crete). It is then often observed in general that a large number of people live in one small house and in very poor living conditions (interv. 1, Crete and interv. 4, Epirus).

In some cases, the solution to the issue of accommodation in the tourism sector is given through the possibility of large hotel facilities providing accommodation and food to their employees, especially to those who do not live permanently in the area but have to relocate to meet the seasonal needs of the summer. However, even if accommodation and food is provided by such large hotel facilities, the said provisions only concern employees and not the members of their family, therefore the general accommodation problem remains as an inhibitory factor for the relocation of refugees to the countryside (interv. 22, Crete).

Nevertheless, the image shown by informants is not completely clear as regards the examination of an opposite trend of return or to attract refugees to the large urban centers from the three areas examined in the survey. First, there are certain references to the general perpetuation of the country's urbanization trend, such as the following:

*The Greek culture does not only drive away refugees but also natives to the large urban centers. Yet, opportunities exist in small cities of the country as well (interv. 24, Thessaly).*

*Refugees may think that in large cities there are more jobs. They have not been in contact with the Greek countryside to see the living standards it has to offer (interv. 40, Thessaly).*

On the contrary, the existence of permanent and sustainable work inhibits the urbanization trend:

*Due to the better living conditions that are provided in the countryside, in all cases I know where there is sustainable employment, refugees do not want to leave Thessaly, as they have settled their life in the area (interv. 6, Thessaly).*

On the other hand, a small number of answers attribute responsibility to the effects of the lockdown and the restriction measures in restaurants applied in 2020 and 2021 which forced many thousands of workers to permanently leave touristic areas and head for the inland where they stay until this day and where they are most probably employed even in different sectors (interv. 16, Crete).

At the same time, there are also a few answers that estimate that the large urban centers enhance the feeling of security and solidarity among refugees because that is where the NGOs intervene more often / more efficiently or because that is where the asylum services are located, to which they must often go to settle their affairs (interv. 33, Crete). The main reason though is that there is a large community of their nationals in the capital and the large urban centers as well as the operation of networks for the arrangement of formalities or for their migration to Northern European countries (interv. 5, Epirus).

It is true that in at least five cases (interv. 36, Crete, interv. 34, Crete, interv. 5, Epirus, interv. 13, Crete, interv. 8, Epirus) it was mentioned that the return to the capital or a large urban center is a transit point for preparation in view of a new destination, typically to countries such as Germany and Italy.

### **4.3.3 Refugee work prospects at a local-sectoral level and coordinated efforts for their enhancement**

An effort is made at the end of this chapter to provide a general picture as regards the possibilities to have job vacancies covered by refugees in general at businesses of the sector at a local level, as well as regarding coordinated/collective efforts that are eventually made by the local administration and/or employers' associations to this end.



As regards the first part, the absolute majority of informants believe that at the time when the interviews were taken (spring 2022) there were many jobs offered, which could be filled by refugees as well. First, there is optimism that many such jobs will finally be filled by refugees:

*There are surely many vacant jobs, I believe that most employers would proceed to the recruitment of refugees to cover them (interv. 31, Crete).*

*The refugees of the area have been reduced by 1/3 compared to last year, and those who are here will be easily absorbed (interv. 30, Crete).*

In many cases, it was clarified that this applies to seasonal work in unskilled jobs (interv. 39, Thessaly) or for manual and difficult work in all sectors except front office (interv. 5, Epirus).

On the other hand, strong concern is often expressed that the refugees' access to employment will finally not be facilitated for various reasons:

*We look for workers in agriculture, not only here but all over Greece, but the foreigners who work for us often leave because they find better remuneration in companies of other sectors (interv. 33, Crete).*

*From the discussions we have with other hotel owners we know that similar efforts are made to find refugees at a local level to cover the vacancies. Unfortunately, due to the fact that the work is seasonal, for about 5-6 months things will be very difficult, considering that in large urban centers outside Crete there is work that lasts for the whole year, beyond the tourism sector (interv. 26, Crete).*

In other cases, the inhibitory factors for the refugees' access to employment in local businesses of the sector despite the identified needs are considered to be related with perceptions of employers themselves:

*There are prospects but there is also strong disbelief regarding refugees because they finally leave and the training and time devoted for them to learn the work goes in vain (interv. 2, Epirus).*

*Training a person without any experience in the food sector is difficult and a waste of time unless such person is already experienced in the profession (interv. 9, Epirus).*

*I believe that the businesspeople of the sector do not look for staff in the right way, e.g., through posts mainly on the internet, but they insist on personal networks (interv. 4, Epirus).*

As regards knowledge and own participation in coordinated efforts to find employees among refugees, most answers were unsurprisingly negative. It is not rare for such answers to be surrounded by a feeling of discontent and remarks like “unfortunately no, there are not any” regarding the existence of collective efforts to attract refugee labor, whereas remarks are also made regarding the fact that the local employer association is not particularly active or as active as it should be for the resolution of the problem.

