

**DO THE
HUMAN
RIGHT
THING**

Raising our voice
for refugee rights

**SEEKING
A NEW LIFE
SEEKING
EMPLOYMENT**

An assessment of the employment
situation of asylum seekers and
beneficiaries of international
protection in Greece.

MARCH 2022

The project

“Do the *human right* thing - Raising our Voice for the Rights of Refugees”

is implemented under the Active citizens fund in Greece by the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) and its partners the International Rescue Committee Hellas (IRC), Diotima Centre and Popaganda.

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INTRODUCTION 01

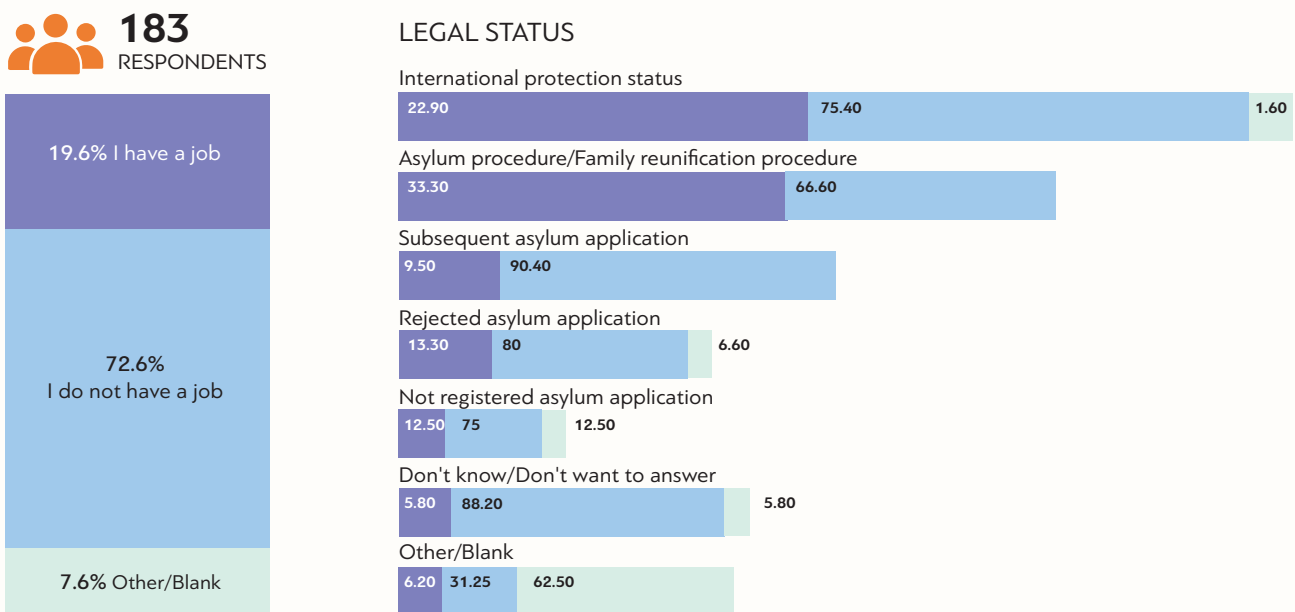
This report was drafted in the context of the project “Do the *human right* thing - Raising our Voice for Refugee Rights”, implemented under the [Active citizens fund](#) programme. It is the second of three reports covering access of beneficiaries and applicants of international protection to the right to housing, employment and health. These three rights are directly interrelated. Refugees and asylum seekers in Greece usually find it difficult to secure housing outside official state-provided accommodation and often face health issues, especially mental health issues, due to survival stress. Similarly, people with health problems, especially when they do not have adequate access to health services, find it difficult to enter the labour market. And of course, homelessness makes it difficult to find work and aggravates health problems.

Working is the most direct way for refugees to integrate into the receiving society.¹ According to Greek law, asylum seekers have the right to access employ-

ment, six months after filing an application for international protection.² In practice, however, access to the labour market is characterised by challenges starting from the reception stage and continuing after the acquisition of international protection status. Beneficiaries of international protection have the right to employment and similar insurance and employment rights and obligations, as Greek citizens.³ In practice, however, shortcomings, gaps, administrative and other obstacles, limit their capacity to exercise these rights.

For refugees, access to the labour market is the means to regain their autonomy and rebuild their lives in dignity and security. At the same time, their successful access to the labour market, as an integral part of their social inclusion, has multiple long-term benefits for the receiving society. It strengthens the national economy and contributes to the sustainability of fiscal policies (e.g. through contributions to the national pension system), and, consequently, can enhance national prosperity.⁴

GRAPH 1. Labour status based on the legal status of the beneficiaries, from their answers in 183 questionnaires of the three organisations



In a total of 183 questionnaires created by the IRC, GCR and Diotima, 72.6% of the respondents stated that they do not work, while only 19.6% of those who work, have an employment contract. 33.3% of those who work are beneficiaries of international protection while 35.9% are asylum seekers.

