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AN ABUNDANCE OF UNLEASHED POTENTIAL

A study on labor market integration of
refugee youth in Greece



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FOREWORD

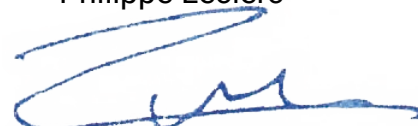
The occurrence of refugees arriving in Greece has been the subject of world news headlines since the start of the humanitarian crises in Syria and other countries of the Middle East. Behind these headlines is an increasing need for integration of refugees into the Greek society and labor market as well as the question of whether these systems have the capacity to effectively include them. As the Greek economy emerged from a decade-long crisis, COVID-19 drastically impacted the situation for all involved players. Even before its emergence, many people at the bottom of the social pyramid were left without employment and hope. Tragically, many talented and capable youth who fled from war and hardship in their countries of origin are caught in the same struggles. Although they aspire to build a better future, their path into employment are hindered by bureaucratic obstacles and lacking opportunities in the Greek economy.

In this situation and while integration interventions are still being designed by governmental authorities, the work of NGOs at the intersection of refugees, vocational training and labor market access is indispensable. In Greece, civil society organizations are providing the refugees with education, training and a perspective in their new environment. These organizations relentlessly work towards preparing their beneficiaries for the Greek labor market by providing skill development in areas such as tailoring, woodwork, agriculture, gastronomy, design, and technology.

Since 2014, Faros has been one of those organizations. Over the course of the past six years, the organization has been a vital part of Athens' humanitarian community, not only through its shelter, but also its education and training program, The Horizon Center, which UNHCR has been supporting since the beginning of 2018.

Given the complexities of the Greek regulations and labor market, we hope that this report stands as an important milestone in the journey of refugees in Greece, empowering NGOs to help their beneficiaries to gain not only a job, but most importantly to gain purpose and acceptance and to make a positive impact in the host society.

Philippe Leclerc



Representative

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GLOSSARY

AFM	Tax number
AMKA	Social Security Number
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EQPR	European Qualification Passport
EOPPEP	National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance
EPAL	Upper Secondary VET School
EPAS	Dual System Professional School
ESF	European Social Fund
KEP	Citizen Service Center
HELIOS	Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection
HQF	Hellenic Qualifications Framework
IEK	Institute of Vocational Training
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIS	National Integration Strategy
NADINE	Digital Integrated System for The Social Support Of Migrants And Refugees
OAED	Manpower Employment Organization
OP	Occupational profile
TCN	Third-country national
PAYYPA	Provisional Insurance and Healthcare Number
SoCE	Social Cooperative Enterprises
VET	Vocational education and training



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was commissioned by Faros as part of its educational and vocational training program, Horizon Center. The program was created in collaboration with MIT D-Lab at Massachusetts Institute of Technology to offer individualized support and innovative training to unaccompanied minors and refugee youth.

The goal of this study was to inform the efforts of Faros and other NGOs working to integrate refugee youth into the Greek labor market. It followed the research question: “How can NGOs improve the labor market integration of their beneficiaries?” and laid specific focus on Vocational Education and Training programs aiding in this endeavor. For the purpose of this study, there was a focus on refugee youth aged 15-24 years old, both male and female.

The study relied on four data streams: Desk research; 27 open-ended, qualitative interviews with governmental stakeholders, NGOs, multinational organizations and corporations; a survey with 26 refugees within Faros Horizon Center; and field work in the informal economy in Athens.

This study is intended to be an initial step towards understanding the complex issues of labor market integration for refugees in Greece. It provides insight into the current labor market environment in Greece and the obstacles refugee youth face regarding their access to job opportunities, and recommendations on how to further advance opportunities for this group.