Only two references have been made by trade union employers from the sample of the area of Crete (Chania and Heraklion respectively) to initiatives taken by the local Chamber. In both cases, it was about conferences on the timely solution to the problem of insufficient labor in several sectors of the area, whereas the informants represented a pastry business and a company that is active in accounting and real estate services:

*Unfortunately, there are no coordinated and organized efforts. The Chamber recently organized a conference regarding the insufficiency of labor, considering the difficulties in certain sectors. Such a framework would very well favor a joint effort and search in view of absorbing a number of refugees (interv. 11, Crete).*

*I know that a few months ago a conference took place at the Chamber with the participation of the Association of Commerce, where reference was made to families of refugees that live on the island followed by a discussion as to the extent to which jobs might be offered to those families. Employers were given the message that they must systematically seek to have their vacancies covered by this population as well (interv. 10, Crete).*

Specifically for the tourism sector, as characteristically mentioned by an informant hotel owner in Crete (interv. 22), the Hotel Chamber of Greece has launched a specific initiative for the development of fast training programs addressed to refugees, in view

of training around 15,000 people at the end of May 2022. “It is a good move, which is comes late” the informant specifically reports; however, it is doubtful if the relevant action was finally implemented.

Previously, employer associations of the hotel sector had suggested developing a comprehensive fast training program that may be addressed to refugee and unskilled workforce and involves basic qualifications: floor keeper, linen keeper, indoor and outdoor cleaner, janitor, dishwasher, gardener assistant and warehouse assistant. The training hours ranged from 60 to 115 depending on the specialization, the trainee allowance ranged from 300 to 575 euros respectively, and the courses concerned the following fields: a) introduction to tourism, b) basic professional principles, c) cleaning and tidying up services, d) hygiene & safety, e) English tourism terminology, f) CV drafting & job interview and g) basic customer service principles. This program, however, financed by NSRF, was not carried out in view of the current 2022 touristic period.

Finally, a number of interviews made reference to actions and activities assumed by NGOs or to partnerships encouraged by the International Organization for Migration (interv. 13, Crete), through which there is some hope of recruiting a small number of refugees in local businesses of the sector. Only one answer makes a reference to an initiative that seems to be taken by the chamber of labor in the area: “I know that some efforts are made by the chamber of labor” (interv. 31, Crete). Besides a reference is also made (interv. 40, Thessaly) about business turning to migrant intermediary networks that ensure the relocation of refugees and asylum seekers of the same nationality, from various areas of the country, for seasonal work in agriculture, as they face the risk of not having their products harvested (again) this summer (2022) because of the great lack of labor.

## 4.4 Ways to overcome obstacles relating to the permanent settlement of refugees for employment

The last chapter of the questionnaire is founded on three basic thematic axes.

The first examines the degree of willingness and/or the possibility of already participating in local-sectoral initiatives to overcome the obstacles of permanent relocation of refugees in the area for the purpose of employment. In addition, references and/or descriptions were asked regarding any successful examples of

enhancing the prospect of medium- and long-term movement of refugees in view of taking a job or having general access to employment.

The second and most important field of investigation refers to assessing the prospects of establishing a mechanism for directly matching labor supply and demand at a local level, as well as assessing the most suitable actors to take over the establishment of such a mechanism.

The third and last axis concerns the expansion of the competences of such a mechanism through the assumption of additional or complementary actions to facilitate the general integration of refugees in areas of the countryside through interventions that focus on accommodation, training/qualification or even ensuring sustainability of employment on an annual basis at the place of permanent residence.

### **4.4.1 Willingness to participate or current engagement in actions to promote employment mobility at a local level**

The manifestation of a positive disposition to participate in actions to promote mobility of refugees for the purpose of employment at a local level is hugely dominant in the answers given by the informants of the survey. In only five cases did the interviewees state the condition of sparing the necessary time for such activation, considering that professional obligations are very significant throughout the year.

In addition, some informants set various conditions, such as “having a totally clear image” (interv. 14, Crete), having the widest possible range of participating entities and organizations (interv. 1, Crete), having central coordination (interv. 6, Thessaly), state support and economic support for the project (interv. 26, Crete) or having all organizational guarantees provided for the success of the initiative (interv. 36, Crete). In fact, in two more cases, interviewees explicitly mentioned the condition of attributing a leading role to the sectoral employer federation (interv. 10, Crete and interv. 13, Crete).

From the positive answers given, certain stand out for the wider social context:

*Yes, of course, we would be positive. We have made efforts in the past to enhance the inclusion of Pontic Greeks from Russia. We will find accommodation and do whatever is necessary to help (interv. 40, Thessaly).*

*I am willing to take over any action that generally supports these people (interv. 31, Crete).*

*We would be willing to participate in such actions, synergistically, i.e., among businesses and actors and eventually through subsidies of the latter to the former (interv. 24, Thessaly).*

In only four cases a negative answer was given. “This is the job of the NGOs” states one of them (interv. 9, Epirus), however, in the other cases it was not about lack of willingness but rather an expression of a feeling of vainness:

*Collectively no, only for our own business. The local businesspeople of the sector are not open-minded, the area is small and the competition is hard (interv. 4, Epirus).*

“No” and “unfortunately not” are the dominant answers to the request to further clarify whether a business already participates in joint initiatives at a local-sectoral level and whether there are synergies with other local actors. In certain cases, clarifications are also given, relating in general to the fact that “the local association is weakened” (interv. 7, Epirus) or that the synergy relates to an informal networking with the municipality of the area. In others, reference is made either to the intervention in informal ad hoc partnerships in the framework of a specific action or to the general inclusion in the local employer association or cooperative body, which also participates in certain similar processes / partnerships.