According to the answers given to the questionnaires of the three organisations, the main challenge for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in accessing the labour market, is the lack of Greek and/or English courses, which continue to be mainly run by civil society organisations, especially for asylum seekers. Moreover, in addition to the challenges that are also faced by Greek citizens, such as the general high unemployment rate in Greece, refugees and asylum seekers are often also faced with other challenges, such as the difficulty of obtaining documents (e.g. tax number, social security number) and the lack of a social network and connection with the Greek labour market.⁵ Additional obstacles include the complicated procedures to have their qualifications and skills recognised, but also to acquire new or enrich their existing qualifications in Greece. These are often compounded by the blunting of skills, due to prolonged displacement, often living in secluded accommodation structures or having restrictions of movement imposed. Finally, delays in relation to their access to the asylum system on mainland Greece,⁶ as well as

in relation to the renewal of their legal documents, extend the time needed to access the labour market. In practical terms, these barriers often deprive refugees and asylum seekers of the right to work, leading them to poverty and maintaining a state of uncertainty, with a direct impact on their mental health, the ability to cope with their financial obligations, the unhindered attendance of classes and other training activities for their professional development, and consequently their financial well-being.

The jobseeker culture and treatment applicants and beneficiaries of international protection receive in Greece, as reported by them to the job counselors of our organisations, is not friendly.⁷ Effective access to the labour market is hampered by discrimination, by the provision of vague instructions and insufficient explanation of procedures, with significant financial and time costs for the population in question. These shortcomings create a suffocating framework for finding and maintaining a stable job for asylum seekers and refugees, who, without a stable income, are unable to maintain a home for themselves or their family. This is especially true for groups with particular vulnerabilities, among whom single women/mothers, who are exposed to risks of exploitation, including sexual exploitation. The obstacles new entrants to the labour market face, can also undermine their long-term integration into the receiving society.

This leads to unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, and, at the same time, the local population can adopt a negative attitude towards refugees, unaware of these obstacles. Labour market exclusion inevitably creates problems of social cohesion, as without a home, income, and health - mental and physical – refugees cannot integrate.

Greece accepted me when I left my country for very serious reasons. But there are no jobs here, so I cannot survive, although I want to stay in Greece. Without a job I cannot pay the rent. Even the little cash support I used to receive has now been cut off.

Kendi*, asylum seeker from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

METHODOLOGY OF THE REPORT

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The findings of this report are based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered by the three organisations, through their presence in the field. In the context of the research leading to this report, special emphasis was placed on the participation of refugees and asylum seekers, in order to capture the experiences and difficulties, in a way that is perceived by the directly affected social groups.

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through a questionnaire of the three organisations on access to housing, employment, and health, which was completed through interviews and the use of online tools. Quantitative data was also obtained through relevant programmes of the organisations regarding the financial empowerment and employability of their beneficiaries in the period September 2021-February 2022 and were framed by a sample of 183 usable questionnaires. At the same time, two focus group discussions were conducted with refugees and asylum seekers, while the answers of the human resources departments of the three organisations and key professionals working in the field of refugee integration in Greece (public sector professionals, and employees of international organisations and civil society organisations) were utilised.

The interviews were conducted in Greek, English or in the mother tongue of the interviewees with the help of an interpreter, being conscious to their gender and cultural identity. All participants in the survey provided oral or written consent. They were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary and anonymous nature of the interview and their right to refuse to be asked or answer questions, as well as to terminate the interview at any time and for any reason they deemed appropriate, without having to provide any explanation. All refugees and asylum seekers' names contained in this report have been changed to protect their privacy and safety.

Possible Limitations

The people who participated in the research are in many cases beneficiaries of the project partner organisations, which means that they often had support from professionals (e.g. for the issuance of necessary documents); as a result, they are often ahead in their labour market integration journey. Therefore, at least some of the findings of this report (e.g. rates of people with a tax number) are likely - if not certain - to present a more optimistic picture than that experienced by other sections of the population in question, who lack the necessary support.

Many respondents to the questionnaires are still trying to adapt to the living conditions in Greece, having to cope with a number of daily struggles (e.g. housing, asylum procedure, lack of childcare, especially in single-parent families), which affect both their readiness to focus on job searching, as well as the prioritisation of the problems they face, which vary from case to case. This inevitably affects the results obtained from the questionnaires, where it was observed that in several cases, questions concerning -in particular- employment, were answered incompletely or not at all.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK



EU Member States have specific obligations under international and EU law - in particular the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the EU Reception Conditions Directive,⁸ and the EU Qualification Directive.⁹ These obligations provide, on the one hand, appropriate reception conditions for asylum seekers and access to the labour market, and on the other hand, they provide for the facilitation of access to employment after refugees status is granted, such as equal treatment in recognition of qualifications.¹⁰ The Reception Conditions Directive allows Member States to set a timeframe for access to work, up to a maximum of nine months after the registration of an asylum claim.

Until the end of 2019, asylum seekers in Greece had access to the labour market, including provision of services, from the moment they submitted their asylum application, provided that they had also received the relevant document attesting to the submission.¹¹ As of January 2020,¹² following an amendment to legislation, a six-month timeframe was set for asylum seekers before entering the labour market. This right is granted if no first instance decision has been taken by the Asylum Service within six months from the submission of the application, while it is automatically revoked with the issuance of a negative decision.