The main findings of this study are:

- Refugees in Greece have full access to the labor market once they are officially recognized but need help to overcome systemic barriers in the administrative system.
- Refugees usually work in low-wage occupations in hospitality and tourism, sales and services, handcraft and technicians. Entering employment is difficult due to the economic situation, a preference for formal education and lacking possibilities for training-on-the-job.
- For refugee youth, the VET programs EPAS and EPAL provide good opportunities, but accessing and completing them is difficult.
- Possibilities for self-employment of refugees are low due to high regulatory barriers in Greece. The special structure of Social Cooperative Enterprises focused on the integration of refugees (Integration SoCEs) can aid refugee self-employment and is already used by NGOs.
- Refugees are drawn to informal work for several reasons, where they remain excluded from labor rights and integration to society).
- Employers see several barriers to the employment of refugees. Language is the most important one. Refugees are similarly recognizing barriers, but are able to retain their goals and awareness of their talents nevertheless.



- The impact of COVID-19, including two national lockdowns, was especially hard on women. For NGOs, contact restrictions meant a reduced capacity to aid beneficiaries, but overall they judged themselves as empowered to deal with the consequences of COVID-19.

Based on these findings, NGOs working towards the labor market integration of refugees may consider the following 8 key points:

- (1) Greek language skills are the most crucial asset for beneficiaries' labor market access.
- (2) Providing high-skilled employment, immediate low-skilled employment and psychosocial support are equally valid, but sometimes conflicting goals - NGOs need to find a balance between them.
- (3) Individual job counseling is invaluable to increase employment.
- (4) Providing high-skilled employment should be considered a long-term project.
- (5) All training or education provided should take place in, or close to, the formal Greek education system.
- (6) Networking with other NGOs will likely result in benefits for beneficiaries.
- (7) It is possible for NGOs to function as employers for their beneficiaries themselves, with special regulation on social businesses potentially applying.
- (8) Women have specific support needs, which NGOs should be acknowledging in their programming.

With these findings in mind, we recommend further qualitative and quantitative research into this topic, including on the long-term effects of COVID-19 on the economy, in order to inform actors working in the area of refugee integration. In unleashing the potential of refugee youth, there are an abundance of benefits, not only for refugees themselves to access job opportunities, but also for companies, and society as a whole.



1 INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Greece is home to 122,000 refugees and asylum seekers (referred to hereafter as refugees, unless an explicit distinction is necessary for analytical purposes). Many of them are young, talented and resourceful, and thus a potentially good addition to the Greek labor force. However, they find it difficult to access the labor market, and Greek regulations do not make it easier on them. Many NGOs are working in this dynamic to improve their labor market access, providing training and education. But how should they best allocate their resources? What challenges are arising for their beneficiaries? What are the must-do's for providing refugees with labor market access? With this study, we aim to inform the efforts of NGOs working on the labor market integration of refugee youth in Greece.

This study is part of the educational and vocational training program of the Faros Horizon Center. The Horizon Program was created in collaboration with MIT D-Lab at Massachusetts Institute of Technology to offer individualized support and innovative training to unaccompanied minors and refugee youth.

The structure of the report is as follows: First, we outline the legal and political environment of Greece concerning the labor market integration of refugee youth, describing the legal basics, the overall political strategy and systemic barriers to employment. Secondly, we describe the relevant dynamics within the labor market, listing the most relevant industries, barriers, deep-diving into VET programs, reflecting on the possibilities of entrepreneurship and the dynamics of informal work, and highlighting the perspective of employers and beneficiaries themselves. Thirdly, we describe best practices for NGOs working in labor market integration. The last chapter summarizes the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and NGOs.

2 METHOD AND SCOPE

This study followed the research question: How can NGOs improve the labor market integration of their beneficiaries? It laid specific focus on Vocational Education and Training and apprenticeship programs aiding in this endeavor. For the purpose of this study, there was a focus on beneficiaries aged 15-24 years old, both male and female. However, the findings are applicable to other age groups as well. The geographical scope of this study was Athens, while many of the findings extend across city boundaries and are applicable on a national level.

This study relies on four data streams: Desk research; open-ended, qualitative interviews; a survey with refugees; and field work.