One participant only has presented a permanent cooperation framework with the Hotel Chamber, local hotels and restaurant associations, the Karditsa Development Agency and the Municipality of Karditsa:

*It is of formal character and permanent contact is established with the said bodies, as this is the only way to solve problems, basically through a synergistic concept (interv. 24, Thessaly).*

Moreover, a manufacture business representative (interv. 18, Thessaly) presented an arrangement of remarkable contacts they had developed at their own initiative with all involved actors at a local level and in cooperation with the chamber or local cooperatives. The target sought is to work with local members of the Parliament in view of finding a solution to the burning issue of insufficient labor in the primary sector, which has multiplying negative effects to the whole economic activity of the area.

Finally, as regards the request to describe good practices aiming at enhancing refugee’ prospects of medium to long-term stay in the area of the survey in the

context of mobility for employment, the overwhelming ignorance of informants was rather expected. Apart from a frequent reference to cases of hotels that provide accommodation and food at their own facilities, it has been impressive that at least five informants made a reference to a specific business in Epirus that massively employs refugees ensuring both their transportation from and to the city center by private bus and their accommodation in houses, although with some criticism of the living conditions therein.

### 4.4.2 The usefulness of establishing a mechanism directly matching offer and demand at a local level

The first of the two relevant topics of discussion are the following: What are the chances of having a successful establishment of a mechanism and/or an electronic platform for the direct matching of demand at the local / sectoral level and offer / availability of work by refugees even in their own places of stay (within and outside state accommodation facilities)? What bodies would be suitable for the operation and/or cooperation in view of achieving the successful activation of such a mechanism and why?

The specific proposal was welcomed with excitement by the vast majority of informants and gave rise to very interesting remarks, ideas and implementation proposals in at least 30 of them. The first spontaneous reaction to the framing of the question-proposal includes remarks such as “excellent /great idea”, “very helpful”, “it would be ideal /perfect for our country”, “it would be very successful”, “I am very positive”, “very useful for everybody”.

*I totally agree. In fact, I had made a similar proposal at the conference I mentioned earlier: to create a platform where refugees may post their CV and any other data that is allowed to post based on the law on the protection of personal data. Employers would visit the platform to seek interested employees and would address the platform administrators who would make the pairing. From then on, interviews might even take place online (interv. 10, Crete).*

*It is a very interesting proposal. It does not only involve registration of the demand or uploading of CVs, it also ensures correct interconnection (interv. 23, Thessaly).*

*A great idea. Another ideal proposal regarding the relocation of refugees and their stay here would also be to offer free accommodation for one to two months until they have the money to rent a home and be smoothly integrated in the local community (interv. 3, Thessaly).*

Further, certain conditions were often set, such as mutual honesty or even the possibility to verify the accuracy of stated skills or qualifications in the context of the electronic platform. In addition, technical issues were raised such as the objective difficulty of certain employers –mainly farmers – to use new technologies. In this regard, another proposal was framed regarding the assignment of the operation of the platform to ad hoc entities/special agencies of the facility with authorized employees at a local level.

*It is a very good idea and in the spirit of our times regarding the use of new technologies. It is positive for employers to be able to seek employees over the platform, but that would also require the existence of personnel that would be here in town responsible for the operation of the platform, which would also give employers the possibility to get in touch in person. Such personnel would guarantee the reliability and safety of the whole platform, it would make the necessary verifications and thus build relationships of trust among all involved parties (interv. 13., Crete).*

*The idea is very good and the proposal is of great interest. It would be good if the platform might also translate information in all languages that refugees speak. The refugee population might in practice consider in advance if it is worth relocating to other areas based on a proper and safe assessment (interv. 6, Thessaly).*

A great variety of responses arose further on regarding the second part of the question-proposal, which concerned the suitable body(bodies) for the implementation of the mechanism and specifically of the platform. In fact, answers might be divided into three separate categories. Apart from one case only, where it was proposed to assign the implementation of the mechanism to private entities, the first version includes only the partnership of state and/or local administration entities, eventually with international organizations as well, the second version includes the participation of civil society organizations only, either with or without the participation of government organizations and the third version refers to broader partnerships.



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In only one case a suggestion was made for a partnership between the regional and the municipal authorities (interv. 14, Crete). In a few responses, the informant suggests that the mechanism should be put under the auspices of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and mostly of the Ministry of Labor. At this point it is worth mentioning that in the whole of the sample, any reference to OAED is made with reservation even in the single case where the view was expressed that “public entities exclusively, normally OAED should be, but ...” (interv. 32, Crete).

*It should be OAED and IOM that undertake such an initiative, but OAED is currently not able to do it (interv. 3, Thessaly and interv. 6, Thessaly).*

In two more cases, the proposal concerns the synergy of the state and UNHCR (interv. 34, Crete) or the partnership of UNHCR with the municipality only (interv. 36, Crete), whereas one informant preferred the cooperation of the Ministries of Migration and Labor with IOM.

The second category of proposal includes social and professional entities. A proposal was rather rarely put forward to have such an initiative assumed only by employer associations and chambers (interv. 11, Crete and interv. 39, Thessaly), by the local Association of Hotel Owners and IOM (interv. 29, Crete) or by the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants (GSEVEE) and the ministry / OAED (interv. 16, Crete).