In the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion for the period 2021-2027,¹³ the European Commission recommends that Member States ensure the timely support of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in the integration process - by also enhancing their prospects for successful access to the labour market. The Action Plan proposes that the process begins before the asylum procedure is completed, especially in cases where granting international protection is likely.

Similarly, the Greek National Integration Strategy, which was put for public consultation in January 2022¹⁴ and which, although only partially, seems to adopt the recommendations of the above-mentioned EU Action Plan, refers to a number of essential aspirations and actions, which should be imple-

mented as soon as possible. These include, inter alia, the design of a skills-recognition programme and the linking of refugees with OAED (Greek Manpower Employment Organisation) and social security in Greece, the classification of skills into groups of high/semi-/low specialisation with the use of certified tools, and the professional training and apprenticeship, through 'second chance schools', vocational training institutes and educational programmes for the unemployed. Training seminars are to be offered for job search and technology familiarisation, networking with local cooperatives and women's associations, events for employers and prospective employees and incentives for business internships. Despite the above welcome proposals, there are serious shortcomings in the proposed Strategy, such as the incorrect statement that European funds are available only for asylum seekers.¹⁵

Importantly, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, recognising the importance of integration, has signed memoranda of understanding with the International Organisation for Migration (June 2021)¹⁶ and with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (October 2021),¹⁷ on supporting the efforts to integrate applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in Greece.

A | EU Funding Programmes for Integration

The new Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) provides for the "promotion and facilitation of the effective integration and social integration of third-country nationals",¹⁸ as a specific objective of the Fund, and requires Member States to allocate at least 15% of the resources of their national programme for this purpose. In addition, support to integration is provided by the EU from many other Funds (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund+, Erasmus+ , Invest EU) and the forthcoming Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme, for the design of guidance and practical tools, coordination, monitoring and supporting partnerships at local and national level.¹⁹ Finally, the integration of third-country nationals is also part of the Recovery Fund, a temporary European fund de-

ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

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signed to help EU Member States respond to the immediate economic and social damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁰

The effort and commitment of the Greece to strengthen the integration of beneficiaries of international protection in the labour market, through a vocational training programme for 14,580 beneficiaries, which will be implemented under the responsibility of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum with funds from the Recovery Fund, must be commended.²¹ In addition to vocational training, the sub-projects of this action concern language and intercultural education to promote the integration of the refugee population in the labour market,²² as well as interpretation services.²³ They also concern internships and work in companies with the aim of assisting trainees in gaining work experience in real working conditions, in order to facilitate integration into the labour market,²⁴ certification of skills for the qualifications of 25% of the participants (4,500 refugees) from certification bodies operating in Greece and/or internationally.²⁵ Finally, the actions also include evaluation of the programme with the establishment of competent committees and groups, by officials of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and, possibly, co-competent Ministries and/or other co-competent bodies.²⁶

“

I have been in Greece for four years and have worked as a cleaner in a hospital and in private homes, but I cannot get a permanent full-time job. I had to wait for a very long time to get my residence permit and then again for its renewal. I am ready to do any job, as long as it is legal.

Aida*, asylum seeker
from Eritrea

”

A | Situation on the field

The implementation of adequate integration programmes is of crucial importance, in order to improve the inclusion prospects of asylum seekers and refugees in Greek society. However, despite the significant number of people who have received international protection in recent years, there is a lack of national, state-run programmes implemented in conjunction with civil society organisations. On the contrary, apart from some initiatives at the level of Municipalities, and specifically through the Cities Network,²⁷ such as programmes run by the Municipality of Athens²⁸ and the Municipality of Heraklion, in Crete,²⁹ to a large extent, integration initiatives have been left to the limited capabilities of civil society organisations. The only exceptions are the HELIOS (*Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection*) programme, which was launched in the summer of 2019 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), funded by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum from January 2022,³⁰ and the Migrant Integration Centers (KEMs).³¹ We hope that the new EU financial framework will give rise to more, larger and more inclusive integration initiatives, such as the aforementioned programme to be funded by the Recovery Fund.

The HELIOS programme offers a range of support actions aimed at promoting the independent living of beneficiaries of international protection. These include, information sessions, work counseling, 6-month Greek courses and assistance to housing,

through financial aid lasting 6-12 months. Despite its importance, however, the programme can only provide support to people who have received international protection from 2018 onwards, who can only access the aforementioned aid if they have previously lived in state-run accommodation, while cases that do not meet the above criteria are examined, upon referral or direct contact with HELIOS staff. The programme has secured European funding until June 2022.³² Based on the eligibility criteria, a significant number of refugees, including those who may already have taken greater initiative for autonomous living on their own (e.g. finding their own place to stay while waiting for the decision on their asylum claim), cannot be supported by the programme, while at the same time, questions arise as to its smooth continuation. In turn, the risk of interruption of the only national-scale integration programme, highlights the need for stable and long-term investment by the State - with EU support – as well as the need for expansion of the services provided by HELIOS (e.g. Greek courses for more than 6 months), in order to enhance the prospects of independent living of refugees.

