

# SO FIE

Support for empowerment and integration of refugee families

## Guidelines for Best Practice of Inclusion based on Needs Analysis of Refugee Families



*Cyprus National Report*

[support-refugees.eu](http://support-refugees.eu)



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# SOFIE

Support for empowerment and integration of refugee families

## **I01 – Cyprus National Report**

Prepared by:  
Irimi Anastassiou  
CARDET

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## 1. Introduction

With the increase in the number of refugees and migrants in Europe, the European Union set as a priority the integration of refugees and migrants that reach Europe. It acknowledged on one hand the challenges that third-country nationals (TCNs) face in the education system, on the labour market and in accessing decent housing, and on the other hand the positive impact that TCNs can have on the local economies when they are well integrated (European Commission, 2016). In 2016 the EU adopted the Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (European Commission, 2016) setting key policy priorities in the areas of pre-departure / pre-arrival; education; labour market and vocational training; and access to basic services (European Commission, 2016). The Action Plan highlights that education and training, especially learning of the local language, are among the most powerful tools for integration. The combination of language learning with the acquisition of other skills and competences is a gateway to integration, employment and social inclusion. Finally, the Action Plan recognized that women face extra challenges in their integration and proposed that a special effort should be made to ensure that such programmes reach both women and men (European Commission, 2016).

This research is part of SOFIE<sup>1</sup>, a European project funded by Erasmus+, which aims to contribute to the social inclusion of refugees by provision of language trainings targeting women and children on the one hand, and on the other hand by training trainers and volunteers in order to better prepare them for the needs of the refugee families. SOFIE is implemented by a consortium of five civil society organisations, Verein Multikulturell from Austria, CESIE from Italy, CARDET from Cyprus, Mozaik from Turkey and Folksuniversitetet from Sweden.

In order to be able to develop and deliver training material and tools targeted to the needs of refugees and volunteers, the first phase of the project consists of a research and needs analysis. This report presents the results of the national research conducted in Cyprus. It identified the needs and challenges that refugee families face, especially in terms of integration and training support, best practices on the integration of refugee families as well as the training needs of volunteers.

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<sup>1</sup> [support-refugees.eu](http://support-refugees.eu)

## 2. Methodology

The aim of this research is to identify and understand the needs and challenges of refugee families in European countries, the training needs of persons volunteering with refugees as well as best practices on the integration of refugee families. The research is the first part of the European project SOFIE and it will inform the development and delivery of training tools that will be tailor made on the specific needs of the target groups. This report presents the research results for Cyprus.

The methodology adopted to produce this report consists of a 5-step process with the use of different qualitative and quantitative research tools, implemented from November 2017 to February 2018:

1. Desktop research and literature review on the needs of refugee families, existing tools and best practices for empowerment and integration support to refugee families.
2. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with at least 15 refugees or asylum seekers to identify the needs and challenges of refugee families, especially in terms of integration and training support. Special attention was given to have a representative sample of refugees with different nationalities and ensure the inclusion of refugee women.
3. Interviews with representatives of five organisations working with refugees, to identify the needs of refugee families from an experts' viewpoint.
4. Collection of qualitative and quantitative data on the experiences and training needs of volunteers with the use of a questionnaire. The goal of the questionnaire was twofold: i) to identify needs of refugee families, especially in terms of integration and training support. ii) to gain an understanding on the experience of volunteers, especially to identify any specific challenges they face while supporting / engaging refugees and their training needs.

CARDET, the lead partner of this research, developed detailed guidelines and research tools. The guidelines consisted of a description of each task, specific instructions on how to deliver all the research activities by all partners, as well as templates such as consent form, instructions and interview guides.

The FGDs and interviews were semi-structures with the use of a research guide and open-ended questions, in order to allow participants to expand on the issues they felt were most important. At the same time, this approach enabled the researcher to investigate in more depth on the key issues. The set of questions included two types: demographic questions and main questions. The aim of the initial questions was to make a comfortable atmosphere and help the participants to start a discussion as well as to collect demographic information on the sample. The main questions were focused on topics interesting from the perspective of the project. The questions could be reviewed and modified by the researcher to meet the situation during the focus group / interview session.

Three FGDs were conducted in Cyprus, with a total of 19 participants, from Somalia, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan. Two of the FGDs only had refugee women. In total, 14 women and 5 men took part. Furthermore, five interviews were conducted with representatives of civil society organisations working directly with refugees, as well as a refugee led organisation and an individual consultant. All the FGDs and interviews were audio-taped to ensure the quality and validity of the data. For the FGDs an interpreter was also used. The data were transcribed and a qualitative analysis was done.

During the interviews and especially the FGDs, strict ethical considerations were followed. At the beginning of each session the researcher introduced herself, her organization and the SOFIE project to ensure participants know she is a qualified researcher and that they understand the purpose of the research. She further explained ethical considerations and their rights as participants, including that their participation is voluntary; they can answer only the questions they are comfortable with; they can leave any time if they don't feel comfortable anymore and that this will not affect in any way their asylum or refugee status. She also explained that the discussion is recorded and notes are taken strictly for the purpose of this research and will be treated with confidentiality. Participants were then asked to sign the consent form for their participation.

The volunteers' questionnaire included both structured and open-ended questions and was distributed both in printed and electronic forms. The online tool surveymonkey was used for the collection of data and their analysis. In total 50 questionnaires were filled in Cyprus.

As a result of the analyses, categories were developed indicating the challenges and need of refugees and volunteers, and best practices on integration were identified. Specific national level recommendations were proposed, related to refugee integration and training needs.



### 3. Literature Review

#### a) Refugees in Cyprus

The first international refugees that are officially recorded arriving in Cyprus over the last few decades arrived in 1998. At the time, the Cypriot Government did not have in place a system to examine asylum applications and provide protection to these people. In the absence of relevant asylum legislation and institutional arrangements, UNHCR assumed the responsibility for asylum seekers, while at the same time it supported the Government of Cyprus to create a legal framework and asylum procedures for the protection of refugees who arrive in Cyprus. (UNHCR, 2017d).

Detailed data on the number of asylum seekers and refugees are available since 2002, when the Republic of Cyprus officially assumed responsibility for the protection of refugees. Between 2002 and 2017, Cyprus received 60,568 asylum applications (Asylum Service, n.da, Asylum Service, n.db, Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2016, Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2017). Of these, 1,250 persons were recognised as refugees and 7,718 were granted subsidiary or humanitarian protection (UNHCR, 2017c). Furthermore, between the years 1998 and 2004, 454 persons were recognised as refugees by UNHCR (Asylum Service, n.da).

The below table shows all of the asylum applications that were submitted between 2002 to 2017 to the Asylum Service. It also provides the number of person who received refugee status, humanitarian or subsidiary protection by the Asylum Service at first instance, however it does not include any recognition that was done at the state of appeal. By the end of 2017, there were 3, 843 pending asylum applications before the Asylum Service.

**Application & Granting of protection status - Asylum Service**

Year	Applications	Refugee Status	Subsidiary Protection	Humanitarian Protection	Total Protection	Refused	Closure	Implicit / Explicit Withdrawal	Pending
2002	952	0	n/a	0	0	143	0	n/a	809
2003	4407	0	n/a	10	10	274	127	n/a	4805
2004	9872	30	n/a	56	86	2734	2525	n/a	9332
2005	7746	41	n/a	123	164	3133	2508	n/a	11273
2006	4545	37	n/a	151	188	1779	3634	n/a	10217
2007	6789	36	n/a	191	227	2316	4641	n/a	9822
2008	3922	64	n/a	163	227	4001	3684	0	5832
2009	3199	49	1287	33	1369	3325	2038	285	2014
2010	2882	31	370	25	426	2032	124	203	2111
2011	1770	53	1	15	69	2559	51	284	918
2012	1620	80	10	15	105	1240	33	261	899
2013	1246	33	124	8	165	633	17	290	1040
2014	1728	53	941	n/a	994	309	2	376	1087

2015	2253	200	1384	n/a	1584	473	58	369	856
2016*	3,055	129	740	n/a	869	748	n/a	n/a	2,293
2017*	4,582	142	680	n/a	822	1,148	n/a	n/a	3,843
<b>Total</b>	<b>60568</b>	<b>978</b>	<b>5537</b>	<b>790</b>	<b>7305</b>	<b>26847</b>	<b>19442</b>	<b>2058</b>	<b>-</b>

**Sources:** For the years 2002 - 2015, the presented data were taken from the website of the Asylum Service  
 \* For the years 2016 - 2017, the presented data were taken from the AIDA Cyprus Country Report.

## b) The rights of refugees

Generally, recognised refugees have the same social and economic rights as Cypriot citizens. Refugees, persons with subsidiary protection as well as asylum seekers are entitled to certain rights in terms of social welfare, healthcare, education, employment and housing. A very brief overview of these rights is provided below:

### i. Social Welfare

Recognised refugees and persons with subsidiary protection can receive Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) from the Social Welfare services with the same conditions as Cypriots. The main challenge in regards to this is the long-delays of the examination of their application, which is a challenge equally faced by Cypriots. However, from the moment they are recognised and receive international protection status, the minimal benefits they received as asylum seekers seize, and therefore they face additional challenges until their application for GMI is examined. For this period they are allowed to apply for an emergency benefit to cover basic costs – a very low amount of 100 – 150 euros per month for one person to 150 – 280 euros for a family. The approval of this amount takes up to two weeks, and they need to continue applying monthly until they receive a decision on the GMI (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2017).

The Social Welfare Services also provide support to asylum seekers who do not have adequate financial means, although this has been repeatedly considered by NGOs and UNHCR as very low and very inadequate to meet the minimum surviving standards, leading asylum seekers to extreme poverty and destitution. It is worth noting here that asylum seekers are not allowed to work for the first six months after they launch their asylum application. Asylum seekers that do not stay at the Refugee Reception Centre, (which is the overwhelming majority) are allowed to the following monthly allowances from the Social Welfare Service:



Family size (persons)	Coupons for food, clothes, shoes	Rent allowance (paid to the landlord)	Utilities and pocket money	Total
1	€150	€100	€70	€320
2	€225	€100	€95	€420
3	€300	€150	€130	€585
4+	€375	€200	€160	€735

Source: UNHCR, Reception Conditions for Asylum-seekers in the Republic of Cyprus (UNHCR, 2017b)

From the above, the only amount that an asylum seeker receives in cash is the fourth column for «utilities and pocket money». The coupons (2nd column) can only be used in a very small number of shops in each city, where it has also been reported that prices are higher than other shops. The rent allowance is payable directly to the landlords (UNHCR, 2017b, Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2017).

Asylum seekers that live at the Reception Centre receive a monthly allowance of 40 euros for the main applicant from each family and additionally 10 euros for each dependant, to cover their basic needs and essential materials including baby-care products, clothing, cleaning products and personal hygiene items, none of which is provided by the Centre (UNHCR, 2017b).