In our desk research, we conducted a review of literature by third parties and existing census data. Thus, in addition to first-hand information, this study provides a synthesis of existing research from various sources.

27 qualitative interviews were conducted with governmental stakeholders, NGOs, multinational organizations and corporations. All interviews were open-ended and participatory, focused on reflecting interviewees' individual perspectives. Written questionnaires were sent to governmental institutions to validate the information collected.

A survey was conducted with 26 refugees at Faros Horizon Center. All of the respondents were participants in the Horizon Center's classes. The low sample size of 26 was the maximum number possible due to limitations of COVID-19. The survey was built on quantitative questions but included open-ended ones, where applicable, to give room for respondents' personal experiences.

Field work and observations were conducted in central Athens, mainly to validate input concerning the situation of refugees working in the informal economy.

3 FINDINGS

3.1 The Political and Legal Environment

3.1.1 Legislation on Labor Market Access

Officially recognized refugees in Greece enjoy the same labor rights as Greek nationals.¹ The most important requirement for employment is a social security number (AMKA), to which refugees are entitled upon their recognition. AMKA provision can be requested through Citizen Service Centers (KEP).² Refugee youth are entitled to work under certain conditions from the age of 15 onwards.³

However, getting officially recognized as a refugee can be an extensive process, taking on average 10-11 months.⁴ Since the EU requires its member states to provide labor market access to asylum seekers no longer than 9 months after their first registration⁵, asylum seekers in Greece gain working rights 6 months after being registered. A Provisional Insurance and Healthcare Number (PAYPA), provided upon registering in Greece, replaces AMKA until asylum seekers are officially recognized as refugees. One difference between refugees (AMKA-holders) and asylum seekers (PAYPA-holders) is that the latter do not have the right to start their own business.^{6,7}

3.2.1 The National Integration Strategy: A brief assessment

Informants in our study frequently expressed a lack of understanding for the unstructured, fragmented approach to and lacking orientation provided by the Greek government on the issue of refugee integration. Based on our research, this impression is due to the structure of the Greek administration as well as the lacking holistic strategy on the topic.

The Greek governmental structure leaves municipalities, such as Athens, with low administrative power on refugee issues.⁸ The major responsibility for migrants' integration lies with the central government in Athens.⁹ This leads to slow-moving processes,

¹The Hellenic Republic (2016). Law 4375/2016: Organization and operation of the Asylum Service, Appeals Authority, Reception and Identification Service and other provisions. <https://www.synigoros.gr/?i=for-eigner.el.politikoi-nomoi.359552>

²www.refugees.info (2020). Getting a Social Security Number. Accessed on 26.07.2020. <https://www.refugees.info/greece/working-in-greece--greece/getting-a-social-security-number-amka/?language=en>

³blog.refugee.info (2020). Top tips on getting a job in Greece. <https://blog.refugee.info/getting-a-job-in-greece/#:~:text=If%20you%20are%20under%2015,can%20work%20under%20specific%20circumstances.>

⁴Asylum Information Database AIDA, 2018. Asylum Information Database Greece Country Report June 2020. <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece>

⁵European Parliament, Council of Europe. (2013). Directive 2013/33/EU, Article 15. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013L0033>

⁶The Hellenic Republic. (2019). Law 4636/2019 on international protection and other provisions. <https://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/resources/internationalprotectionact.pdf>

⁷The Hellenic Republic. (2020). Common Ministerial Decision 717.2020: Arrangements for ensuring the access of applicants for international protection to health services, health care, social security and the labor market. https://static.help.unhcr.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/04/01195618/JMD-on-PAAYPA-issuance.pdf#_ga=2.53151147.2025672945.1595604892-2017989223.1588846163

⁸Greece allocates only 7% of governmental funds on municipal level, compared to an OECD average of 40%. See: OECD. (2017). Subnational Governments in OECD Countries: Key Data 2017. <http://www.oecd.org/regional/>