Quite frequent suggestions are made on schemes that remind of the classic social dialogue among social interlocutors, eventually at a tripartite level:

*Normally, the competent entity should be the Ministry of Labor but so far, it has not managed to do so. I believe that the suitable bodies would be the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) with its Institute, in cooperation with an equivalent body of the GSEVEE (interv. 8, Epirus).*

*I believe that the suitable entities for the implementation of such mechanism would be first of all the Workers' Associations and trade unions, possibly in partnership with employers' associations (interv. 12, Crete).*

*I believe that such a mechanism might only be efficient through the partnership of employers' and workers' associations. Local employers' associations and GSEBEE should also be engaged, and definitely the workers' union, so*



*as to ensure equal terms and equal opportunities for potential employees and surely to avoid any discriminations between locals and foreigners (interv. 15, Crete).*

However, the informants' proposals conclude in principle that it is necessary to form broader partnerships to ensure proper and efficient implementation of the said mechanism. A minor issue in this kind of proposals is whether the emphasis or the central organizational role should be attributed to an employers' association, an employees' union, an NGO or a state entity. Among others, the following was stated:

*The OAED, GSEVEE, GSEE and an NGO might work together. The NGO would register interested employees, the GSEE would assist the drafting of CVs and the OAED would run some relevant projects (interv. 9, Epirus).*

*Employers' associations, NGOs and state entities might work together (interv. 1, Crete).*

*The suitable entities would be IOM, the chambers, the regions and the municipal authorities (interv. 24, Thessaly).*

#### **4.4.3 The extension of the operation of the mechanism to support actions for the general integration of refugees in the local community**

The second of the two relevant questions is the following: Do you believe that in the framework of such a mechanism / platform it would be positive to include in the general planning - for the relocation of interested refugee employees – a number of parallel / complementary actions targeting their attraction and safe integration [i.e. the refugees' access to accommodation/ education/ vocational training / language & terminology training / provision of sustainable employment/ arrangement of formalities regarding their residence status etc. throughout the year]? Do you have any ideas regarding the resources to fund such parallel actions and projects?

This proposal was also very warmly welcomed by almost all informants although their enthusiasm was not equal to the reactions manifested in the previous question. This variation is absolutely reasonable and expected for two reasons. The first reason is that for the vast majority of businesses, particularly in spring 2022, the

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major problem has been to cover vacancies. Hence, a framework to facilitate the matching of offer and demand was already a tangible and urgent necessity. The second reason is that the content of the second proposal refers to interventions of programming and thus entails a mediumterm character; it lies beyond the usual competences or priorities of the labor market, whereas it certainly has features of an unprecedented and eventually very progressive idea.

The benefits for businesses stemming from such a broad activation of the mechanism in issues of integration to local community, based on the answers given, range from the business world itself to the whole national economy.

*It seems very positive and it would help to have refugees coming to Ioannina. With interventions of this kind, Greece could become a country of permanent settlement for refugees, who would not leave for Europe. They would be successfully trained and they would stay (interv. 5, Epirus).*

*If everything were well planned, the life of both businesspeople and employees would be easier, whereas specifically for refugees their relocation in our area would also be more feasible, particularly as regards overcoming the accommodation issue (interv. 30, Crete).*

*It is a very good idea and I believe that it would have a positive effect so as to facilitate the relocation of refugees here, eventually providing a solution to the most critical problem, accommodation (interv. 4, Epirus).*

*For hotel businesses as well as for any employer, the recruitment is followed by one more “investment” on the training and capacity building of employees. Therefore, the safe integration of refugees and the enhancement of their access to accommodation, training, Greek language and terminology learning makes such “investment” of businesses much safer by default (interv. 28, Crete).*

As regards the content of such additional actions that might be undertaken by the proposed mechanism, the informants made very interesting suggestions, usually in a spontaneous way.

*Such actions would be very positive. In the medium term, they would result in Greek language learning, whereas they might also ensure the acquisition of useful skills and qualifications, such as a professional driver’s license. I*

*believe that the proper level is the local one, besides specialized vocational training centers operate in all cities (interv. 16, Crete).*

*It would definitely help very much. First, if the arrival of refugees takes place in an organized way, it will be much easier and safer for owners to rent the properties they have available in the villages of the region. Second, it requires further decentralization of such actions beyond the regional urban area, so as, for example, for training or education to be also offered in remote places of work and residence and not only in the main city of the region (interv. 40, Thessaly).*

*I believe it would help, as I also believe that projects such as HELIOS provide a positive experience, through which Greek language courses are offered, as well as assistance in finding accommodation (interv. 27, Crete).*

However, as regards suitable entities for the implementation of such additional and complementary actions, the spontaneous answers of informants lead to the conclusion that there is reduced confidence in schemes or partnerships among social entities and a there is a conviction that such initiatives are mostly a state affair. A typical case concerns a representative of a vehicles operation business in Crete, who, even though in the previous question (see sub-chapter 4.4.2) spoke in favor of the partnership among employers and employee associations, here the same person stated:

*I quite agree with such actions, but I believe that trade union bodies are not suitable for their implementation. They must be put in place by state entities such as competent ministries or the regional authorities (interv. 15)*

*... the engagement of which guarantees transparency and enhances the confidence of employers (interv. 12, ....).*

Nevertheless, there are also views according to which such actions should be implemented by chambers, trade union bodies and OAED (interv. 32, Crete). Yet, the whole sample is dominated by answers indicating that the most suitable entities are state bodies, regardless of the following statement of informants related to funding sources.

