



Integrated Action Plan for Integration of Refugees

Municipality of Thessaloniki

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Executive Summary

The Municipality of Thessaloniki found itself at the forefront of the management crisis of refugee flows in 2015. What started as an emergency response in 2015, with the closure of the Balkan Route and the EU-Turkey common statement of March 2016 has required a shift to a more effective urban response to accommodating refugee populations and their needs with the ultimate goal of having an inclusive, welcoming city that embraces difference, diversity and effectively responds to those most in need.

In the spirit of the City vision as expressed in the resilience strategy “Thessaloniki 2030”, Thessaloniki is conceptualized as “an inspiring, dynamic coastal city that ensures the well-being of its people and nurtures its human talent while strengthening its urban economy and respecting its natural resources.”

The objective of this Action Plan is to develop the necessary administrative structures and services that fall within the mandate of the Municipality of Thessaloniki; bolster these services through coordinating with other key national and international actors and deliver a robust framework that can allow for the integration and inclusion of refugees in the city and society in Greece with respect for diversity and in collaboration with civil society actors. The Action Plan is not solely service focused. It aims to adopt and mainstream a rights-based approach where old and new communities can enjoy their fundamental rights and thus be empowered to contribute to City life.

Two important collaborative processes characterize the development of this action plan and the spirit of policy development for the Municipality of Thessaloniki on integration. Firstly, the preparation of the Plan has benefited from the URBACT Arrival Cities Programme (2015-2018) which allowed the City to engage in peer learning together with partners from other EU cities on how cities can manage challenges of old and new migration. Secondly, the planning process has been enriched through participatory planning with actors on the ground, such as civil society organisations and volunteers. The dialogue with these actors were structured around the URBACT Local Support Group and the URBAN Working Group co-chaired by the Municipality. In this respect and also part of the Action Plan, the Municipality of Thessaloniki continues to pursue active membership and role in international networks as well as creating alliances with Municipalities facing similar challenges nationally.

In addition to the commitment of the Municipality of Thessaloniki to plan and execute interventions in a participatory manner, equally important is the City’s commitment to ensuring that policies directed to particular groups such as refugees and asylum seekers are not in silo. Therefore, the measures foreseen in the action plan are designed so that there are either direct or multiplier effects on the host community; in particular vulnerable groups. This inter alia bolsters a key priority of the City, which is social cohesion. Second, that the measures foreseen respect individual agency. Hence, community engagement, community participation and channels to make voices heard are key priorities for the City. The inhabitants of the City, including new arrivals, have the right to access services on an equal basis and have access to timely information in forms and languages they can understand. Therefore, transparency and regular communication regarding services, structures, assistance and also integration prospects as well as the possibility to raise concerns and complaints are highly valued aspects of this Plan.





Integration and inclusion is a two-way process. While individual agency free of paternalism is key for successful inclusion, this does not insinuate that inclusion happens on its own. The current Action Plan takes the view that a proactive stance in order to facilitate to creation of path ways for inclusion; in particular the focus should be on removing barriers, filling gaps, reforming Municipal structures to effectively respond to new realities on the ground and providing key assistance where needed. An important aspect of this pathway and process is supporting vulnerable groups in achieving self-reliance. While there are limitations to the mandate of the Municipality to intervene in key sectoral areas such as employment, health, education policies; there are key areas where supportive measures can bolster overall national and regional efforts. In this respect, the promotion of affordable housing in the City, creation of robust employability programmes for citizens and non-citizens alike, linking the private and public sector and supporting individuals through non-formal education activities are some of the central measures foreseen by the Action Plan.

Finally, we want to be able to know and measure the impact of the interventions but also the degree to which residents of the city feel and are welcome and included. In this respect, the Municipality through regular field research and the creation of an Integration Monitor Index, aims to assess the degree of integration and inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers and take corrective measures in collaboration with key actors.