⁹OECD. (2018). Working Together For Local Integration Of Migrants And Refugees In Athens. <https://www.oecd.org/greece/working-together-for-local-integration-of-migrants-and-refugees-in-athens-9789264304116-en.htm>

potentially increasing the public impression of lacking structure and willingness. However, it is worth noting that the Kallikratis reform of 2010 made an effort to decentralize government and provide more responsibility to municipalities, including on the integration of vulnerable groups such as refugees.¹⁰ In this new setting, municipalities have implemented local, targeted projects such as the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee Issues (ACCMR).¹¹

While legislation on immigration is codified since 2014¹², our research indicates that Greece does not have a standardized integration framework for refugees with clear goals and success metrics for all involved actors, from refugees to NGOs and employers.¹³ The government created Greece's first-ever National Integration Strategy (NIS) for Third-Country Nationals¹⁴ (TCNs) in 2013, and updated it in 2019 after the increased influx of refugees in 2015 and 2016.

The NIS does not detail legally binding steps. Nevertheless, it states that the integration of TCNs in Greece is a benefit for migrants and their families, the host society, and migrants' countries of origin, and affirms that integration of migrants remains a key concern of the Greek government.¹⁵

To date, the NIS' overall impact has not been officially assessed.¹⁶ In the following, we will briefly review its approach to labor market integration.

The NIS outlines two policy measures and subsequent actions on labor market integration¹⁷:

Measure 1: Recording and recognition of skills. Associated actions:

- (1) Mapping of educational background, work experience and professional profile
- (2) Creation of an information system to process skills and connect TCNs with relevant employment services

Measure 2: Facilitating access to the labor market. Associated actions:

- (1) Promoting employment in the agricultural economy
- (2) A mentoring, training and apprenticeship/internship program
- (3) Promotion of micro-entrepreneurship/startup businesses

Our research raised questions on whether the strategy might lead to the desired results and prompted questions on the legal basis for some measures.

For example, the recognition of existing skills and work experience is a major barrier to labor market integration of refugees. However, the dependence on formality is rooted in the Greek culture and its education system, especially through the Hellenic Qualifications

¹⁰OECD. (2010). Decentralization in Greece. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264304116-9-en.pdf?expires=1595530443&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=71847A361D0B-356F8EFD96D0B5773C4>

¹¹See more at www.accmr.gr

¹²The Hellenic Republic. (2014). Law 4251/2014: Code of Immigration and Social Integration.

¹³A good example of such a framework is Germany's 2016 law on integration with the premise "Demand and Support", see more at <http://www.buzer.de/gesetz/12155/index.htm>

¹⁴Third-country nationals is the legal term referring to all non-EU nationals in Greece, including migrants and refugees. There are large differences in the situation of different third-country nationals, which unfortunately are not further reflected through the term.

¹⁵Ministry of the Interior, General Secretariat for Population and Social Cohesion. (2019). National Strategy on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. Εθνική Στρατηγική για την Ένταξη

¹⁶European Commission. (2020). Governance of Migrant Integration in Greece. Accessed on 24.07.2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/governance/greece>

¹⁷Ministry of the Interior, General Secretariat for Population and Social Cohesion. (2019). National Strategy on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. Chapter 3.6.4, Page 62. Εθνική Στρατηγική για την Ένταξη

Framework (HQF) and official Occupational Profiles (OPs). It remains unclear how foreign education by refugees can be transferred into this formal system (see chapter 3.2.2.2).

Secondly, traineeships and internships are not specifically regulated in Greece, but are subject to the general rules of the labor law. This means interns have to be provided with health insurance and are entitled to the minimum wage.¹⁸ Exceptions are only granted for internships within certain educational programs, such as apprenticeships or university studies. For the majority of refugees, access to these programs proves difficult (see chapter 3.2.2.3).

Similarly, entrepreneurship in Greece is subject to high regulation and requires a distinct skillset. Given these hurdles to entrepreneurship especially for refugees, our research does not confirm the high expectations related to this option (see chapter 3.2.4).