Moreover, although it is now completed, the ‘Curing the limbo’ project³³ has enhanced the integration experience of organisations with a number of good practices. This European pilot project was implemented by the Municipality of Athens with the aim of dynamically integrating the beneficiaries of international protection into the urban fabric, through courses in Greek, English, creative expression and new technologies, access to affordable housing and professional counseling sessions according to their profile.³⁴



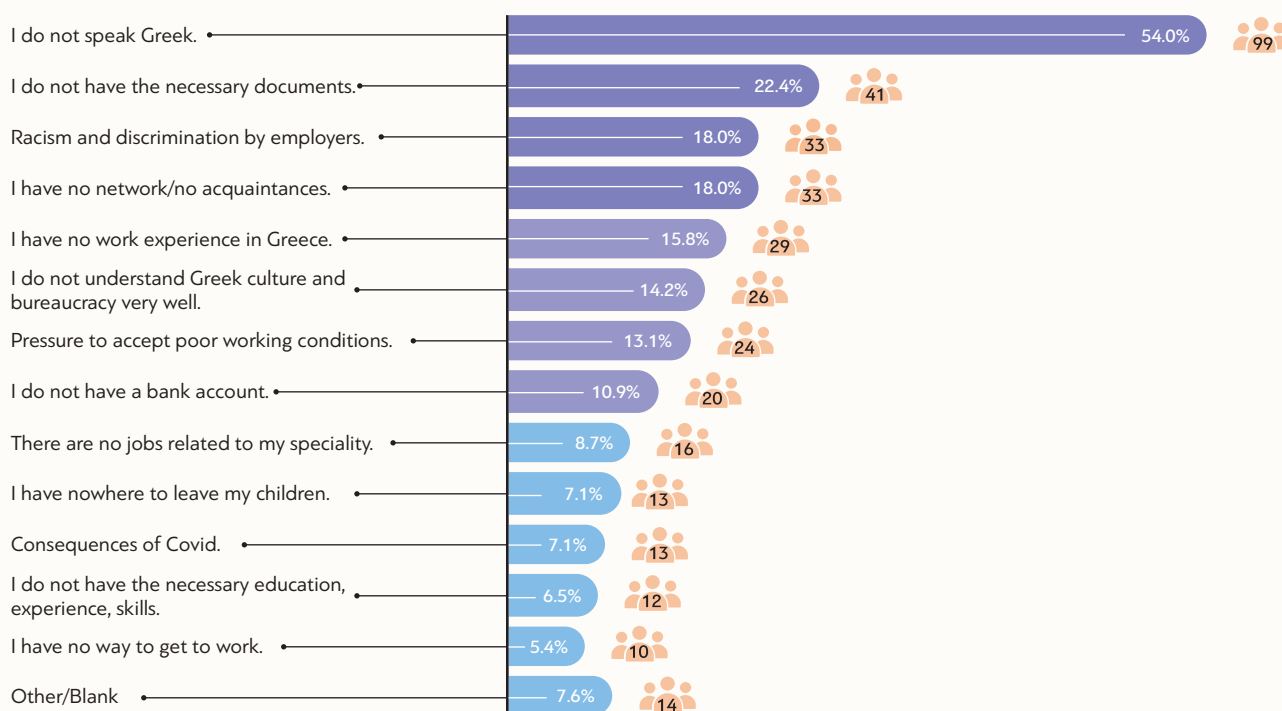
Photo: Stathis Mamalakis/IRC

Jobfairs with the participation of private companies from various sectors of the Greek economy, which wish to meet job candidates and explore recruitment opportunities, are a very good practice for refugees and asylum seekers accessing the labour market. A Jobfair was organised in April 2022 for the second consecutive year by the International Organization for Migration, under the HELIOS programme, funded by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and supervised by the competent Deputy Minister, Mrs. Sophia Voultepsi. In the framework of the “WELCOME” career week, 350 applicants and beneficiaries of international protection took part in interviews with representatives of the largest hotel groups of the country, with physical presence and 300 online, as Greek tourism is in search of employees to meet the needs of the sector.

B | Obstacles encountered by applicants and beneficiaries of international protection

Asylum seekers and refugees face the issue of high unemployment, which affects the entire population in Greece. Despite an apparent improvement in recent years, the unemployment rates in Greece remain high, compared to other EU Member States (13% in the third quarter of 2021 compared to the EU average of 6.2%³⁵), with the number of long-term unemployed amounting to 66.4% (409,000 people) of the total number of unemployed in the country.³⁶ As pointed out in 2018 by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, in addition to the administrative obstacles faced especially by refugees (e.g. issuance of documents), the economic conditions in the country are also a factor that increases the exclusion of third country nationals from the labour market and the risk of being forced into undeclared work, with serious consequences for the enjoyment of basic social rights.³⁷ In addition, there is a continuing alarming rise in racism and negative stereotypes in the country,³⁸ as

GRAPH 2. Barriers on accessing the labour market, for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, according to the responses to 183 questionnaires from the three organisations



misunderstandings due to cultural differences and habits can contribute to suspicion, and, often, hostility. Discrimination based on race, nationality, or ethnicity often becomes apparent even in job advertisements.³⁹