Municipality of Thessaloniki: IAP Summary Table¹

Axes, Objectives and Actions

Axis	Goals	Objectives	Actions	Problems tackled
A. Communication, Dissemination and Awareness	Refugees and asylum seekers have easy access to information about services and a solid understanding of their rights in Greece; access to municipal services as well as services provided by NGO and civil society is facilitated through appropriate information and interpretation in native languages; urban response actors, including key authorities, take community voices into account; complaints and feedback mechanisms are in place	Objective 1: Refugees and asylum seekers have access to accurate information on primarily Municipal services as well as NGO services/assistance, asylum, rights and opportunities (including employment) and assistance selection criteria through printed and audio visual material in native languages and face to face communication Objective 2: Refugees and asylum seekers can clearly communicate with necessary municipal offices and local services in their native language through cultural mediators. Objective 3: An accountability framework is in place, through mechanisms for feedback/complaints giving others the opportunity to assess	A1.1 Establish an Information and Communications Committee in the Municipality of Thessaloniki A1.2 Prepare necessary communications/information tools for KEM A1.3 Explore use of radio and TV as CWC tool A1.4 Actively promote code of conduct for reporting free of discrimination, racism and xenophobia (Municipal TV and radio) A.2.1 Provide and/or facilitate access to quality native language interpretation for refugees and asylum seekers in key locations such as municipal offices and at mainstream service points, including technological solutions A 2.2 Provide KEM with cultural mediators, translation support and accompaniment services A 3.1 Mainstream refugee issues into existing Municipality complaints mechanisms and embed these mechanisms primarily in the SEM with clear links to KEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Although very limited at the moment, there is a risk of negative reactions, xenophobia and racism, including resistance towards measures to support refugees - Information tools and products in multiple languages regarding Municipality services not yet available - Mechanisms for ensuring accountability and transparency are available but need to be bolstered by effective communication - Feedback and complaints mechanisms weak in relation to needs of refugees and AS

¹Note that this is a summary of the full version of the IAP.