## ii. [Housing](#)

There is one government led reception centre in Kofinou. The centre has a capacity of 350 persons and it is based in a remote area (without any other facilities around it), a few kilometers outside a village and 25 km from the nearest town (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2017). The centre is at its full capacity and its infrastructure is considered inadequate to meet the needs of such a number of residents (Ombudsman and UNHCR, 2017).

The majority of asylum seekers and refugees live in private accommodation which they are expected to find by their own. When there is no capacity at the reception centre, which is usually the case, the welfare services provide a very small allowance to cover housing expenses. This allowance is 100 euros for a family of 2 persons up to 200 euros for families of 4 persons and more. The allowance is paid directly to the bank account of the landlord (UNHCR, 2017b). However, given the renting prices in Cyprus, this allowance is insufficient to cover the cost of accommodation.

## iii. [Healthcare](#)

Refugees and persons with subsidiary protection have the same access to the public healthcare services as Cypriot citizens. In order to be allowed to free healthcare services, there are certain criteria: contributing to the Social Insurance Fund for three years, making a tax statement and meeting certain financial criteria. Refugees who are

receiving support from the welfare services or the minimum guaranteed wage, children under the protection of the Social Welfare services (including unaccompanied minors), unemployed persons, pregnant women and families with four children or more are also allowed to free healthcare (National Human Rights Institution, 2015). Both refugees and asylum seekers that reside at the Refugee Reception Centre are explicitly eligible to free health care (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2017).

In the case of asylum seekers, they are allowed to access free public healthcare services as long as they do not have adequate financial resources. The level of maximum resources in order to be eligible for a medical card and have access to free healthcare services is not specified (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2017).

For all free healthcare services, all beneficiaries are required to pay a registration fee of €3 for every general practitioner / doctor they visit and €6 for each specialised doctor (National Human Rights Institution, 2015), as well as €0.50 for every medicine they receive and €10 to visit the emergency room.

#### iv. [Education](#)

Asylum-seeking children are entitled to attend elementary and secondary school under the same conditions as nationals. They should be enrolled at the school as soon as they apply for asylum and definitely not later than 3 months after they apply. Similarly, children who have a refugee or subsidiary protection status should also attend school in the same terms as nationals (UNHCR, 2017a).

However, in practice there are challenges with the quality of education provided to asylum seeking and refugee children, which are discussed in the following section.

Refugees have the same rights to take the exams and attend university as Cypriot nationals. Adult refugees also have the right to participate in vocational trainings offered. However, they have difficulties attending these trainings, mainly because of language barriers and of lack of information about the courses (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2017).

In terms of learning the Greek language, there are available afternoon Greek language courses offered by the Ministry of Education and the local authorities, as well as by non-governmental organisations and higher educational institutions, mainly funded by EU funds (Nicolaou A et al, 2016).

#### v. [Employment](#)

Recognised refugees are entitled to work in all employment categories as nationals and other EU nationals. In the case of asylum seekers, they are not allowed to work for six months after they submitted their asylum application. Once this period passes, asylum seekers are only allowed to work on low-skilled, low paid positions in specific economic sectors which include agriculture, livestock and fisheries, regardless of their academic qualifications or previous experience (UNHCR, 2017b).

### c) The system of support and integration for refugees in Cyprus

Policy and practice towards integration for refugees and migrants has only appeared in the Cypriot public domain the last decade, and this is manifested in the integration experiences, challenges and needs of refugee families.

#### i. [The concept of integration](#)

There is not one officially adopted definition on Integration. In 2010 the Government adopted the first time ever an Action Plan for Integration of Migrants Legally Residing in Cyprus, for 2010 – 2012. While the action plan did not adopt a definition of what integration is for Cyprus, in its introduction, it referred to the definition given in the Common Basic Principles for Migrant Integration of the European Council, November 2004: *«Integration of immigrants and their descendants is a dynamic, long term and continuous two-way process of mutual acceptance. So requires the participation not only of immigrant and their descendants but also every citizen. The host society should create opportunities for full economic, social, cultural and political participation of immigrants.* (Special Committee of Experts for Inclusion, 2010).

Furthermore, the goal for developing the Action Plan was to prepare «a comprehensive policy that builds on the positive approach of long-term legal immigration and a positive view of multiculturalism Cypriot Society by taking measures to:

- Inclusion and participation of migrants in social and public life of the Cypriot society
- Recognition of social, economic, political and cultural rights and needs on immigrants
- Racism and discrimination, and also to design strategies and action plans, which set measurable goals and mechanisms for monitoring implementation.»(Special Committee of Experts for Inclusion, 2010).

#### ii. [Problems and integration needs of refugee families](#)

An evaluation of the above mentioned plan did not take place in order to measure the extent to which it was implemented. A report commissioned by UNHCR shows that there is little evidence that the action plan had any positive results while, no integration measures were taken specifically in favour of refugees (Officer and Taki, 2013, ECRI, 2016). This is reaffirmed in the 2016 Report of the Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe after his visit to Cyprus, who states that the action plan was not implemented (Muiznieks, 2016).

The 2013 report commissioned by UNHCR found that refugees and persons with subsidiary protection were marginalised and lived in increasingly vulnerable and precarious conditions (Officer and Taki, 2013). Subsequent literature shows that the situation remains challenging for them. The same report found that well over half of this

group were out of work at the time, four times more likely to be unemployed than Greek Cypriots and they were disproportionately impacted by the recession (Officer and Taki, 2013).

The most important integration challenges that refugees, persons with subsidiary protection and asylum seekers face are related to children's education, the knowledge of the local language and lack of employment.

### iii. [Children's education](#)

As mentioned above, all children have the right to access education in the same conditions as nationals, however, refugee and asylum seeking children face significant challenges in accessing this right. These are related to lack of formal procedures for assessing their educational level and of a system to enroll them in the correct classes according to their knowledge, skills and choices, limited school capacity to accommodate additional students at a given time, lack of information to asylum seekers and timely arrangements, non existence of specialized courses to cater for the needs of children at different educational levels and non-issuance of a formal high-school diploma upon completion of schooling (UNHCR, n.da; Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2017). Furthermore, an additional challenge is the lack of knowledge of the greek language, since all classes are taught in Greek. The Ministry of Education arranged for transitional classes, with which students at the first 3 classes of highschool get 18 hours of Greek classes per week and those at lyceum get an additional 4 hours of Greek classes per week. However, the remaining hours students follow the main curriculum in Greek for all other subjects (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, n.d). Other challenges to access education also include the transportation and other school related expenses (Drousioutou and Mathioudakis, n.d).

In several occasions, it is reported that asylum seeking children do not attend formal education. For example, in a UNHCR policy paper, out of over 100 unaccompanied minors – asylum seekers who were mainly between 16 – 17 years old and were staying at the childrens' shelters, only 46 of them had a place at a formal educational institution (UNHCR, n.da).

### iv. [Employment](#)

In terms of employment, asylum seekers have very limited employment options focused only on specific – low skilled labour areas (UNHCR, 2017b). For an initial period of 6 months they are not allowed to work. After this period, the challenges they face in getting a gainful employment are related to low wages and lack of supplementary material assistance, distance and lack of convenient transportation, language barriers, lack of interest in employing asylum seekers and lack of gender and cultural sensitivity in the recruitment procedure (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, n.d).

While recognised refugees can be employed in any position, their difficulties in securing a job are mainly related to language barriers, preference given to nationals, lack of awareness that refugees are allowed by law to work, as well as difficulties to recognize

their previous qualifications (Muiznieks, 2016). They also face difficulties in attending vocational trainings due to language barriers and lack of information about such trainings (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2017).

v. [Other challenges and integration needs of refugee families](#)

Other challenges faced by refugee families in regards to their integration include:

- Cultural understanding and acceptance, including unreceptive attitudes towards foreigners in general and lack of understanding among locals of the specific situation of refugees
- Racism and discrimination
- Extreme difficulties in acquiring the Cypriot citizenship or a status of long-term resident
- Un-availability of practical measures in place to assist persons who are recognised as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection to obtain social welfare or find accommodation and employment, leading many remaining in the reception centre which is not conducive to integration.
- Finally, it is a common practice for Cyprus to grant subsidiary protection status rather than refugee status, which further impacts integration, especially since this status does not allow for family reunification.
- When accessing healthcare services, they are excluded from financial schemes for treatment in foreign country when such treatment is not available in Cyprus. (ECRI 2016; Muiznieks, 2016)
- Asylum seekers have reported that they faced racism from medical staff related to the lack of knowledge of Greek and the reluctance of medical professionals to speak english (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2018).

**d) Tools and initiatives for empowerment and integration of refugee families**

i. [Language courses for refugees and migrants](#)

Greek language courses in Cyprus are offered for all third country nationals, there are no distinct classes for refugees. There is no official structure for the acquisition or language skills and orientation knowledge for newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers. However, there are various programmes for teaching Greek, mainly implemented by EU funded projects, organisations and local authorities, as well as through the lifelong learning / adult education classes offered by the Ministry of Education. High-school and elementary school pupils get some hours per week of dedicated Greek language courses. For the academic year 2017-2018, the Ministry of Education piloted a number of transitional and integration programmes in some schools where there are migrant or refugee children (Spaneas and Zachariades, 2018).