From a sample of 183 questionnaires created by Diotima, GCR and the IRC, the following obstacles are identified as the most important:

Lack of language skills

Based on the interviews conducted for this report, the main problem mentioned in finding work by refugees and asylum seekers but also by professionals working in the field of employability, is the lack of knowledge of Greek and/or English. Basic knowledge and use of Greek or, depending on the field (e.g. tourism) English, is a prerequisite for employment in any job in the Greek market, as there are few exceptions where Greek are not necessary. The gap of Greek language programmes for asylum seekers and refugees is significant.⁴⁰ The HELIOS programme is an exception, in the framework of which the beneficiaries are obliged to attend the integration courses, which include 280 hours of Greek language. Additionally, the Greek and English language courses as well as the computer courses

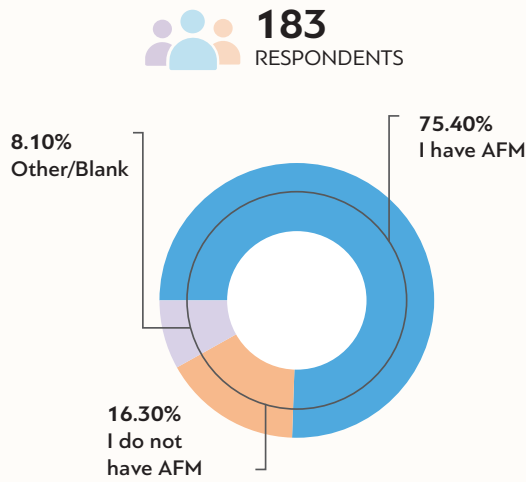
provided free of charge by non-governmental organisations are not sufficient to cover all needs, while there is a lack of access to sponsored or free workshops by the Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), according to the social service of the Greek Council for Refugees.

Lack of necessary documents

According to IOM,⁴¹ in December 2021, out of a total of 15,793 people living in the 25 reception facilities in mainland Greece, less than half of the adults (47.47%) had AFM, while only 9.97% of the residents over 15 years had an unemployment card from OAED. According to the data of the HELIOS programme,⁴² in a total of 18,981 sessions on integration, 40.76% of all refugee participants requested assistance in administrative procedures and 19.02% in daily difficulties. According to the survey of our three organisations, out of a total of 183 participants, 138 have issued AFM, while 30 have not.

In theory, AFM is automatically issued with the acquisition of the asylum seeker card. If an asylum seeker moves to a different location, the tax office employees often request a special certificate from the Asylum Service attesting perma-

GRAPH 3. Percentages of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection that have AFM, based on the 183 questionnaires of the three organisations



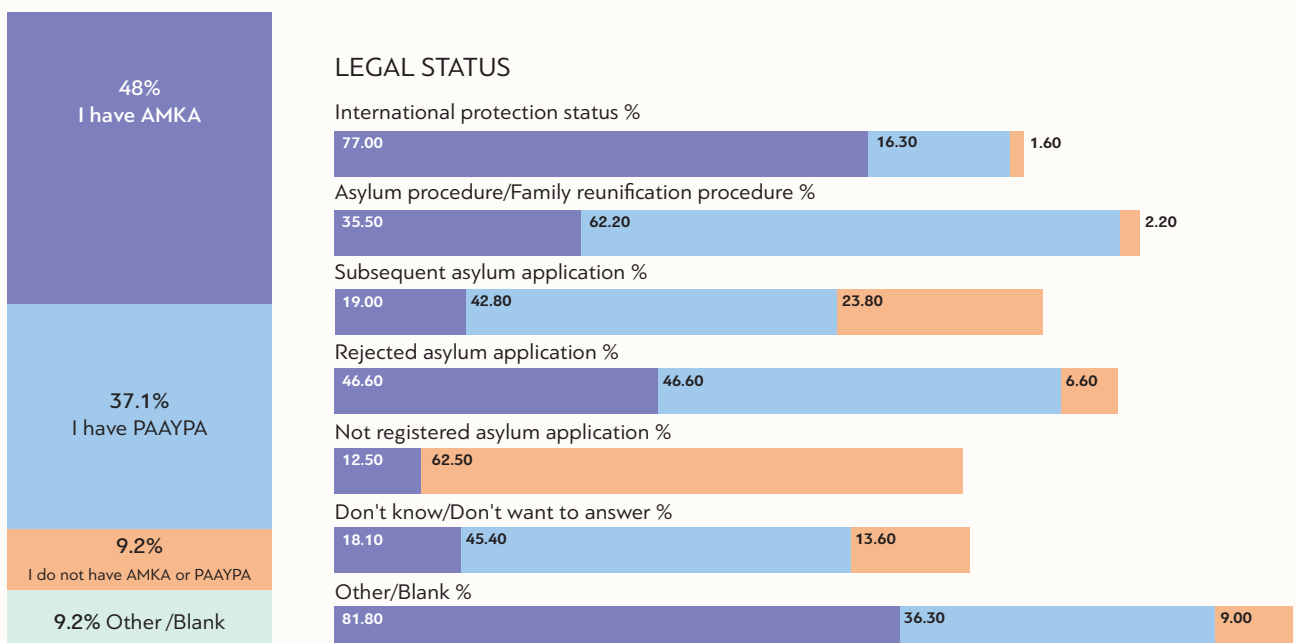
ment residence, as well as a certificate from an employer that they will employ the applicant.⁴³ According to data from the Greek Council for Refugees, there are shortcomings in the use of the online codes of the electronic application of the tax office (Taxisnet), and in modifying data such as place of residence when it concerns refugees, forcing people to visit tax offices in person.