	<p>Response is coordinated by the Municipality effectively and access to services is ensured for refugees and asylum seekers; multi-level action and capacity building is carried out in order to ensure that there is effective mainstreaming of the rights-based approach and increased coordination; Accurate and updated data about refugees and asylum seekers and the humanitarian operation is available and provided in support of key partners and government counterparts</p>	<p>Objective 1: Municipality of Thessaloniki has the necessary support and training to assume a leading role in the urban response and take over the associated coordination apparatus and tools; effective coordination is ensured through the Urban Working Group</p> <p>Objective 2: Refugees and asylum seekers are referred to appropriate service providers and assisted to complete administrative procedures to access services, social protection measures and employment opportunities</p> <p>Objective 3: Accurate and comprehensive data about the refugee population in Metropolitan Thessaloniki is available and systematically verified, updated and shared with partners and authorities to allow for improved monitoring of refugees and asylum seekers and operational planning, respecting Data Sharing protocols.</p> <p>Objective 4: All stakeholders are regularly updated about the migration/displacement context through the circulation of appealing and regularly updated Information Management (IM) products</p> <p>Objective 5: Strategic advocacy is conducted on key issues identified by the UWG, the SEM and by community members with relevant stakeholders</p> <p>Objective 6: Strengthen transnational networks to garner support for City level priorities, establish alliances with cities and actors committed to integration and inclusion and exchange of good practices and generate new partnerships beyond borders</p>	<p>B 1.1 UWG meets fortnightly to coordinate urban response</p> <p>B1.2 Mobilise staff secondments/allocation/recruitment of experts to the Municipality of Thessaloniki to work on coordination, community engagement and associated capacity building</p> <p>B 1.3 Work with different municipal departments and on-going strategic initiatives to establish an internal forum to mainstream refugee issues within the administrative services of the Municipality and ensure synergies between initiatives, and inform UWG on developments</p> <p>B 1.4 Train and mentor key municipality staff to take over all coordination apparatus</p> <p>B 1.5 Facilitate the sharing of best practice, innovation and tools, between organisations working in Greece and from other responses in and outside the EU through information sessions, seminars etc within the framework of the UWG</p> <p>B 1.6 Further develop service mapping tool into an inter-agency 4Ws platform hosted by the Municipality</p> <p>B 1.7 Establish an administrative department for urban response for migrant and refugee integration</p> <p>B 1.8 To reach out to interested municipalities to transfer experiences and learning around urban response and provide guidance and support to new initiatives, including study visits, programme support, capacity building, including the signing of related MoUs</p> <p>B1.9 Explore systems, plans and structures to respond to emergency situations and prepare an emergency preparedness plan</p> <p>B2.1 Develop clear pathways to administrative services</p> <p>B2.2 KEM to assist refugees, asylum seekers to complete administrative procedures necessary to access services and social protection support</p> <p>B3.1 Conduct comprehensive profiling exercise</p> <p>B3.2 Establish and oversee mechanisms to regularly verify and update refugees and asylum seekers' data and monitor local integration through the establishment of an Integration Index</p> <p>B3.3 Establish electronic platform to be hosted by the Municipality to ensure accountability, transparency and assist in providing accessible information to all interested parties; develop IM products to facilitate planning, coordination and transparency</p> <p>B4.1 Establish an inter-agency task force on IM</p> <p>B5.1 Identify core advocacy concerns for the UWG and SEM through a consultative process: develop joint sector and inter-sectoral initiatives to ensure regular and consistent advocacy</p> <p>B5.2 Conduct soft and hard advocacy with stakeholders; develop advocacy strategy for the SEM</p> <p>B6.1 Participate in key international networks and for a</p>	<p>Lack of coordination among actors working at the urban level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple actors implementing actions and programmes, with risk of duplication and overlap - Lack of municipal administrative capacity to respond to refugee and migrant needs - Lack of capacity among municipal staff tailored to refugee and migrant needs - Capacity of facilitation services (KEM) limited for the moment - Beneficiaries are held back by administrative procedures to access mainstream services, social protection measures and employment - Lack of knowledge on the profiles and needs of urban population challenges provision of services (no baseline info) - Basic registry procedures are hampered as they are not tailored to the reality facing refugees/AS - Burials of Muslims with linked procedures not possible in the City, leading to costly transfer to Muslim cemeteries of the North - Advocacy plan for the SEM not yet available - Due to differentiation in prerequisite documentation, there are obstacles in the issuance of administrative certificates - The lack of possibility for burial of non-Christians burdens communities and also leads to costly transfer for burial to other cities