Below is a breakdown of the existing language courses:



Language Classes / Institution	Link
<p><b>iLearnGreek</b></p> <p>iLearnGreek provides free Greek language courses at two different levels (basic and intermediate level) for refugees, asylum seekers, and persons with subsidiary protection and non-EU migrants. The courses are held in all cities and they start three times per year (September, February, July). The Courses are implemented by KES College, CARDET, INNOVADE and the Municipalities of Agios Dometios, Agios Athanasios, Deryneia and Pafos. They are funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (90%) and the Republic of Cyprus (10%).</p>	<p><a href="http://www.ilearngreek.eu">www.ilearngreek.eu</a></p>
<p>GeiaXara offers free Greek language courses to children of migrants, refugees, persons with subsidiary protection or asylum seekers, aged 6 – 12. Children. There are two different levels (basic and intermediate level). The courses are held in all cities. The project is implemented by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, CARDET and INNOVADE with funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (90%) and the Republic of Cyprus (10%).</p>	<p><a href="http://www.geiaxara.eu">http://www.geiaxara.eu</a></p>
<p><b>University of Cyprus – School of Modern Greek</b></p> <p>The School of Modern Greek offers intensive and non-intensive Greek language courses at all levels (beginners, intermediate, advanced and higher). Participants need to pay tuition fees. Intensive courses are offered 3 times per year (starting September, January and a Summer School) while non intensive courses start once per year – every September.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.ucy.ac.cy/mogr/en/courses">http://www.ucy.ac.cy/mogr/en/courses</a></p>
<p><b>State Institutes of Further Education, Ministry of Education</b></p> <p>The State Institutes of Further Education offer free Greek language courses to all non-Cypriots legally residing in Cyprus. Classes take place twice per week from September to May every year, with a final exam at the end of the year. Applications for the classes open in June.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.moec.gov.cy/en/state_institutes.html">http://www.moec.gov.cy/en/state_institutes.html</a></p>
<p><b>Adult Education Centers (Επιμορφωτικά), Ministry of Education</b></p> <p>The Adult Education Centers is a significant programme that provides general adult education in Cyprus within the framework of providing lifelong learning opportunities. The Centers offer Greek language courses to all migrants, refugees as well as Turkish Cypriots. The courses run from November to May and they are composed of 24 weekly 90minute classes per year.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.moec.gov.cy/epimorfotika/en/index.html">http://www.moec.gov.cy/epimorfotika/en/index.html</a></p>

### *Informal Language classes by NGOs*

<p><b>The Learning Refugee – CARITAS Pafos</b></p> <p>The Learning Refugee is a volunteer organisation assisted by St Paul’s parish and Caritas that provides language training to refugees.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.facebook.com/learningrefuge/">https://www.facebook.com/learningrefuge/</a></p>
<p><b>CARITAS Cyprus – Migrant Centres</b></p> <p>Caritas provides humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees. Among other services it provides Greek language courses as well as other classes or seminars on various subjects.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.caritascyprus.org">www.caritascyprus.org</a></p>
<p><b>OASIS</b></p> <p>OASIS is a voluntary community group in Larnaca that supports refugees and asylum-seekers in Cyprus. They offer Greek language and English language classes for free, as well as food baskets on Mondays. In addition they have a Social Café meeting every Wednesday morning.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.facebook.com/oasislarnaca/">https://www.facebook.com/oasislarnaca/</a></p>

### ii. [Other integration tools & initiatives](#)



## Trans-sectoral initiatives

UNHCR	UNHCR created a website where asylum seekers, refugees and other persons with international protection can find out general information about their life in Cyprus, their rights, legal procedures as well as about organisations and initiatives that can support them.	<a href="http://help.unhcr.org/cyprus">http://help.unhcr.org/cyprus</a>
Nicosia Municipal Multipurpose Centre,	The Nicosia Municipality offers various support and integration services for migrants and refugees, including free childcare and creative activities as well as intercultural activities.	<a href="http://www.nicosia.org.cy/el-GR/municipality/multipurpose-centre/rainbow/">http://www.nicosia.org.cy/el-GR/municipality/multipurpose-centre/rainbow/</a>
Municipality of Agios Athanasios	The Municipality of Agios Athanasios prouids itself to be offering plenty of opportunities for all its residents for culture and personal development. These include the open school, Greek language courses, childcare services as well as several multicultural festivals and activities.	<a href="http://www.agiosathanasios.org.cy">www.agiosathanasios.org.cy</a>
Municipality of Ayios Dometios	The Municipality of Ayios Dometios implements various initiatives for the social support and inclusion of all migrants living in its area. These include offering psychological and social support services, employment and orientation workshops and seminars and cultural exchange events.	<a href="http://www.dad.org.cy">www.dad.org.cy</a>

## Education and employment

Center for the Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology (CARDET)	CARDET implements a range of projects that aim to enhance integration of refugees. Its initiatives have a particular focus on families support, providing language programs for refugees, parents and children and access to education. It also offers several opportunities for adult education and vocational training for adults, while it also implements trainings for adult educators, teachers and youth trainers in the field of integration. Several of these courses are also freely available online as e-courses.	<a href="http://www.cardet.org">www.cardet.org</a>
University of Nicosia	The University of Nicosia has awarded a series of scholarships for refugees and immigrants.	<a href="https://www.unic.ac.cy/discover/university/contribution-to-society/refugee-humanitarian-initiatives">https://www.unic.ac.cy/discover/university/contribution-to-society/refugee-humanitarian-initiatives</a>
KASA High School	The KASA High School will offer – starting in 2018-19 school year – places to refugees and asylum-seekers who wish to obtain a high school leaving certificate. Interested individuals of 16 years or older with a good command of the English language will be eligible to apply.	<a href="http://www.casacollege.com/eos/unhcr-and-the-kasa-high-school-join-forces-for-refugee-education/">http://www.casacollege.com/eos/unhcr-and-the-kasa-high-school-join-forces-for-refugee-education/</a>
Help Refugees Work	Help Refugees Work is a web platform that was recently created by the UNHCR Country office in Cyprus, in collaboration with Cyprus Refugee Council, to support refugee integration through work. It is meant for refugees, employers, institutions running vocational education and training (VET) programmes, and individuals and organizations committed to promoting social participation, inclusion and diversity.	<a href="https://www.helprefugeeswork.org">https://www.helprefugeeswork.org</a>

## Housing

“Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center	Hope for Children has been running children’s shelters which accommodate unaccompanied minors who under the legal guardianship of the public Social Welfare Services. In addition to accommodation, the shelters provide multidisciplinary and holistic services including psychological, legal and social	<a href="http://uncrcpc.org.cy/index/programs/home-for-hope.html">http://uncrcpc.org.cy/index/programs/home-for-hope.html</a>
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	support to the children.	
Caritas Cyprus	Caritas Cyprus' Migrant Shelters provide temporary emergency accommodation to migrant men, migrant women and children. The men's shelter accommodates up to 12 men and the women's shelter accommodates up to 9 women and 4 children.	<a href="http://caritascyprus.org/migrants">http://caritascyprus.org/migrants</a>

### Legal, health and social support

Cyprus Refugee Council (CyRC)	CyRC provides free legal and social advice to asylum-seekers and refugees in the Republic of Cyprus in relation to the asylum procedure, access to the labour market, social and health services, family reunification, and other issues. It also offers psychological support to victims of violence.	<a href="http://www.cyrefugeecouncil.org">www.cyrefugeecouncil.org</a>
Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism (KISA)	KISA provides free information, support, advocacy and mediation services to migrants and refugees, as well as victims of trafficking and racism. KISA also offers <i>pro bono</i> (free of charge) legal representation in very specific cases.	<a href="http://www.kisa.org.cy">www.kisa.org.cy</a>
Caritas Cyprus	Caritas provides humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees including the management of two emergency shelters, the distribution of clothing and food, and transportation and referrals to health and mental health services. Caritas also provides guidance through the asylum-procedures, administrative assistance, legal advice, and opportunities for integration, including language classes and social gatherings.	<a href="http://www.caritascyprus.org">www.caritascyprus.org</a>

### iii. [Examples of EU funded projects](#)

The Cyprus Information Guide for Third Country Nationals	<p>The Guide provides general information about Cyprus for TCNs to help facilitate their integration in the Cypriot society and the local labour market. The Cyprus Information Guide is developed in an effort to promote mutual respect and appreciation among TCNs and the local society regarding access to a number of basic daily activities, rights and obligations. The primary objective of the Guide is to support a substantial participation of TCNs in the economic, social and cultural life of Cyprus.</p> <p>The Guide is available in English, Arabic, Filipino, Hindi, Moldovan Romanian, Russian, Sinhala, Tamil, Ukrainian and Vietnamese. The Guide is available both in an electronic and printed version.</p> <p>The Cyprus Information Guide was developed by CARDET and INNOVADE and it was co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Republic of Cyprus.</p>	<a href="http://cyprus-guide.org/en/">http://cyprus-guide.org/en/</a>
ENGAGE	ENGAGE is a European project that aims to support migrant women's role as integration and community leaders. Central to the idea of <b>ENGAGE</b> is the provision of a new integration curriculum and a suite of flexible and adaptable training resources. These resources will support migrant women to become integration ambassadors and leaders in their communities. They will also be helpful for adult educators who are tasked to provide the necessary education,	<a href="http://engageproject.eu/">http://engageproject.eu/</a>

	<p>knowledge and skills to migrants and refugees. ENGAGE is funded by Erasmus+ and it is implemented in Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Ireland and Italy.</p>	
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#### iv. Examples of best practices

<p>Migrant Information Centres (MiHub)</p>	<p><b>The challenge:</b> Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, especially those newly arrived face a lot of challenges in regards to their social orientation, understanding the various legal procedures, their rights and obligations, applying for asylum, finding accommodation and getting a job.</p> <p><b>The project:</b> MiHub offers advice, guidance and support to all migrants on issues related to their rights and responsibilities, access to public services, housing, health, employment, education and social benefits. It has offices in four cities.</p> <p><b>Details:</b> The aim of MiHub is to fill the gap on the available migrant support and integration services as well as the gap on access to information about migrants' rights and responsibilities. Through its four regional centres, MiHub helps vulnerable migrants across Cyprus offering them social and legal advice and support in all aspects of their integration. The majority of MiHub's clients are refugees and asylums seekers.</p> <p><b>The organization:</b> MiHub is run by the University of Nicosia, CARDET and the Cyprus University of Technology, with the financial support of the Asylum, Migrant and Integration Fund and the Republic of Cyprus.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.mihub.eu">www.mihub.eu</a></p>
<p>New Channels for Integration</p>	<p><b>The challenge:</b> The increase of the number of migrants and refugees living in Cyprus over the last three decades lead to the need to enhance integration into the local society. Cultural exchange and understanding also become important. The role of local authorities is valuable and can be a catalyst to harvest the benefits of cultural exchange and understanding, but at the same time to address phenomena of social exclusion, social inequality and discrimination.</p> <p><b>The project:</b> New Channels for Integrations is a collaborative initiative that has been running since 2012 by a consortium of municipalities across Cyprus. Municipalities joined forces to uphold the principles of contemporary democratic pluralistic society and assist in the integration of migrants at their communities and in the Cypriot society more broadly.</p> <p><b>Details:</b> For 2018, their actions include the provision of social care and psycho-social support services for adults and children; organisation of workshops and seminars offering empowerment, orientation and information; creating opportunities for intercultural exchange and cultural expression and offering training in sports and participation in sports games.</p> <p><b>The organization:</b> For 2018 the project is implemented by the Municipalities of Nicosia, Ayios Dhometios, Engomi and Lakatamia.</p>	<p><a href="http://localintegration.eu/en/">http://localintegration.eu/en/</a></p>

## **4. Support and Integration needs of Refugee Families (*analysis of FGDs with Refugees*)**

### **a) Participants' characteristics**

In order to identify the needs and challenges of refugee families, we held three focus group discussions (FGDs) with 19 refugees, persons with subsidiary protection and asylum seekers in total. Two of the FGDs were only refugee women, from Somalia and Arab-speaking countries, while the third one included refugee couples representing families, from Palestine, Syria and Afghanistan. Participants' average age was 31 years old. Twelve of the participants had children, some of which were in Cyprus and some were back home in their country.