A similar problem is created to access social security and, in particular, the acquisition of a social security number, which is a prerequisite for employment. Out of a total of 61 beneficiaries of international protection who participated in our survey, 47 have AMKA, 10 have PAAYPA, 3 have not issued any of the two and one person did not answer. Out of a total of 66 asylum seekers, 20 have AMKA, 37 have PAAYPA, 6 have not issued any of the two and 3 did not wish to answer.

Upon receipt of the asylum seeker card, applicants for international protection receive the Temporary Insurance and Health Care Number (PAAYPA). According to the law,⁴⁴ PAAYPA is registered on the social security e-government service (IDIKA), which is interconnected with the online employment platform, ERGANI, where employers are required to notify the hiring, termination and declaration of employment terms. Both these online platforms are informed of the existence -or not- of PAAYPA for each asylum seeker. However, in practice, the ERGANI platform does not recognise PAAYPA. Consequently, access to the labour market is possible for asylum seekers only if they physically present themselves to a tax office with a certificate of employ-

GRAPH 4. Percentages of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection that have issued AMKA or PAAYPA, based on the 183 questionnaires of the three organisations

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RESPONDENTS



ment, issued by the prospective employer, so that their recruitment can progress. This requires knowledge of the process by the employer and the applicant.⁴⁵ In reality, according to IRC programme experience, the procedure can be even more complicated.

The asylum system often forces asylum seekers to travel repeatedly between different parts of the country (for example, if they have applied in one area but now live and work in another) in order to complete procedures. This travel entails considerable costs, and often to the detriment of annual leave if people work.

A corresponding burden is created by the process of issuing and, in particular, of renewing legal documents. To start with, there are challenges with the certificates of application for a residence permit, which as mentioned in a previous project report,⁴⁶ do not meet the requirements for refugees to access social rights, such employment. Another challenge is that the system for monitoring the process of the issuance and renewal of documents is extremely difficult to use, as it does not have an automatic search option, while technologically illiterate people have difficulty using it. As a result, people are often unable to be informed on time about the date on which they will have to retrieve their residence permits from the competent asylum office and miss the relevant appointments. Moreover, in cases where refugees may have had to change their place of residence after submitting the necessary documents for the issuance/renewal of their residence permit, and the document has already been issued, there is a difficulty receiving it, as refugees often need to return to the place where they had originally submitted the documents. Improved information flow among the co-competent services could potentially resolve this issue, making it easier to obtain legal documents from the nearest office or branch of the asylum office or, if not available, the nearest police 'Foreigners' Division' section.

Absence of a social network

Asylum seekers and refugees often do not have a social network that can assist them in connecting with potential employers and/or facilitate their understanding of job search methods and tools.

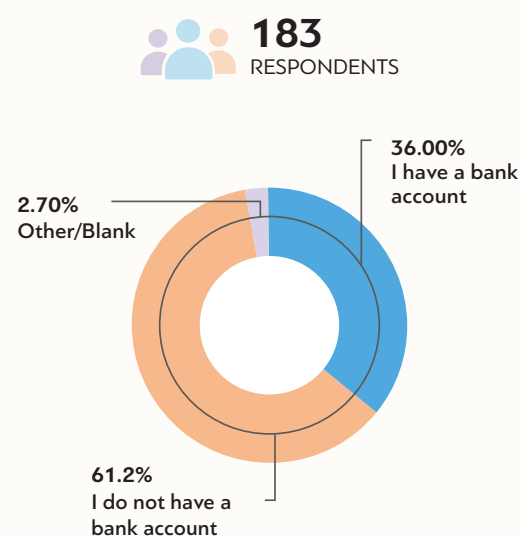
In addition to being in a new country, where they have to start their lives from the beginning, their stay in often secluded camps further hinders the opportunity to connect with and meet local communities.

Difficulty in opening a bank account

Another necessary step for labour market integration is the opening of a bank account⁴⁷ in Greece, for salary payment. However, it has been observed that bank employees often refuse to open a payroll account and quite often ask for a national passport as a certificate of identification,⁴⁸ possibly unaware that applicants for international protection are required to submit it to the Asylum Service. Once their refugee status is established, they cannot recover their old passport and they are not entitled to a new one. In the absence of a national passport, upon recognition of their status, refugees should be able to show, in addition to their residence permit, the travel document issued by the Greek State. However, this is often not accepted by banks.

Out of the total of 183 participants in the survey, only 66 have a bank account.