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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">C. Community Engagement</p>	<p>Refugees and asylum seekers are engaged as a key, influential actors in decision-making, in a way that accounts for the diversity of communities, situations and special needs; and have opportunities for meaningful interactions with local authorities, service providers and host community to contribute to the development of services and social initiatives; Social cohesion is enhanced through municipality supported activities; refugees and asylum seekers are linked to opportunities to develop language and other skills to access the labour market.</p>	<p>Objective 1: Mechanisms for knowing the community are in place to better understand concerns, needs and preferences of refugees and asylum seekers; to gain guidance to improve the quality and responsiveness of our work; putting refugees and asylum seekers in the driving seat of the response as part of a community based protection (CBP) strategy</p> <p>Objective 2: Refugees and asylum seekers have the opportunity to participate in direct and meaningful dialogue and advocacy with local authorities, service providers and host communities</p> <p>Objective 3: Social cohesion is enhanced due to improved knowledge and understanding between refugees, asylum seekers and host communities through cultural, recreational, educational activities and other forms of social dialogue, exchange and awareness raising</p>	<p>C1.1 Conduct outreach via Street workers and other monitoring mechanisms to connect refugees and asylum seekers to services and feed information acquired into data and information management initiatives and relevant working groups</p> <p>C1.2 Identify and train outreach volunteers on CBP</p> <p>C2.1 Explore and map existing for a for local dialogue between host community, service providers and refugees and asylum seekers including local associations</p> <p>C2.2 Facilitate participation of community representatives in SEM meetings – ensure effective representation of refugees and asylum seekers</p> <p>C2.3 Develop AGD sensitive two-way communication and community feedback mechanisms including face to face and remote/technological opportunities</p> <p>C3.1 Facilitate regular activities and events at a neighbourhood level through schools, community centres and other available community spaces; inter alia promoting awareness and knowledge on rights, obligations, cultural understanding, diversity as well as combating widespread rumors and stereotypes. For this purpose the Municipality of Thessaloniki will seek to explore regular programmes (in the form of workshops, seminars etc.) of existing actions or foster the development of new programmes that can support awareness raising in schools which host refugees and asylum seekers to foster a culture of understanding, tolerance and to combat racism and xenophobia. It will support and organize cultural initiatives highlighting inter alia the multicultural history of Thessaloniki.</p> <p>C3.2 Organise campaign to combat xenophobia and discrimination and to build social cohesion</p> <p>C3.3 Continue to incorporate refugee issues in ongoing city level events</p> <p>C3.4 Actively support refugee and asylum seeker social and economic initiatives</p>	<p>-Systematic information on Municipal services not available in multiple languages relevant to refugees/AS</p> <p>- Info on above services not readily available in multiple languages</p> <p>- Poor engagement with communities due to: new mechanisms in the Municipality for engagement; networks among communities very new and thus challenging to ensure representativeness</p> <p>- Lack of understanding among the host community of the situation and support provided to refugees/AS, hence undermining social cohesion</p>
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<p>D. Self-reliance</p>	<p>Through appropriate support, facilitate the access to self-reliance opportunities and integration for all ages</p>	<p>Objective 1: Access to inclusive, equitable and good quality educational opportunities and assistance for all learners of any age, allows for social inclusion and protection, full participation in social and civic spheres of life, long-term integration into the labour market and prevention of exploitation Objective 2: To facilitate conditions of improved living conditions for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable persons in the City.</p>	<p>D1.1 Continue fundraising initiatives to support long-term integration D1.2 Provide labour counseling, life skills, orientation courses for refugees and asylum seekers; facilitate access to opportunities to enhance skills and vocational training opportunities for refugees, asylum seekers and host community D 1.3 Open dialogue with private sector, MoL, OAED and other institutional bodies D 1.4 Initiate development of city level strategy for social entrepreneurship to support social economy initiatives that benefit both third country nationals and host community D 1.5 Explore means of promoting diversity and inclusion in economic activities and among economic actors in the City (CSR) D 1.6 Work with the relevant MoE bodies to create a learning network of teachers and educators working with refugees and migrants D 1.7 Support partners in their NFE activities D1.8 In order to improve quality of NFE services; create a service standards index for NFE D1.9 Improve Greek language skills of refugees and asylum seekers D 1.10 Improve capacities of municipal NFE services D 2.1 Right to housing for vulnerable groups and social housing models D 2.2 Seek ways to combat substandard housing; promote availability of affordable housing and foster right to shelter (including affordable housing Action Plan)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mandate of the Municipality on employment issues is limited - The Job Center and access to labour market services of the Municipality is limited - Limitations in access to education (registration, secondary support to access education - Limitations in access to labour market - Lack of knowledge of existing skills - Varying quality of NFE services in the City - Systematised Greek language support not yet available as a first step to integration - Risk of housing precarity for refugees
<p>E. Monitoring and Evaluation of the IAP</p>	<p>Ensure that the IAP is implemented in schedule and measure impact in line with identified indicators and take corrective measures in case of set backs.</p>	<p>Objective 1: Identify a Monitoring Plan Objective 2: Ensure transparency and accountability vis a vis the implementation of the IAP</p>	<p>E1.1 Design Monitoring Plan with clear intervals for reporting on progress E 1.2 Conduct regular risk assessments E 1.3 Update IAP and identify additional actions, including revisions E 2.1 Regularly publish information on progress made vis a vis achievement of IAP objectives</p>	