In regards to their level of education, among the Somali participants, there were two who did not go to school, two attended only elementary school while one went to High School. Among the Participants from Palestine, Syria and Afghanistan, five went only to elementary school, four to high school and five attended University. Finally, in terms of jobs that they were doing before they fled their country, their occupations included teacher, secretary, housewife, tailor, translator, mechanic, driver, food merchant and managers. Some of the participants were not working because they were still studying, while another three mentioned that they did not work back home.

Participants had been in Cyprus between 2 months to 11 years. At the question if they speak any other language except from their mother tongue, eleven of them reported that they speak english. From the interviewer's experience, at least six of them were able to communicate freely in English, while the rest had different levels of english. Only two persons spoke «little Greek».

### **b) Challenges of refugee families in their daily life**

#### **i. Employment**

Employment was identified as perhaps the most significant issue that impacts the integration of refugees and their quality of life. Participants explained that the major challenges they face in finding a job include language barriers, lack of previous relevant work experience and lack of formal or vocational training. Gaining such experience or attending trainings to build their skills would be very useful.

In the case of asylum seekers this issue is further exacerbated by the fact that they are only allowed to work in very limited, low-paid positions, even when an asylum seeker has higher educational qualifications or professional experience.

Participants discussed that it is important to recognize their skills, talents and aspirations and allow them to work in those areas. For example, one participant said: *"They never think [the labor office] what's your qualification and how good asset you are for the society because everyone come from different areas, different education*

*background, different experience. And that's a good asset for the country to use it. But they never think that. And they send in a basic, or unuseful or unrelated, or something that really really hard for you to understand, something that you feel it that you lost yourself."*

## ii. Housing

For asylum seekers who cannot stay at the refugee reception centre which is beyond its full capacity, finding accommodation is particularly daunting and influences every aspect of their lives, including access to education for children and creating additional stress. One participant said that since she arrived in Cyprus with her family four months earlier they were still homeless, and they have been shifting between homes of their relatives or friends.

They also mentioned that one of the reasons it is so difficult to find a house is also the fact that landlords are reluctant to rent a house to refugees or asylum seekers, a problem many of them face.

## iii. Communication and Language

Challenges related to communication and knowledge of the local language had two aspects: the challenges that arise due to lack of knowledge of the local language and challenges associated with access to language learning opportunities that meet their needs. Being interlinked, these two aspects create a vicious cycle.

Participants discussed several reasons as to why they consider learning the local language essential for their integration. These included getting employment, being able to better communicate with various public offices and being able to make friends and communicate better with the local community. They also clarified that learning Greek, the local language is more important for them than learning English.

For refugee mothers specifically, learning the local language is also important in order to be able to teach their children, support them at school and even communicate with their doctors and teachers.

In regards to access to language learning opportunities, the challenges identified included lack of enough classes to learn the greek language, different levels of language knowledge among learners, unavailability of intensive language classes tailored to the specific needs of learners and the need for teachers who are well qualified to teach second language to non-native speakers. For example, respondents said that at times the teacher of the Greek course will explain the course in English and vice versa, but, for the refugees that do not speak neither of the languages it is very difficult to gain anything from either class. Participants also suggested that it would be useful if the teacher could speak their mother language.

Other challenges identified were related to difficulties in attending classes that are held far away from their home, as well as access to information in relation to available

language classes. Integration is interlinked with the community where refugees live, the opportunities that exist in that area and being able to get information about them.

Despite going to greek language classes for a while, some of the respondents, who did not finish primary or secondary school in their home country, were only able to say a few basic words in greek, showing that they had significant difficulties in learning the language. This may be associated with their level of education, which should also be taken into account.

Finally, the cost of the language courses was also raised as a challenging factor. Participants mentioned that when there is a fee for classes this becomes a significant challenging factor – even in the case of the government-run weekly afternoon classes which only cost 60 euros per year. While this may not be considered a big amount, it is a significant one for an asylum seeker who has no financial resources whatsoever, and therefore, this, in combination with the other challenges has stopped them from attending classes.

#### iv. [Psychological challenges](#)

The psychological impact caused by all the difficulties refugees and asylum seekers face becomes very heavy: *«I am fed up, I reach the level I cannot stand, I am crying from the morning»* one participant said. This builds on the already existing psychological trauma they carried with them when they arrived. For example, among the small sample of 19 participants, two of them have lost a child, two were separated from their children and at least one family with two children was homeless. Participants clearly stated that they have a lot of stress, which consumes a lot of their time and doesn't allow them to relax at all.

#### v. [Isolation](#)

Isolation and a feeling of exclusion from the local community were also discussed. For the girls that attend school, their daily life mainly consists of going to school, as well as afternoon classes to learn Greek. One participant said that she spends her whole day at home, she sleeps a lot and only goes to language classes in the evening. Another participant said she mainly stays at home. In general, participants explained that they feel separated from the local community.

#### vi. [Discrimination](#)

Respondents feel that they are treated differently in some public services because of their status, their dressing appearance or lack of knowledge of the local language. *«if you go to an office they just look at you and they tell you just go. First of all with the way we dress, the dressing code and not knowing the language»*.



### c) Access to information and social orientation

Refugees and asylum seekers feel that they lack adequate access to information about their rights and responsibilities, the asylum and welfare procedures as well as the specific procedures that need to be following in each public service. Furthermore, they expressed the need to have a broad social orientation upon arrival. Respondents said that they mainly find out information through word of mouth among other refugees and asylum seekers, and to a lesser extent from the NGOs who work in this area. Some of them mentioned that NGOs have been the only organisations to provide them with any support and guidance.

Being bettered will also allow them to teach their children on their rights and responsibilities, how to behave, «*what to do, not to do*». Moreover, they expressed the need to be kept updated about any changes in the law and regulations, especially since these ones change frequently and can leave a refugee or asylum seeker in a gap. This has resulted in some participants losing the welfare benefit they receive by the state. Furthermore, they also mentioned the importance of better understanding the culture and the people as well as having more access to information about programmes that are designed specifically for refugees. To be useful, all these information should be widely available and in languages that refugees can understand.

### d) Specific Challenges of refugee women

Refugee and asylum seeking women, especially muslims, feel that they face discrimination and prejudice due to their appearance, especially in regards to wearing the head scarf. They feel this both in relation to their everyday encounters as well as in their effort to find a job. One participant said: *“The main problem is the scarf. As women, the scarf that we wear they don’t allow it. If you go anywhere like if you want to find a job they tell you you have to take it off.”* Another participant said: *«When they see the woman to put the mantil [head scarf], or they find her muslim, the first thing they mention is why you put this on your head. So there is no opportunity for the woman to work. [...] Our country this what we put on our head doesn’t prevent us from learning education, from working. Its normal, we can be a doctor, we can be a teacher, we can do a lot of things».*

Moreover, the African women refugees feel they have a harder time finding a house because of their skin colour.

### e) Specific Challenges of refugee families and children

All the above mentioned challenges are also relevant to refugee families. The children’s wellbeing and the impact that all these difficulties are having on their children was the main priority of all parents. They’re concern can be summarised in one statement: *«We care about the kids rights more than our rights because they are the future».*

Therefore, this section discusses challenges related to refugee children. The most important challenges faced by refugee children in terms of their integration are related to language, school and hardships in their daily life including finding appropriate housing and psychological trauma. All of these challenges can pose additional psychological burden on the child.

### i. Education

Children's education is particularly important for refugees. Children refugees and asylum seekers can attend public school up until the age of 18, however, there are still challenges in accessing education.

Participants discussed that it is imperative to have more preparatory classes for refugee children, especially in terms of language. They mentioned that children are not supported with intensive language courses from the very beginning, instead they are put directly in the public school system without knowing the local language. In some cases, a student might even spend an entire school year in a greek speaking class, without any additional specialised classes to help them learn the language. This renders their education particularly difficult, as they cannot understand the class, instead they attend school as observers. In one case, other community members had to intervene and contact the Ministry of Education in order for this to be addressed while in another case the children still did not have a greek language teacher to the day that the FGD took place. To add to that, not knowing the language means that they also cannot communicate well with their teachers. Whether due to language barriers, or different educational level, refugee children find themselves in classes that are not adequate with them.

An additional challenge faced by refugee children is the lack of support for their homework. One participant said "how can they help us if we want to help our kids during the school? For example the homework, they write it, they give them [to the children] everyday a small paper and it is in Greek. And we don't understand what is written." This causes additional stress to the children, since they know their family cannot support them with homework. It can lead children to avoiding discussing with their parents about their homework or any difficulties they face at school and instead carry the burden inside them. "When they start the primary school every parent everyday they will help their kids to make the homework but the child here [of refugees or asylum seekers] will not mention the homework in front of the parent because he knows no one can help him. So he depends on himself." This is further exacerbated by the lack of important tools such as a laptop to assist with their research and homework.

For the young asylum seekers who recently turned eighteen, finishing their education becomes a challenge. As long as they are under 18 the policy is to allow them to go to school. Once they turn 18, respondents said that asylum seekers are no longer allowed to continue going to formal school, they can only continue with language classes at the afternoon lifelong learning classes of the Ministry of Education. At the same time, they are required to seek for a job.

## ii. Children's psychological wellbeing

Refugee children carry with them psychological trauma. Children are still traumatized by the war and the horrors they witnessed at their home country and in the journey to flee the country, while family separation remains an important aspect that affects them. The reception and integration difficulties they face in Cyprus further intensifies the psychological trauma. Left unresolved, this can also impact a child's education, wellbeing and ability to concentrate. One mother described: *«they saw horrible things in Syria during the war, and when they came here they didn't treat or forgot this because they saw things more worse than the war .... Imagine that with all these problems he sits in the class and he didn't understand anything. As a parent we couldn't concentrate or find a solution to solve this problem. So if something I couldn't solve it, how can our kids solve it. I found our kids lost everyday, they are crying, they are fearing for nothing, they went to school and sometimes they come back crying, they have big stress and they don't want to go to school. We really hope that you can save the education of the child. Psychologically, physically..»*. The following is another example: *“At Christmas, when there were fireworks they [the children] were afraid, they think that the war started. They [were] scared. That's an example about their fear”*.

These exemplifies the psychological trauma that refugee children carry with them which needs to be addressed. They are also clear examples of how lack of appropriate reception and integration further intensifies this trauma. In the last example, the children relived their fear of war because they didn't know the local custom of lighting fireworks to celebrate.

Participants suggested that it would be useful to have a programme for children and parents, where they will be taught more about the local society and how things work in Cyprus so that the children's daily life and integration becomes smoother. One participant also proposed to organise summer school for refugee children: *“For me I prefer if there is summer school for the kids that will help them for the next year, they will give them information, so when they start the school they will have some ideas over, they will get some confident. [...] So if they have summer school they will contact with the other kids and they will get the language. So if it is 3 or 4 month before the school they will get many information which will help them”*.