GRAPH 5. Percentages of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection with or without a bank account, based on the 183 questionnaires of the three organisations



Inability to prove and recognise existing education & training qualifications

Another obstacle to labour market integration, is the inability to prove the skills and qualifications that people have before arriving in Greece. Often, due to the circumstances that force refugees to leave their homes, they are unable to have all their documents with them, including those proving their education and/or professional skills. At the same time, they face difficulties in obtaining copies of these documents in Greece, although there is a European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR),⁴⁹ which could be used for the recognition of studies from third countries outside the EU.⁵⁰ In addition, there is no training certification system such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), a degree recognition mechanism, without the submission of documents from the country of origin, which most often cannot be requested by refugees, due to persecution.

It is difficult to prove the technical skills of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection where certification is required, in professions such as electrician, engineer, etc. For such professions, applicants and beneficiaries of international protection either need to have a diploma of a corresponding school and have it recognised in Greece as equivalent or participate in examinations addressed to vocational training institute (IEK) graduates, examinations that are conducted in Greek and do not have a fixed frequency.

The barriers described prevent applicants and beneficiaries of international protection from having access to employment, to a position with improved conditions, or even to movement from one job sector to another.

Other significant obstacles mentioned by the people who participated in this research include the lack of work experience in Greece, the difficulty in understanding the Greek culture and bureaucracy, as well as racism or discrimination by employers.

C | Obstacles encountered by employers in recruiting applicants and beneficiaries of international protection

It is important that the employers' side in the recruitment process for asylum seekers and refugees is presented. According to a recent survey of companies' attitudes towards the employment of refugees/immigrants,⁵¹ there is a perception of unstable residence of the refugee population, whereby, the possibility of leaving Greece and relocating elsewhere is commonplace. This fact makes 66% of the companies to a reluctance to hire refugees. However, a major deterrent is the difficulty of verifying legal documents for 73% of businesses, and the need for the involvement of the employer in supporting applicants and refugees to receive AFM, AMKA or to open a bank account. Seven out of ten companies consider the legality verification process as an obstacle.⁵²

This situation discourages employers who wish to hire asylum seekers and refugees, given that if they hire people without all the necessary supporting documents, they risk receiving sanctions such as fines, partial or full exclusion from public benefits, aid or subsidies, including nationally-managed EU funds, exclusion from all public procurement, or the closure of the company's premises.⁵³

D | The particular challenges faced by refugee and asylum-seeking women

Refugee and asylum-seeking women face a number of additional barriers in the labour market. The main ones are the difficulty of advancing to positions of responsibility and the gender division of professions into "male" and "female", with unequal pay and greater precariousness for the latter. At the same time, refugee and asylum-seeking women find it difficult to cope with professional and family obligations, as they cannot easily arrange for the care of their children without a family or social circle in Greece. Finally, there is a greater risk of social exclusion and poverty in groups of women at increased vulnerability, such as single parents, the long-term unemployed, and survivors of gender-based violence.⁵⁴

The gender gap in the EU refugee population is significant: only 45% of refugee women were employed, compared to 62% male refugees, even before the unprecedented arrivals of 2015.⁵⁵

Refugee women face consistently lower employment rates than their male counterparts and particularly miss out on the rapid increase in employment that men experience in the first years after their arrival in the host country.⁵⁶ According to studies, refugee women are often excluded from the job market from the reception stage.⁵⁷ Most measures aim at the integration of refugees living in formal government structures and receiving financial support, where the man is considered as the reference of the family and the person who receives support, such as financial assistance.⁵⁸

The prevailing patterns of gender roles and norms, with women inside and men outside the home, also play an important role in the refugee population. Some couples, even before leaving the country of origin, often adopt patriarchal norms, which are destabilised in conditions of displacement.⁵⁹ According to these norms, women and girls are not involved in deciding whether to go to school, whether to relocate, etc.⁶⁰

Motherhood is another important factor that makes the experiences of refugee women qualitatively different from those of men, in terms of finding and retaining work. Women shoulder family responsibilities both in cases where they live with the spouse/father of the children, and in cases where they are a single-parent family. It is extremely difficult for a woman, in a foreign country, to be able to trust her children to someone, to be able to look for a job, to work, to learn Greek, without having a support network. It is also common for women to have a lower level of education, less or no previous professional experience, conditions that make access to the Greek labour market even more difficult. As a result, they seek temporary job opportunities, for their daily survival, and do not have the chance to develop their skills or training in a field that interests them. Importantly, being excluded from the labour market increases the risk of being exposed to exploitation.

It is important to note that women with increased vulnerabilities, such as survivors of gender-based violence, face much greater challenges. In the EU, one



Photo: Stathis Mamelakis/IRC

During the WELCOME career week interviews, Bart van Capellen, chef in charge of a restaurant in Antiparos, said "I want to hire refugees for the summer season, not only to support them financially, but because I am sure I will learn a lot from them."

in eight women has been financially abused by her husband/partner. The exercise of economic violence, recognised as a form of gender-based violence by the Istanbul Convention,⁶¹ takes place on its own or in combination with other forms of violence. The abuser forces the woman's financial dependence on himself and undermines any attempt of independence. A survivor cannot escape an abusive relationship if she is not financially self-sufficient and conversely a survivor cannot become financially autonomous while still in conditions or under threat of gender-based violence.⁶² In the refugee population, inactivity, male underemployment, and the destabilisation of dominant patriarchal standards, often create new tensions between women and men. Financial resources and programmes implemented with the aim of empowering displaced women, have sometimes had negative consequences. These consequences include, inter alia, a corresponding reduction in financial participation and mobility of spouses/partners.⁶³