*Something like that would help a lot. It is a very good idea. These actions might be implemented under the auspices of the chamber, but in any case,*

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*they must be done with initiative of the state. Besides, private professionals are so absorbed by their professional duties that it would be very difficult for them to undertake the organization of such actions on their own initiative (interv. 11, Crete).*

*The state must look after the refugees and whoever comes to our country (interv. 41, Thessaly).*

The robust central organization as well as the engagement of specialized personnel are the necessary conditions for the success of such a plan:

*These are all very positive. In order for the venture to be successful, it must be run by people whose exclusive scope would relate to such actions. There must also be a whole support network under the umbrella of the regional authorities, where chambers and local actors would participate, particularly in small communities, so as for personal social relations to develop and to further build trust amongst employers (interv. 10, Crete). It would also be encouraging mainly for refugees; it would make them feel more comfortable to arrive at a place where they are supported in practice (interv. 34, Crete).*

*All these are very good ideas. But they must be implemented in an organized way, under the responsibility of the state, the Ministry of Labor, eventually with the engagement of the OAED and the partnership of actors such as the regional authorities. There are actors, such as those who work on the ESTIA project, whose staff has huge know-how regarding the refugee issue and who should also be engaged in the implementation of such actions (interv. 13, Crete).*

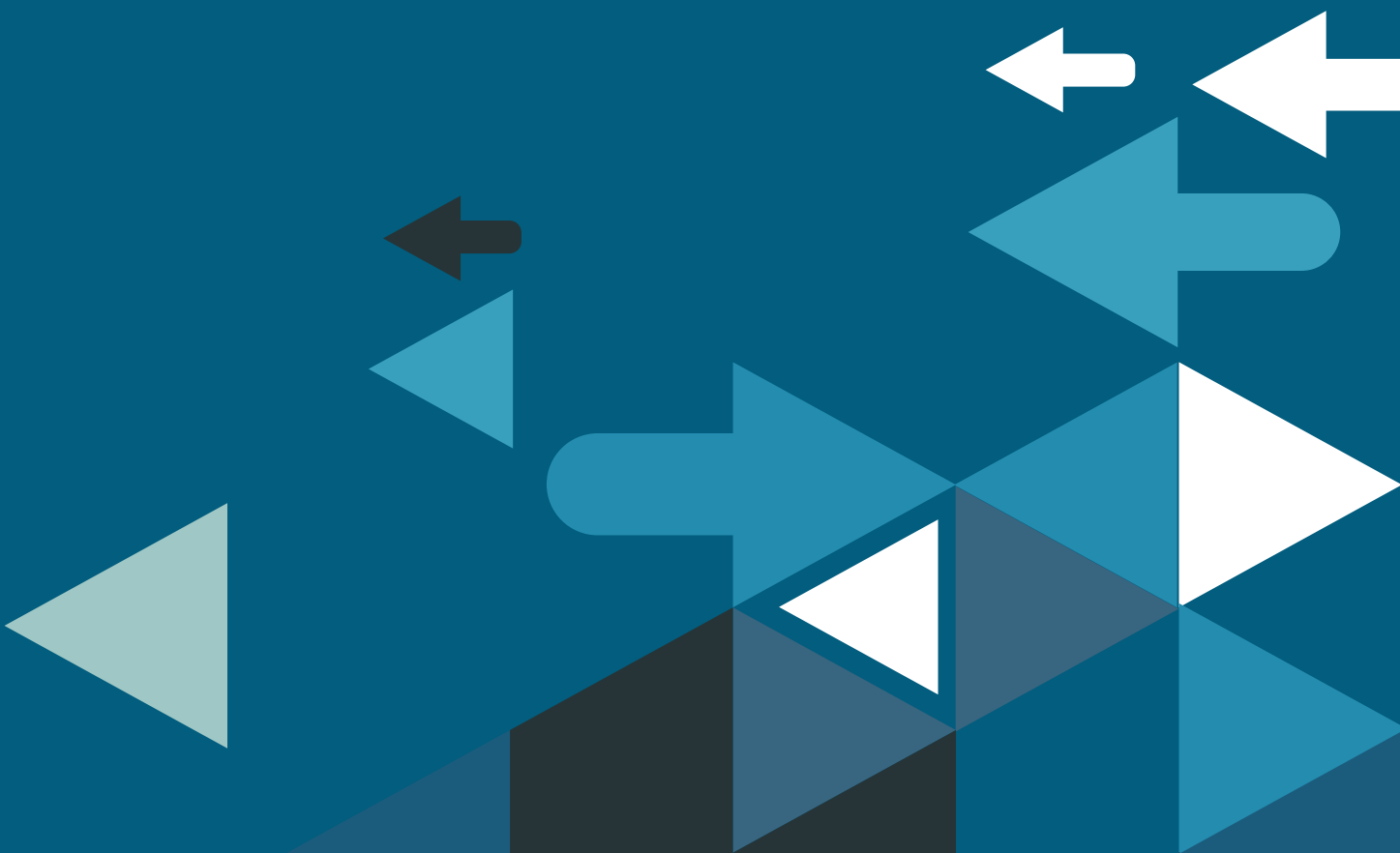
Finally, as regards funding, most answers received estimate that it is only through the NSRF or EU funds in general that such actions could be financed, considering that the refugee issue is a European phenomenon. However, other views have been expressed relating to pure state funding (Ministry of Labor) occasionally with the participation of the relevant regional authorities, however, not the municipalities for which it is believed that they would not be able to financially support such actions to enhance integration. In one case only has the opinion of the informant allocated the financing facilities to the state and/or the EU by 50% and to (large) businesses themselves by another 50% (interv. 9, Epirus).