## iii. Other challenges

The reception and integration difficulties also impact the children's education and psychological wellbeing. For example, the difficulties in finding a house can impact children's education, since, without a house and a home address it is very difficult for them to enroll to school or concentrate in class.

Without employment or housing and with limited resource, even small daily things become a challenge for refugees. One mother said: *“when my youngest son asked me about the carnival that my friends in the school they are putting a special costume for the carnival how can I provide him this, and this is just simple thing. Sometimes when the*

*school goes for a journey or a picnic this is only 5 euro but I couldn't pay. [...] I take money from a friend because I don't want my son to feel less than the other students".*

Finally, another particular problem that asylum seeking and refugee families face is child care. Based on the law, adults they are required to seek for a job and the welfare office only provides them with financial support for the period of time that they are actively seeking for a job. However, a mother with small children cannot easily go to work because she doesn't have a support system, somewhere to leave the child.

### **f) Identification of education/training needs for refugees**

Refugees and asylum seekers agreed that learning the local language was essential for their integration, and among their top priorities. Gaining conversational skills was their first aim. Furthermore, they explained that language courses would be very beneficial if the topics covered were relevant to their daily life and included such vocabulary and examples of conversations. The following focus areas were proposed:

- Education and the school system in order to be able to communicate with their children's teachers, especially in relation to their performance and behavior at school.
- Health and access to healthcare. Vocabulary and phrases that will help them in their interaction with the doctors.
- Communication in everyday life, at the supermarket, talk with their neighbors, with their landlords, how to get a taxi.
- Communication with public services.

Finally, participants also mentioned that the use of online tools, such as duolingo, and youtube or other mobile apps are very useful and they would be interested to further use them.

Beyond language learning, the main education / training needs identified were the following:

- Information about the law, their rights and responsibilities.
- Labor rights, minimum wage standards applied to them, social insurance and other social benefits associated to work and how one can access them.
- Learning more about the local culture, Cyprus, its tradition and its people.
- Skills that will help them find a job. The skills they would like to learn include: computers, tailoring, baking, cooking, technical skills, like plumbing, car technician and carpentry. One participant proposed to focus more broadly on training refugees in new skills in order to give them different options and opportunities.

### **g) Volunteers**

In terms of the role of volunteers and any support they receive from the local community, refugees and asylum seekers living in the community, outside the refugee reception centre said that they do not have access to volunteers, or they have not received any volunteer assistance beyond that of specific organisations. However, they were of the view that the support from volunteers would be very valuable for them. While there are a few volunteer groups which are very active, especially at the refugee reception center, the fact that participants in the focus group discussions felt they did not have support from volunteers shows that there is need for even more volunteers and support, especially towards the refugees and asylum seekers that live in the cities and therefore it is not as easy to connect with them.

## **5. Mapping the needs of refugee families and existing best practices (Analysis of Interviews with NGOs)**

### **a) Participants' characteristics and experience working with refugees**

Five interviews were conducted with representatives of key organisations that work to support refugees. These included three organisations that offer legal, social and material support to refugees, a refugee-led association and a social worker / trainer who is involved in the provision of greek language classes for third country nationals.

### **b) Identification of the specific needs and challenges of refugee families**

The main challenges discussed during the interviews were lack of knowledge of important information in relation to the asylum procedures, their rights and responsibilities, unemployment, communication, psychological challenges, as well as isolation and difficulties to integrate with the local communities. A general remark is that the overall system of support is not adequately structured to ensure that, once someone is recognized as a refugee he learns well the local language and becomes gainfully employed. Without financial independence they the probability to remain dependent on the welfare system remains high.

#### **i. Employment**

The challenges faced by refugees are many and significant ones. The issue of employment is among their top priorities as it impacts their ability to live in dignified conditions and support themselves. At the policy level, they face structural restrictions. From the moment they apply for asylum they are only allowed to work after a six months period has elapsed, and even in that phase, they are only allowed to work in very restrictive sectors.

Interviewees also discussed other challenges that are related to employment. Childcare was identified as one of them. They discussed how refugees and asylum seekers have difficulties with childcare and the supervision of small children during the period of time that they need to be at work. Even if childcare facilities exist nearby, they cannot afford to pay the fees for such services. Consequently, finding employment is even more difficult for asylum seeker women with children, as they are usually sent to work in village or a farm, which makes it impossible for them to arrive at work on time or simultaneously take care of their family. Another factor preventing women from being employed outside the home in certain cases is also a cultural one.

Given the added challenges women face, it was proposed that trainings on practical skills that can help women find a job would be very valuable. In connection to this, interviewees also suggested that the labour offices should make more efforts to match refugees with positions that take into consideration their specific knowledge and skills. They also highlighted that there is a need to inform society of the unrestrictive right of recognized refugees to work freely in any position, since it is evident from their



experience that employers are not aware of this right, and therefore are reluctant to hire a recognized refugee.

#### v. [Language and Communication](#)

##### Learning the Greek Language

Learning the Greek language is a real need for refugees, especially for those that do not speak English either. However, there are very few real opportunities to learn the language. Even in the cases where such classes exist, attending them presents its own challenges for refugees, especially for women. The following challenges were described:

- Distance From Home
- Lack of childcare assistance for children that are not going to school yet. From previous experience, women had nowhere to leave their children so that they can attend the Greek classes. The situation was even worse for women who were single parents. Those women had no social network available to support them.
- Mixed classes offering Greek lessons to both men and women, end up to becoming either all -men or all- women classes. This was apparent in the refugee center in Kofinou where, eventually, emphasis was placed on offering opportunities to women to learn the Greek language. This initiative was welcomed with great enthusiasm by women.
- Persons working long hours are unable to attend classes.

##### Communication with the Authorities, public institutions and organisations

In general, interviewees mentioned that asylum seekers mainly get information from their peers about the various services and institutions. The challenge with communication becomes more evident in special cases and in non-familiar settings, such as when they visit the doctor or when the school needs to inform the parents about things that are relevant to their everyday life, for example about a new school trip, the child's progress or even just informing them when the child is sick. An interviewee said that this is a challenge they face with civil society organisations (CSOs) as well, who, in order to address this often collaborate with interpreters. Similarly, often times the asylum seeker or refugee asks a CSO to assist with their communication with the school. The CSOs have created in some cases standardised translated forms and text, that can be used by the school for communication with the parents.

As mentioned above, similar challenges also appear at visits to the doctors. Furthermore, it was reported that in some cases doctors or other officers from governmental services, especially the labour office, are not very helpful towards refugees. Therefore CSOs and volunteers often accompany to the doctor or other services those asylum seekers or refugees that do not speak very well Greek or English, assisting them with interpretation and overall support.

Language is also a challenge for children's education. Teachers themselves indicate difficulties with communication and updating parents, not only about the progress of

their child but also about issues of everyday life in the school. Examples are cases when a child became sick and the father had to come to take the child home.

#### vi. [Financial and Livelihood issues](#)

Asylum seekers face significant financial challenges. The financial support they receive from the welfare services is insufficient to cover their housing and livelihood needs, leading them to destitution and homelessness.

The housing allowance is very low compared to the rent prices, making it very difficult for asylum seekers to find accommodation, while at the same time, the Kofinou refugee camp has been full beyond capacity for a long time. This results in people living in crowded or inadequate conditions, even becoming homeless. The seriousness of this situation is exemplified in the following quote *“we had many many cases of homeless people that were hosted by friends and .. its difficult because in summer at least they go to sleep at the beach but not its winter they cannot do it”*.

To cover food and other essential items they receive a monthly allowance in the form of coupons that can be redeemed in very specific supermarkets. Besides the fact that this allowance is extremely low to cover their needs, the prices at the said supermarkets are sometimes higher than other supermarkets, which further reduces their value and the amount of products they can buy with them.

The impact of this policy is evident by the fact that asylum seekers often find themselves without food, and they turn to CSOs and charities to provide them with food. This is also the case with newly arrived asylum seekers. Until they manage to submit their asylum application (which often takes a few days) and in the days or weeks that follow this, they only receive a small amount of emergency assistance which in reality is enough to cover their immediate needs only for a couple of days. Therefore, they reach out to the CSOs and ask for food and shelter.

Interviewees discussed that persons who receive a status of either refugee or international protection also face financial challenges during their transition from the status of asylum seeker to refugee, due to the interruption of the financial support they receive from the Welfare Services. More specifically, the application to receive the Guaranteed Minimum Income, that unemployed recognized refugees are allowed, takes up to six months to be examined. In the meantime, the limited support they were receiving as asylum seekers ceases, leaving them in limbo. During this period, they only receive a small emergency allowance, for which they need to follow-up every two weeks. Without roots and a strong network of support, the transition period is once again filled with hardship.

#### vii. [Access to information](#)

Refugees and asylum seekers have limited access to information regarding the law, the asylum procedure and other processes that need to be followed to access their rights. Their main sources of information are civil society organisations and word of mouth

from their compatriots. It becomes overwhelming for newly arrived, who do not know Cyprus at all to manage to navigate the system and follow the various procedures. These initial processes and procedures that refugees have to undertake are all intense and difficult ones. After all that they have to learn how to go about with everyday life in a new country, for which they still need guidance and support. The need for information becomes especially pressing for refugees when processes and procedures are altered, since, if an important change occurs and they didn't hear about it they risk losing any state support they receive, which has happened in several occasions. In one such example, when an asylum seeker first applied for asylum he was informed that after 9 months he will need to register with the labour office and find a job. However, in the meantime the law changed and he was required to register with the labour office after 6 months – something for which he was never informed. Instead, after 6 months passed, his welfare support was stopped. Nevertheless, there is no official system in place to inform all the refugees or asylum seekers of any new changes in the law and policy.

Another issue is to be updated on their asylum case or other procedures that they have launched.

Lack of information can also impact children's education. For example, some asylum seekers do not know that their children have the right to go to school even while their asylum case is being examined.

#### viii. [Challenges and stress](#)

Most refugees and asylum seekers face a lot of stress related to their integration. Firstly, the process of applying for asylum and waiting for the decision on their application is very stressful. Applying for and accessing other benefits and services, such as getting welfare support, a medical card and enrolling their children to school is also taxing, especially because processes are sometimes difficult, while at the same time asylum seekers do not receive adequate information about them. Finding accommodation is also very difficult, even leading some asylum seekers to homelessness. The limited financial support they receive as asylum seekers and their inability to work leads to more life hardship and stress.

Furthermore, it was reported that refugees and asylum seekers feel excluded from the local community, they don't have enough information on what happens in the local community. Most of the asylum seekers don't know the local language which doesn't allow them to understand news, get informed and connect with the community, making them feel isolated.