In this context, an entire "safety net" is being built for survivors through programmes provided, designed in the light of *the urgent need for effective gender mainstreaming in all immigrant and refugee policies and programs, with an emphasis on risks of gender-based violence.*⁶⁴ These programmes consist of: empowerment seminars, skills development, learning the language of the host country, creating solidarity bonds and information on their rights in the light of a holistic approach.⁶⁵ A good example is the programme "Gender-Based Violence Prevention & Response"⁶⁶ and its activities, such as the

CONCLUSIONS 05

“Preparing ourselves for the labour market” by Diotima Center and the NGO NAOMI in 2019, which focused on skills development for refugee women, specifically tailored to their needs, where the women who participated had the opportunity to identify and work on their strengths and skills.

The participation of women in these programmes also works in the direction of their empowerment and intentional action. In the multilingual survival empowerment groups, supported by Diotima Center in 2019 and 2020, when participants were asked about the content of the workshop programme, they expressed the need to receive psychological support, in order to feel more empowered and regain their self-esteem and -at the same time- professional counseling, aiming to chart the first steps for their integration into Greek society.

Based on the questionnaires and the focus group discussions of this project, it appears that asylum seekers face more obstacles than refugees in labour market integration in Greece. Upon arrival in the country, without knowing the language or the specificities of the local labour market, without access to the necessary documents and without having a network of contacts, asylum seekers are often left out of work.

In order to ensure improved access to employment, based on their general experience and labour market integration programming, the three partner organisations of this project, make the following recommendations.

12

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In Afghanistan, I did not work, I have not finished school. My family did not allow me to leave the house. Now that I am in Greece, I would like to work. It would be easier if my Greek was better. Also, it would be easier if I could start work at 9 in the morning, when my children are at school, because I don't have anyone to take care of them.

Farzana*, refugee from Afghanistan

”

RECOMMENDATIONS



A | The Ministry of Migration and Asylum, in cooperation with other Ministries and competent bodies, should:

- Introduce general and professional Greek language courses from the reception stage.
- Create integration programmes at the reception stage, such as providing interpretation for access to services, psycho-social support, digital skills and cultural orientation courses for asylum seekers.
- Follow a more individualised approach to integration, based on the principle of equal opportunities, paying attention to the needs and particular challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees.
- Utilise the European funding programmes for the integration of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in Greek society, to their fullest.
- Adopt existing tools for the recognition of certifications, diplomas, vocational training and professional experience before arrival in Greece, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.
- Support applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, through special programmes for the acquisition of skills, qualifications, and vocational guidance.
- Evaluate national policies to achieve gender equality and enhance financial opportunities for beneficiaries of international protection in consultation with refugees themselves, civil society organisations and businesses.
- Link national integration support programmes with the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion for the strengthening of collaborations with municipalities, regions and other stakeholders, the improvement of integration programmes and the support of the active participation of refugee communities.
- Adopt an action plan with specific objectives and indicators for the implementation of the National Integration Strategy, as well as annual progress reports.

B | The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs should:

- Ensure the connection of the temporary insurance and health care number (PAAYPA) with the ERGANI online employment system, so that asylum seekers can have unhindered access to employment.
- Pursue the mobilisation of the private sector, by providing incentives for the recruitment of asylum seekers and refugees.
- Evaluate and commend employers who choose diversity of their workforce.
- Assist in the development of skills of staff in the framework of OAED, the Manpower Employment Organisation, in order to better respond to the cultural and linguistic needs of the refugee population.
- Ensure the unhindered access of the beneficiaries of international protection to the system of social welfare benefits, the same way it applies to the Greek population.

C | The Asylum Service should:

- Indicate the expiration date of residence permits and display a unique number (instead of a simple protocol number), as well as a photo in the certificate of application for renewal of residence permits, so that access to the ERGANI online employment platform is possible.
- Introduce the wording “Right to Access the Labour Market” in the application form of international protection, according to art. 53 of L. 4636/2019.
- Inform asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection about labour rights, the labour market, insurance conditions, safety at work and the existence of institutions that support workers in the event of a breach of employment provisions, through a multilingual campaign, from the moment of their arrival in Greece.
- Provide the forms required by the administrative services but also the electronic services such as the renewal of residence permits in the languages used by asylum seekers and refugees, namely English, French, Farsi, Arabic, Urdu and as appropriate.

D | The Greek State, in cooperation with banks should:

- Eliminate the requirement to deposit a financial guarantee - at least in cases where people do not have sufficient resources.
- Guarantee the right to open a bank account, with a detailed description of the necessary supporting documents for transactions for asylum seekers and refugees on the banks' websites and push for the acceptance of employers' certificates of employment.
- Establish training for their employees, in order to be aware of the provisions and documents necessary concerning applicants and beneficiaries of international protection.

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