In summary, the funding of actions for the integration of refugees in the framework of mobility for employment in the regions of the country does not seem to be an inhibitory factor for the employers of the sample.

*This idea of yours would certainly bear fruit, considering the Greek economy is in great need of such actions for the integration of refugee populations in local communities (interv. 17, Thessaly).*

*If it is not possible for them to be planned directly at a central level, then such actions could start immediately, already as of this year, at least at an experimental level as an initiative of local associations and with the responsibility of the Hellenic Hoteliers Federation (POX) and the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE). Their success is certain and would surely act as a pole of attraction for the whole refugee population (interv. 20, Crete).*

# DISCUSSION



A demographic bomb at the foundation of the country. This is the title of the special issue (no. 45) of the biweekly online magazine Parliament: at the Peristyle that came out on June 21 2022<sup>15</sup>. The editor's note states, "To some the title of the cover may seem somehow exaggerating. But the demographic data given by experts and surveys are shocking and cause a national vertigo".

Besides, all recent scientific analyses, particularly those relating to provisional findings of the latest census make a special reference, among other factors, to migration as one of the basic conditions, at least for the implementation of the worst-case scenario for the demographic survival of Greece. In fact, this important aspect of the debate on the demographic issue relates both to the containment of the out migration of natives, refugees and migrants who already stay in Greece, and to the settlement of a large number of newly arrived citizens in the country as of now.

At a conference held in early June 2022, entitled "Demography-The Major Challenge", the Greek Prime Minister himself made a detailed reference to the contribution of migration to the address of demographic challenges<sup>16</sup>. Besides, he referred to "a complex chapter that must finally be addressed openly in our country as well, without prejudice and extreme populist statements. I refer to the integration of legal migrants into the Greek society. It is an answer to the great problem we face: lack of labor force observed both in the primary and construction sector".

At the same conference, the competent Minister of Migration and Asylum notes in this regard<sup>17</sup> that "we must open legal channels, because we have objective needs. We see it this year in statements of productive entities of the agricultural sector, of tourism, construction –and not only in Greece- that are in search of labor force. In our capacity of Ministry of Migration and Asylum, we try to use the logic of the private sector, to be able to respond to the needs of businesses regarding permits and to be able to issue, where necessary, residence permits in an expedient way".

However, apart from the generally admitted ascertainment that current and future migration flows might, under specific conditions, contain the deterioration of the demographic map of the country, is not equally clear how this would be ventured and more significantly how it would be achieved. This is even more so, since, already as of this year, great labor insufficiency is noted in all sectors of the Greek economy

<sup>15</sup> The issue is available at: [file:///C:/Users/apost\\_edhzvkv/Downloads/%CE%92%CE%9F%CE%A5%CE%9B%CE%97\\_%CE%A0%CE%95%CE%A1%CE%99%CE%9F%CE%94%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%9F.pdf](file:///C:/Users/apost_edhzvkv/Downloads/%CE%92%CE%9F%CE%A5%CE%9B%CE%97_%CE%A0%CE%95%CE%A1%CE%99%CE%9F%CE%94%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%9F.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> The whole speech is available at: <https://primeminister.gr/2022/06/08/29504>.

<sup>17</sup> The speech of the Minister is available at: <https://migration.gov.gr/n-mitarakis-dimografiko-2022/>.

as these may even exceed 200,000 at the beginning of the summer. This is so because, as subtly noted in a special report in the press, it seems that we are now in the search of the foreigner workers we have been pushing away all these last years<sup>18</sup>.

In countries like Greece, as it currently stands in its socio-economic and geopolitical position, the lack of insightfulness and programming or the constant appeal to “surprise” regarding the special manifestation of the phenomenon in space and time, cannot be hence justified after almost 35 years of uninterrupted experience in the reception of migration flows of all sub-categories while they will prove catastrophic in the immediate future. Even though in migration studies the attempt to forecast the development of transnational movements is unsafe, it is nevertheless necessary.

Therefore, it would not be too risky to assume that, unless shockingly unforeseeable circumstances arise, Greece will most probably continue accepting migration flows, typically mixed, but all with an increased share of displaced and refugee populations. At the same time, even if the economic and social environment has significantly improved, once relieved from the consequences of consecutive crises (fiscal, hygienic), for many residents of the country –regardless of their nationality or stay status – relocation to economically more developed countries (of Europe) is expected to continue unabated.

Hence, the integration of refugees and asylum seekers as well as their access to employment would be particularly beneficial, obviously for themselves but for the whole Greek economy as well. Eventually, the number of refugees who decide to stay in Greece is not high at the moment, but the strategy to enhance their sustainable and decent employment will have a great and useful effect in two more regards.