#### ix. [Lack of transportation means](#)

Transportation was also identified as an important challenge, especially given that the public transportation system in Cyprus is not very efficient. This impacts their ability to visit the doctors and other services, go to language classes as well as to get a job, since it is very difficult to use the public transport system to get to work, especially when the job is at a village. There are no frequent buses nor enough routes for someone to easily

move between different parts of the city, therefore making it very time-consuming and difficult to go from one place to the other. In the case of mothers with children that need to visit the doctor this becomes even more difficult to impossible. Furthermore, despite the very limited financial resources of asylum seekers, transportation is not free of charge.

#### x. Social Integration

Interviewees were of the opinion that refugees' integration was lacking. They often live in areas where there are mostly persons from their own countries and their interaction with the local population is very limited. Even in schools you can see that children interact mostly with children of their own nationality, something that applies both to Cypriot and refugee children. However, asylum seekers and refugees are eager to engage with the local community and become friends with Cypriots.

The smooth inclusion of refugees in the society of Cyprus is made even more difficult by the chain-like consequences resulting from the lack of financial resources, unemployment and the inadequate competence in the knowledge and the use of the Greek language. This is even more challenging for women due to their focus on their role as mothers and wives. Their priority is to cook, take care of the house and their children rather than go out to meet new people. It was also mentioned that there are cases where a woman remains at home for cultural reasons. All the above deprive them of the possibility for socialization and social integration in the society of Cyprus.

Interviewees highlighted the importance of having more organised groups or associations of refugees so that they can amplify their voices in the local society, whether by advocating for their rights, raising awareness on the challenges they face as a group or by having more opportunities to participate in the society.

#### c) **Identification of education/training needs of refugees**

A major finding is that any language classes should be structured in a way that is most beneficial for the every day life of a refugee, especially in being able to get a job. Some of the things that were identified as successful practices in previous Greek language courses were:

- using real-life situations;
- learning in practice;
- training visits in the community (such going to the coffee place or visiting a public service);
- focusing on employability skills and vocabulary;
- arranging for traineeships;
- classes offered to specific communities with same language so that it is easier to learn and support each other;
- including women empowerment, to understand that they can contribute back to society.

In terms of specific topics that would be important to include in a training curriculum, the following were proposed:

- Communicating with the school: Being able to discuss the child's progress and any challenges they face at school; information about public holidays and other school activities such as school trips, religious and cultural events.
- Visiting the Hospital: Having a discussion with the doctor; explaining their condition; understanding the doctor's questions and advices
- Child-care in general
- General health issues and family health, such as immunization.
- Vocabulary on daily activities such as: how to speak about food, clothes, transportation.
- Communicating with the public services: vocabulary to explain their financial situation and their livelihood needs.
- Vocabulary related to jobs: Basic conversation in order to get a job, learning some technical terms and vocabulary related to the fields in which they can work.

Beyond the language courses, interviewees also identified the follow training areas that would be very beneficial for refugees:

- Basic and advanced IT skills
- Trainings focused on specific skills that will increase the employability prospects for refugees, especially refugee women, such as cooking, sweing and basic principles of enterpreunership.

#### **d) Identification of education/training needs of volunteers**

Lastly, the role of volunteers' was also discussed with a focus on the potential training needs that volunteers may have. All interviewees acknowledged that volunteers can be instrumental in helping refugees and asylum seekers in Cyprus, especially since there are very few organisations supporting refugees and therefore volunteers' contribution is very valuable. However, one person mentioned that a challenge they face with using volunteers in their work is that of consistency (taking into account that volunteers themselves also have other obligations). Therefore a big pool of volunteers helps to be able to accommodate flexibility.

One interviewee also discussed that when referring to volunteers we should consider that they can be categorized in two groups, a) volunteers from the host communities and other EU countries and b) refugee volunteers or other persons who come from the same cultural background. Both of these groups are very important, they can contribute in different ways but at the same time they may also have different training needs.

Training for volunteers can be general or specialized depending on the type of volunteerism that someone is doing. For example, there are different training needs for the person who offers legal advice or support for meeting their livelihood needs and the

person who mainly organizes educational or recreational activities. Interviewees proposed the following training topics for volunteers:

- Understanding the Asylum System & Refugee Challenges
  - Understanding basic concepts, for example who is a refugee, and the differences between an asylum seeker, refugee, person with subsidiary protection and other migrants
  - Understanding the asylum procedure, how long an application takes to be examined, what are the different steps etc
  - Having an overview of the social and integration problems asylum seekers and refugees face and at different stages.
  - Learning the rights of refugees and asylum seekers (especially in relation to housing, health, education, employment, welfare), the various procedures to access them and the public authorities involved.
- Addressing challenges they may encounter as volunteers
  - Personal psychological issues volunteers may face. This training is mainly needed when their work includes listening to the problems of refugees.
- Cultural understanding and cultural differences; for example on the interaction between women and men
- Issues of confidentiality

#### e) Identification of Best practices

Finally, interviewees discussed other initiatives that they consider had very positive outcomes. These included:

- The OASIS voluntary organisation which organizes various integration activities, such as language lessons, sewing and jewelry making. These opportunities are very helpful for refugees and at the same time they make them feel welcome in the society.
- The events organised for World Refugee Day by UNHCR, which offer a good opportunity for refugees to feel part of a big event and engaged in their community. For example, at last year's festival, refugees cooked and sold their own traditional food which made them very happy.
- Volunteer's arranging to go with refugees to local events, such as theatre, music festivals or day trips to see the countryside. Refugees "*absolutely love*" these outings.
- Using alternative means to inform refugees, for example through community radio.
- Public awareness campaigns which aim to inform the society about refugees and address the negative attitudes towards them.
- Integration activities organised by the Municipalities and civil society organisations because they offer them the opportunity to interact and mingle with locals and other communities.

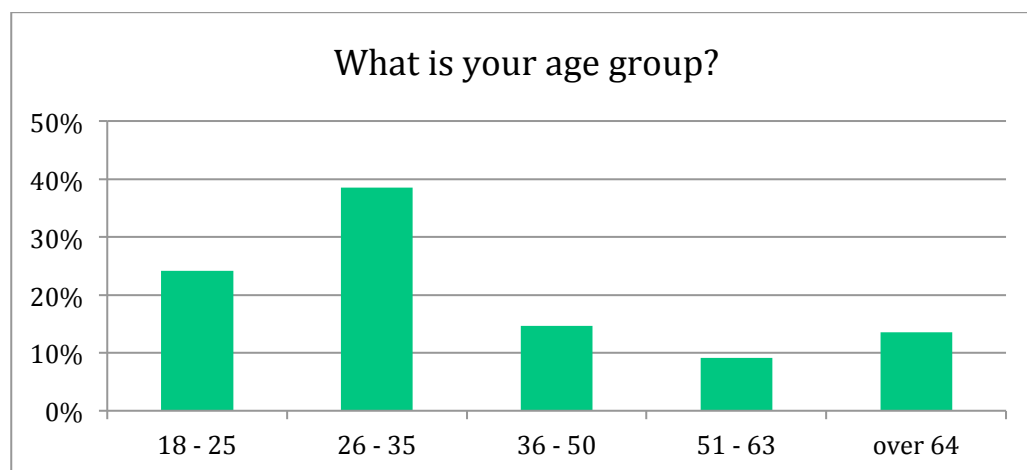


## 6. Mapping Volunteers' Experience (Analysis of Questionnaires with Volunteers)

Further to the views of refugees and persons working directly with refugees, this research also sought to collect the views of persons who volunteer in order to support refugees. An online questionnaire was distributed in both English and Greek and responses were collected from 50 volunteers. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain an understanding of the experience of volunteers, especially to identify any specific challenges they face while supporting or working with refugees as well as the training needs that they have as volunteers. The results of the research will inform the design of a training and mentorship programme for volunteers. In addition, we also requested volunteers to share with us their views on the needs of refugee families, as they see it through their direct engagement with refugees.

### a) Participants' characteristics

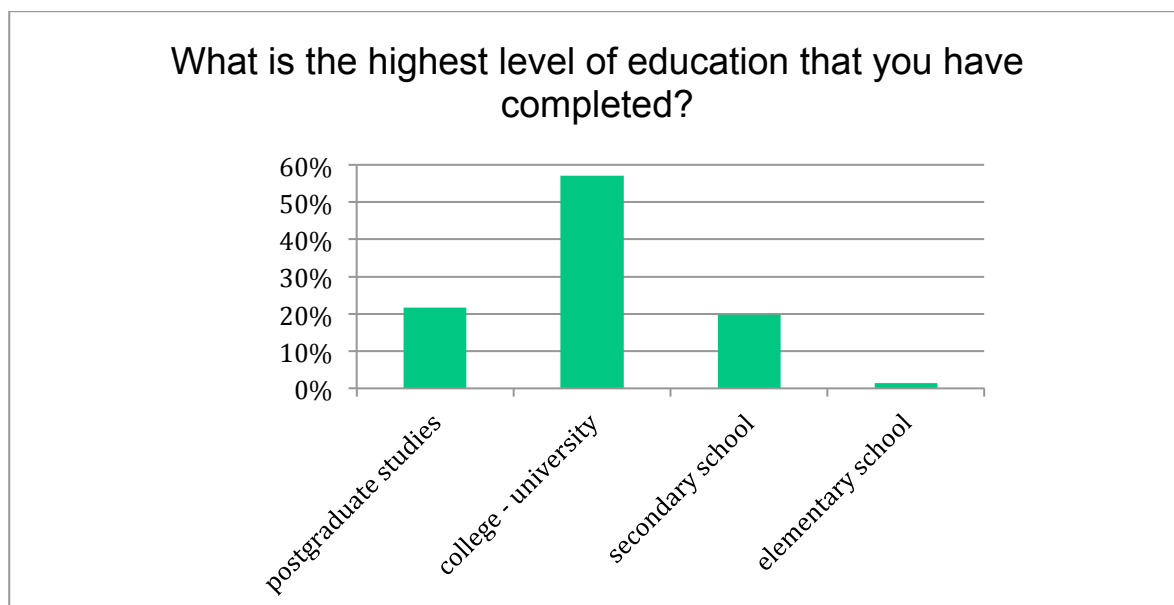
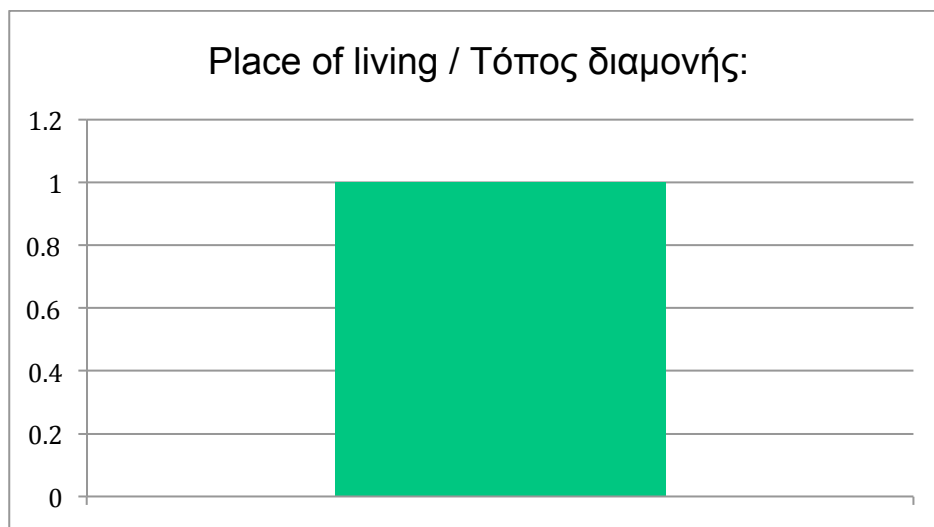
In total we received responses from fifty (50) volunteers. The majority of respondents were women, with 38 responses (or 76% of all responses), while we received 12 responses from men. Half of all respondents were between 26 – 35 years of age (50% or 25 persons), followed by those that are 51 – 63 years old (18% or 9 persons). The table below shows the age group of all respondents:



The majority of participants were Cypriot citizens (34 respondents or 68%), of which 4 persons had dual nationality. These included two British Cypriots, a Cypriot with Saudi Arabian origin and a Cypriot – South African. The second largest nationality of respondents were British (in total 8 persons including the two aforementioned British-Cypriots). Other nationalities included three Americans, as well as French, Portuguese, Italian, Irish, New Zealander, Georgian and Czech. Of those who are not originally from

Cyprus, 8 persons have been in Cyprus for 2 years or less, 5 persons for 3 to 10 years, 1 person for 11 to 20 years and 5 persons for over 20 years.

The majority of respondents live in a city (35 persons), 7 persons live in a small town and 8 persons in a village. Everyone has a high school diploma while almost all respondents have also finished higher education (17 persons finished a college / University and 31 persons have done post-graduate studies). The following tables show the place of living of respondents and their level of education.



The occupation of respondents' varies considerably. What is interesting is that an almost equal number of respondents represent specific occupational groups which can be directly related to specific needs of refugees. For example, 9 persons come from the

healthcare professions (including a music-therapist, doctor, nursing teacher, psychomotor therapist, physiotherapist, dental practice administrator and nurse); 8 persons are teachers or professors, while 7 work in the humanitarian sector or offer social services. Other professions are related to project management, research, finance, administration and other positions.

Among the 50 respondents, 13 persons said that they or their families are refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). This is particularly relevant to the context of Cyprus where a significant percentage of the population was uprooted in 1974 and therefore identify themselves as IDPs or refugees. Therefore, we also compared the number of Cypriot nationals who responded positively to this question and we found that 11 out of 34 Cypriots said they or their families are refugees or IDPs. This is only 32% of the Cypriots that responded the questionnaire, therefore we observe that, within our sample, there is not a significant correlation between having a refugee background and volunteering for refugees. However, at the question whether they themselves have ever been a migrant, 35 of all the respondents replied positively, indicating that there might be some correlation. Nevertheless, this correlation was not examined in more depth with additional questions, as it was not the focus of the research.

### **b) Identification of challenges refugees face and training needs from the volunteer's eyes**

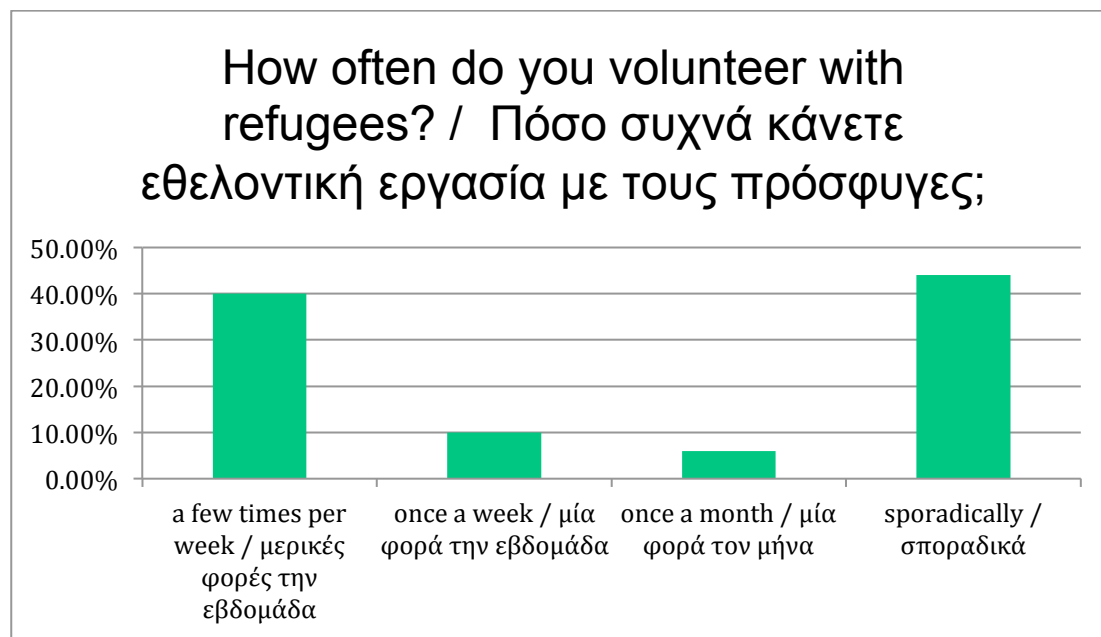
Question 10 of the survey requested volunteers to name, in their opinion, the greatest challenges that refugee families face. Their responses can be separated into 7 broad categories:

1. Meeting their basic daily needs and lack of financial resources. Employment (including inability to find a job, lack of opportunities and availability of only low-skilled and low paid jobs) was identified as the number one challenge of refugees, followed by the inability to find affordable housing. Affordable transport costs and challenge with meeting their basic living needs such as food were also mentioned.
2. Children's education.
3. Language barriers, including lack of support to learn the language, challenge with communication with the local communities and understanding the local culture.
4. Racism, discrimination and xenophobia, including institutional racism, refusing to rent a house to black people, ignorance, prejudice and bullying.
5. Integration more broadly, including lack of opportunities, lack of community support for integration, marginalisation, social isolation, lack of social interaction with Cypriots and social acceptance, loneliness and isolation in reception camps rather than encouragement of integration in the society.
6. Access to information regardsing their rights and the system, healthcare information and locating where they can get aid and assistance.
7. Challenges in their engagement with the government, including «navigating the official bureaucracy», challenges with accessing services, issues with the

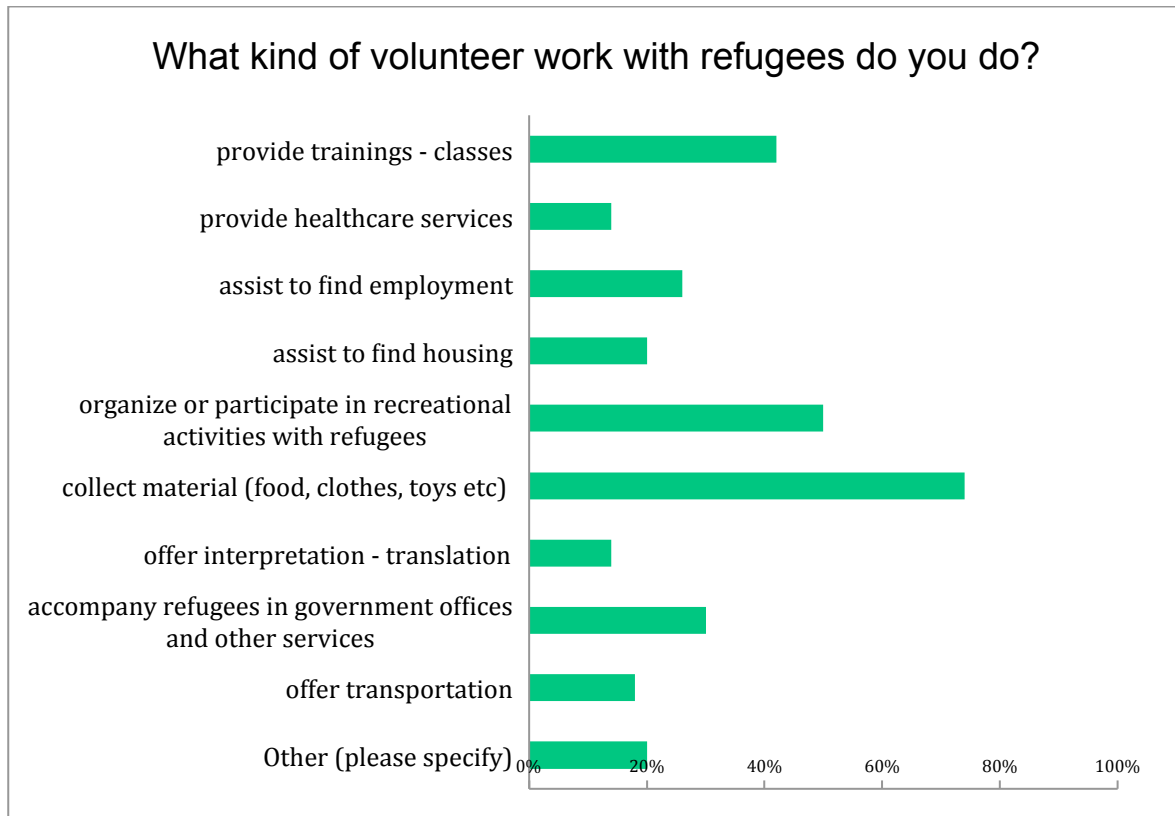
- welfare payments and long waiting times to process their asylum applications
8. Health related challenges, including psychological trauma and access the healthcare services.

### c) Challenges volunteers face

The below table shows how often the respondents volunteer.

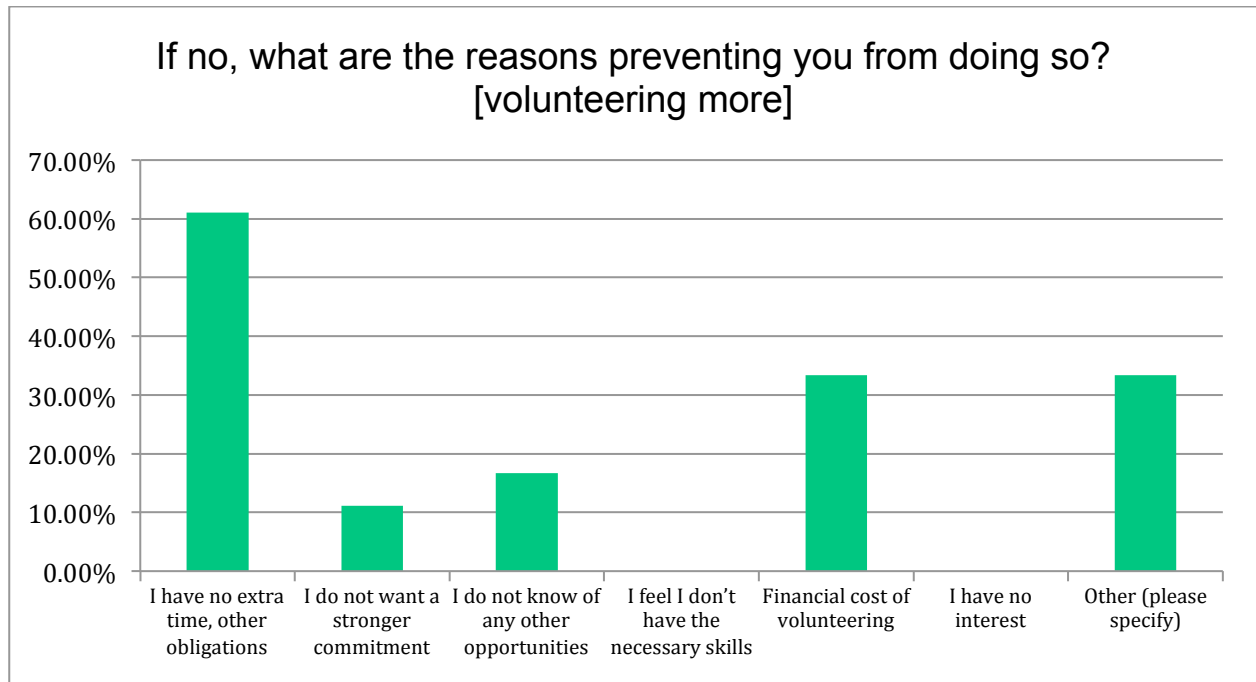


The majority of the respondents are involved in collection of essential material for refugees (74%), followed by organizing or participating in recreational activities with refugees (50%) and providing trainings – classes (42%). The below table shows the kind of volunteerism that they do:



Volunteers also gave other responses such as provide psychological support, volunteering at a shelter for unaccompanied minors and at the refugee reception camp, organise a distribution centre at the camp, organising a social cafe, women’s events, run a mother / baby unit at the camp, spending time speaking and playing with the children, offering friendship, supporting refugees who live outside the refugee camp, contacting doctors and dentists regarding refugee patients.

The majority of the volunteers (34 out of 50) said that they are considering volunteering more. Of those that are not considering to volunteer more, most of them reported lack of extra time and other obligations as the main reason. Their responses on what prevents them to volunteer more are as follows:



It is interesting to note that none of the volunteers mentioned lack of necessary skills as a reason not to volunteer more. One volunteer mentioned that *«the opportunities for volunteering that do exist are inefficient and crucial training that explains how a volunteer can work well/protect himself or herself is lacking. This are slowly improving but this is still a substantial concern»*, while another volunteer mentioned poor volunteer management. In addition, another volunteer said they are disabled and cannot dedicate additional time healthwise.

Over half of the volunteers (27 out of 50) have encountered challenges in their voluntary work. These can be grouped into five issues:

1. The main challenges they mentioned was in relation to the governmental services, such as lack of necessary tools and structures to help refugees, ignorance, rudeness, racism and poor response towards refugees. However, one participant also mentioned that there is also disconnect between local charitable organisations and government services.
2. Psychological difficulties, becoming overwhelmed on how to assist refugees, as well as managing to separate oneself from the refugee.
3. Challenges with the volunteers' coordination, including lack of a structural support system to better channel the volunteers' skills and poor volunteer management.
4. Language barriers, either in directly communicating with the refugee, or knowing Greek in order to communicate with the authorities
5. Experiencing first hand the racism that refugees face as well as lack of understanding from the society on why they are helping refugees.



#### **d) Analysis of current initiatives to train/educate volunteers**

Exactly half of the respondents mentioned that they have previously attended volunteer training sessions. These trainings included training on arrival, legal social and project management, workshops run by refugee oriented organisations such as UNHCR and NGOs, orientation trainings on the refugee situation and terminology, organizing and explaining volunteer opportunities, cultural and religious differences, pediatric care, psychological signs, human trafficking and child abuse identification, intercultural communication, adult education, boosting self-confidence and psychosocial support. Most of them stated that the trainings were very useful, especially in order to understand better the different process refugees go through, the situations they face, as well as deal with the day to day psychology and behavior of refugees. As a consequence, 38 out of 50 respondents said that they would like to attend additional relevant training courses.

#### **a) Identification of training needs for volunteers**

Volunteers proposed several training topics, which can fall under the following categories:

- Understanding the legal and social context for refugees: this includes asylum procedures, child protection, the needs of refugees, employment assistance, understanding the rights and obligations of refugees and relevant governmental services, in order to be able to navigate the governmental system.
- Advocacy skills.
- Culture and Integration: Intercultural communication and understanding, new strategies for inclusion and integration; migrant inclusion tools, teaching a second language; how to train migrants / refugees on integration issues; refugee formal and non-formal education.
- Psychological wellbeing of volunteers: stress management and psychological support; psychological first aid; how to deal with burn out and how to separate oneself from the refugees.
- Health and wellbeing of refugees: refugee counseling; strategies to be most helpful when accompanying a refugee to the doctor; health prevention; trauma counseling, providing health screening / first aid.
- Children and youth: organising activities for the children; empowering youth and volunteers.
- Volunteer coordination, as well as fundraising for volunteer organisations.

## 7. National Level Recommendations

The results of this study lead to some important conclusions. Having collected views from three different groups of stakeholders, it is evident through this research that the main challenges refugees and asylum seekers face are related to housing, employment, financial constraints, language barriers, access to information and children's education. Through the use of multiple research methods, these challenges were highlighted by all the groups of stakeholders that took part in this research as the most prevailing ones. The following section offers recommendations that can contribute to addressing them:

### *Housing*

- The government should take measures to ensure every person has access to housing, either through the provision of additional accommodation, either through the creation of additional housing facilities run by the government or through the increase of the housing allowance to reflect the current housing prices.

### *Employment & Financial Constraints*

- Review the policy of coupons for asylum seekers.
- Offer more training opportunities for refugees, including vocational trainings, taking into consideration their language barriers.
- Offer more opportunities for refugees to gain work experience, including by supporting specialized schemes and providing incentives to companies that offer traineeships and job positions for refugees. This could be part of a company's corporate social responsibility.
- Broaden the fields in which an asylum seeker is allowed to work and reduce the time period during which they are not allowed to work at all. Allowing them to work can only be a win-win situation both for the asylum seekers and for the government. It will result in economic resources for the asylum seekers, enabling them to meet the many and pressing needs of their families and leave the welfare system, while at the same time contributing to the Cypriot economy.
- Enable refugees to use their skills, talents and aspirations, by offering them more opportunities to enrich their skills and to work in the areas of their interest. This can be a win-win situation both for the refugees and the state, as they become more economically active. This can include more educational and vocational training, as well as access to micro-finance services and specialized trainings on creating their own businesses.
- Intensive language classes for those who are unemployed and receive public benefits can help them secure a job. Without good language training, the difficulties to access the labour market and integrate quicker will persist with higher chances to remain dependent on the welfare system rather than becoming independent.
- Offer free or significantly subsidized local transport for everyone that receives financial support from the social welfare services (including asylum seekers, refugees and the local population).

- Offer child-care services free of charge to those families that cannot afford the minimum fees. This is also an area in which voluntary organizations can take the initiative to organize and develop the services needed by refugee families who have babies and toddlers.

### *Language Barriers*

- Increase the possibilities for Greek language courses and orientation in the local society.
- Language courses should be tailored to the daily needs of refugees and asylum seekers, to support them in their integration and access to the labour market.
- Greek language courses should be organised in all cities, with multiple classes for different language levels as well as educational levels of the participants. There should be classes for all levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language, from basic user (A1) to proficient user (C1), with opportunities to receive formal certification. Language classes should be 100% free of charge. Intensive language courses should also be offered.
- Organise specialized trainings for language teachers, on teaching greek language to non-native speakers.

### *Access to Information*

- Set in place an individualized process at the time that a person applies for asylum, where the asylum seeker is fully informed about their rights and the various procedures they need to follow, using the assistance of a translator if necessary. The system should also keep the person updated on the progress of their application and on a changes in the law or practice that may affect them. Such information should also be given at the time of their interview with the asylum service, in order for them to understand the procedure that will be followed.
- Offer translation services at all relevant public authorities where there is a high interaction with refugees and asylum seekers that do not speak Greek or English.
- Translate important documents and information in the languages of refugees and asylum seekers.

### *Children's Education*

- The right to education should be safeguarded for all children and efforts should be made to ensure that parents are informed of this right and all children are enrolled to school, at the appropriate level.
- Offer welcome classes for refugee children in order to acquire a basic level of greek before putting them into the formal education system. Being able to communicate and comprehend to some extent what is taught in the class before entering the normal classes will help them integrate more quickly in their normal school class, make friends and avoid any marginalisation or negative reactions from the school communities.

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# SO FIE

Support for empowerment and integration of refugee families

## Contacts



### Verein Multikulturell

[www.migration.cc](http://www.migration.cc)

*Barbara Bitschnau: [b.bitschnau@migration.cc](mailto:b.bitschnau@migration.cc)*



### CESIE

[www.cesie.org](http://www.cesie.org)

*Giovanni Barbieri: [giovanni.barbieri@cesie.org](mailto:giovanni.barbieri@cesie.org)*



### CARDET

[www.cardet.org](http://www.cardet.org)

*Irini Anastassiou: [irini.anastassiou@cardet.org](mailto:irini.anastassiou@cardet.org)*



### Mozaik Human Resources Development

[www.mozaik.org.tr](http://www.mozaik.org.tr)

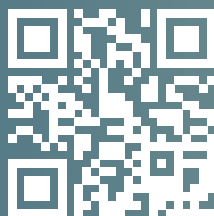
*Olçay Belli: [o.belli@mozaik.org.tr](mailto:o.belli@mozaik.org.tr)*



### Stiftelsen Kursverksamheten Vid U-A Universitet

[www.folkuniversitetet.se/In-English/](http://www.folkuniversitetet.se/In-English/)

*Ali Rashidi: [ali.rashidi@folkuniversitetet.se](mailto:ali.rashidi@folkuniversitetet.se)*



[support-refugees.eu](http://support-refugees.eu)