First, it will gradually change the way these people see Greece, i.e. with no prospect of employment and hence of social integration and exclusively as an intermediate stop in a journey to other countries. In consequence, as regards future humanitarian flows, the predisposition of permanent settlement and the pursuit of integration into the labor market may guarantee the modification of all quality features of such flows. Second, the permanent (re)location and integration of refugees, particularly in the Greek region, may actually have a beneficial effect, precisely as the previous migration flows did in the ‘90s through time and at the first place. Such flows were decisive in containing the population in these areas and in boosting local economies, providing conditions like the increase of employment that enable the permanent stay of (mainly young) native – among others – residents of such areas.

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.efsyn.gr/themata/thema-tis-efsyn/348781\\_psahnoyme-tora-toys-xenoy-s-poy-diohnoyme](https://www.efsyn.gr/themata/thema-tis-efsyn/348781_psahnoyme-tora-toys-xenoy-s-poy-diohnoyme).



These achievements were also often stressed in the context of interviews given by representatives of Greek businesses during a survey that focuses precisely on mobility and employment of refugees with emphasis on stay and work in the Greek regions. The following general conclusions are drawn from all the answers given:

The lack in labor force in Greece is in spring 2022 unprecedentedly considerable and equally concerns all sectors of economic activity in all three areas of the survey (Epirus, Thessaly, Crete).

The Greek businesses are fully aware of the necessity to search for employees among refugees, they are generally positively predisposed and, in some cases, they are also adequately experienced.

Nevertheless, only a small number of refugees are employed in the businesses of the sample, and generally in all sectors of the local level, based on the estimations of informants. This is due to several particular factors that raise additional obstacles to access to employment for the specific group of the population.

Reservations and inhibitory factors do not only stem from language, skills/knowledge and experience or legal status and relevant bureaucracy, but mainly or primarily from the instability of staying in businesses and specifically sudden or rapid resignations. This phenomenon concerns cases of refugees that have always wished to leave to other European countries.

On the contrary, for others, of the seasonal and temporary nature of the jobs usually offered a reduced prospect for full-time and sustainable employment, which are necessary conditions for a person to decide to relocate from the center to the regional areas.

In any case, the accommodation issue, i.e., the availability of accommodation for rent and high leasing prices, is a major inhibitory factor that may obviously be settled only in the context of more comprehensive policies and development plans.

Finally, personal networks of employers are the only way to find refugee employees, usually through the activity of NGOs, namely the intervention of IOM, and less often thanks to a small number of ad hoc synergies or permanent partnership structures at the local level.

However, the most important finding from the experimental survey is, on one hand, the enthusiasm with which representatives of businesses responded to the

alternative of finding immediately applicable initiatives to surmount the obstacles detected and, on the other hand, their willingness to actively participate in them. Specifically, partnership and allocation of competences at a local level among almost all stakeholders, the use of new technologies, and mainly the spirit of cooperation and transparency are noted as the most valuable conditions for the operationalization of a modern and innovative plan to foster the safe movement of refugees for permanent resettlement in the regional areas based on sustainable employment possibilities.

Summarizing the main idea [of the survey], as it has been hence enriched by the comments and suggestions of the informants themselves, the following axes are identified:

- ▶ It is necessary to both surmount the ignorance of Greek businesses of all sectors regarding ways to search for potential employees among refugees and to facilitate the matching of offer and demand in an easy, integrated and reliable way.
- ▶ A suitable way would in principle be to operate an easily accessible electronic database or platform, through which such matching may take place in a flexible way and based on quality criteria, even remotely with the use of new technologies.
- ▶ Such matching regarding the occupation of available jobs is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the achievement of the target of the mid-term increase of refugees' access into the Greek labor market.
- ▶ The operation of such platform must be integrated into the context of a more comprehensive strategy for the enhancement of refugees' access to employment and for their safe mobility to the country's regional areas for the specific purpose.
- ▶ This broader mechanism entails a permanent and well-organized central planning structure with regional centers and with reference and implementation infrastructure of the various actions.
- ▶ The central organization structure may guarantee the efficiency, transparency and reliability of the mechanism, both for businesses and for job applicants.
- ▶ The regional infrastructure may ensure the necessary personal contact, and mainly the on-site development of side or additional interventions.
- ▶ Therefore, such mechanism is required to be staffed with experienced and exclusively employed personnel that has knowledge of all particularities surrounding

refugees' employment in relation to that of the natives or long-settled migrants of previous decades.

► The general partnership among state agencies, local administration authorities, NGOs, International Organizations, professional associations and trade unions emerges as the most suitable arrangement for the operation of such a mechanism.

► At the same time, individual partnerships among some of the aforementioned bodies might be formed on a case-by-case basis for the application of this suggestion, even at a pilot level.

However, as regards the prospect of relocation, particularly of refugees who are in a stagnant state at the capital of the country, it is equally necessary to develop a number of complementary interventions at multiple levels.

► The planning of the mechanism addressed here must also include actions directly targeting the enhancement of both employers' and employees' sense of security, each for their own different reasons, where necessary, as regards refugees' employment.

► On one hand, the guarantee of faster learning of Greek and/or of professional terminology both in Greek and in English, as well as fast training through vocational education programs surely mitigate the hesitation of businesses to employ refugees.

► At the same time, addressing the burning issue of accommodation either through further utilization of houses that have not been made available either through assurance of decent and affordable accommodation, seems to be one of the major concerns for the operation of the mechanism.

► On the other hand, the enhancement or even guarantee of employment throughout the year, eventually in several jobs, as well as parallel support of access to employment for the other members of the family is expected to facilitate the decision to relocate in the country's regional areas, even in remote areas of a region.

► For all these complementary yet equally necessary actions, it is clear that it is rather necessary for the state services and local actors (from each Region) to undertake the main responsibility or at least the planning, and this not (only) for reasons of ensuring the necessary funds.

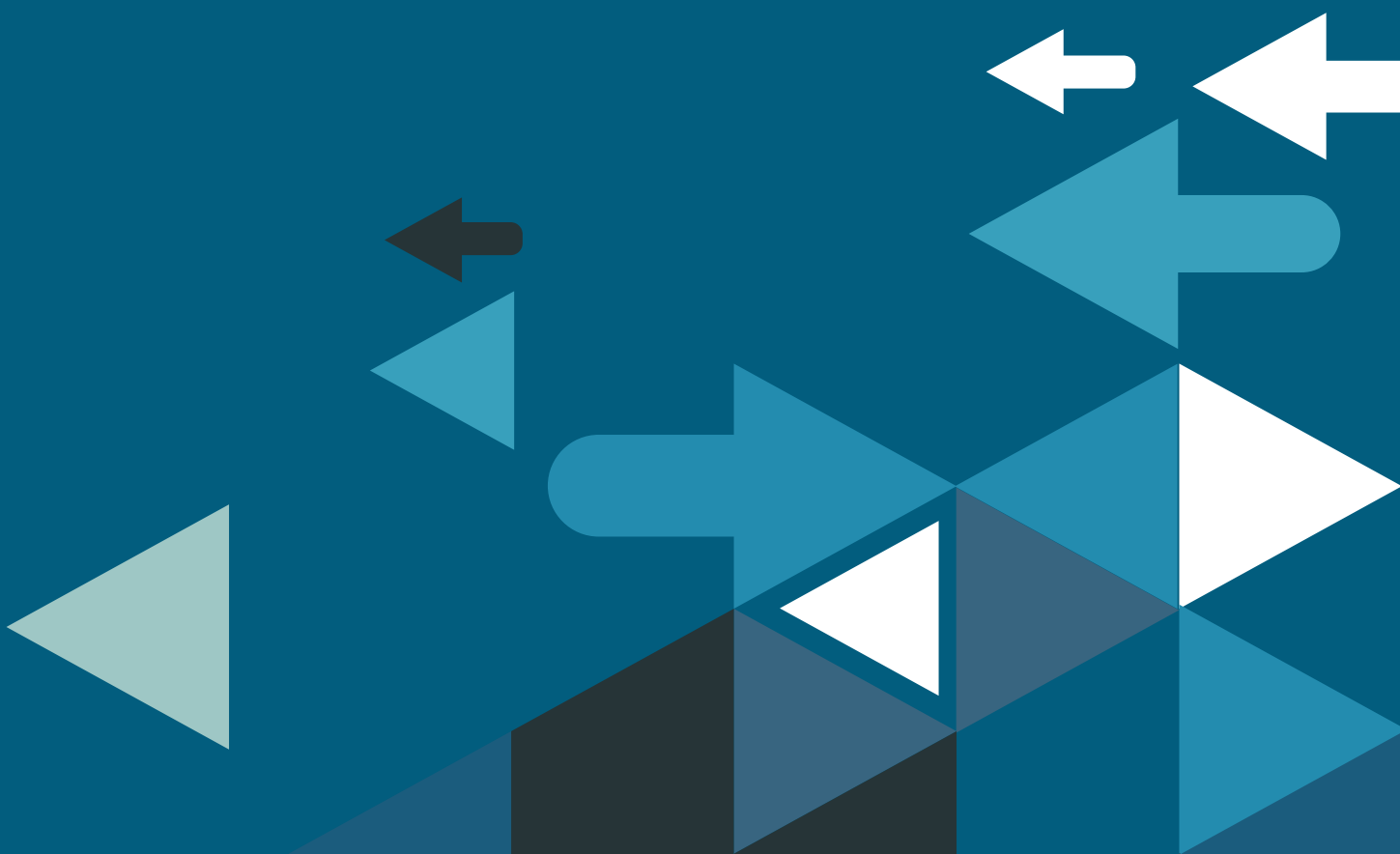
► Even though it would be desirable for the Greek State to assume such a central plan that would combine de-urbanization actions, local economic development and refugee integration policies, in this case even at a pilot level, other partnerships concluded at a national and local level might put in place a political plan to match the offer and demand and to provide comprehensive enhancement of mobility aiming at the integration into regional labor markets of the country.

### **Postface**

The completion of this survey coincides with the closure of the biggest Refugee Accommodation Facility in Elaionas, Attica (June 30 2022), which entails a new mobility of a significant number of refugees. Earlier than this, on 22/2/2022, an announcement of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum states that “as of April 16 2022, the positions of the accommodation project “ESTIA II” will be limited to 10,000 from the 27,000 it disposed of in 2021, due to improved management of the migration issue, in a perspective of having the project completed by the end of 2022”.

It thus becomes understood that following such a development, the refugees’ mobility and employment issue at the local level hence emerges as a central issue as regards their general social integration in Greece. At the same time, the implementation, even at a pilot level, of the mechanism suggested here might, already as of now, provide the necessary conditions for a different image in relation to vacancies and unoccupied jobs in anticipation of the next summer season of 2023...

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