3.1.3 Beyond the Legislation: Administrative Barriers

While the legal situation of refugees in the labor market is well-defined, obtaining necessary documents such as AMKA, tax number (AFM) or health insurance remains a barrier.^{19, 20} As experts pointed out, this is mainly due to the complexity of the system, which “makes it almost unmaneuverable for refugees.” A main issue is the simple lack of information on which documents are required and where refugees can request them.

Secondly, the design of document application processes is often not refugee-friendly, meaning that refugees are unable to complete legal necessities without assistance.²¹ This can be due to language barriers: For example, to get an AFM, refugees have to fill out two forms at the local tax office - both are available only in Greek.²²

Another barrier is lacking information of refugees’ entitlement to certain documents (e.g. AMKA or AFM) or even uncertainty about their employment rights: Up to 46% of refugees are unaware of or uncertain about their right to work.²³

Lastly, the interaction with employees at administrative offices often plays a role for refugees, with individual administrators occasionally refusing to issue legal documents to refugees. The reasons might again be lacking clarity on the officers’ side, amongst others: For example, a study found that two main reasons for tax officers to refuse the issuing of AFM to refugees was (1) their scepticism that refugee reception facilities can be considered a permanent residence and (2) the officer’s request of a written certification of the Asylum Service confirming that refugees have the right to work (a document that does not exist).²⁴ Our research confirmed similar issues with certain banks, where NGOs had repeatedly witnessed a refusal of administrators to provide accounts to refugees.

¹⁸Erasmus+, Standardize best Practices about Internships. (2017). Regulations On Employment, Internships And Traineeships Insurance In Eu Countries – Appendix 1. Available at: <https://www.sprint-erasmus-plus.fr/content/o1-research-indicators-and-standards-quality-internships>

¹⁹European Migration Network. (2018). Labor Market Integration of Third-Country Nationals in Member States: Focussed Study 2018. www.emn.europa.eu

²⁰UNHCR. (2018). Inter-agency participatory assessment report. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/66441>

²¹UNHCR. (2014). UNHCR observations on the current asylum system in Greece. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/54cb3af34.html>

²²Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

²³Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

²⁴Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

3.1.4 Overcoming Administrative Barriers

To overcome these systemic barriers, counseling by Greek speakers is vital for refugees. Our research indicates that the hurdles refugees are facing can often be easily overcome by Greek-speaking officials at job counseling services. Job counselors (e.g. at ARSIS) report a high capacity to lower these barriers for refugees by explaining their rights and guiding their application process.

As one counselor explained: “If they are sent back to us from an officer who didn’t give them their AFM, we explain to them that it is their right and send them back to the office. And this works.” Counselors stress that their service does not mean that steps are taken for the beneficiaries - rather, it seems sufficient to educate and reassure beneficiaries of their rights, so they can take the necessary steps themselves. Additionally, the website [refugee.info](https://www.refugee.info/greece) is providing introductory information on various issues, including labor market access, to refugees.²⁵

In case job counseling services are not known to beneficiaries (e.g. self-accommodated individuals), they often resort to their own communities or paid brokers to finalize necessary documents.²⁶

3.1.5 Governmental Programs Targeting Labor Market Integration

At the time of this study, three national programs targeted the labor market integration of refugees: The Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection (HELIOS), the Digital Integrated System For The Social Support Of Migrants And Refugees (NADINE) and the Vocational Education and Training (VET) program implemented by the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED, the Greek Public Employment Service). NADINE and HELIOS are EU-funded and managed by non-governmental actors (e.g. IOM and Caritas).

The HELIOS program seeks the integration of beneficiaries by promoting independent living. Along with language, culture and employability courses, accommodation support and host-community sensitization, HELIOS provides individual employability and job readiness support through job counseling, access to job-related certifications and networking with private employers. HELIOS is currently running 18 Integration Learning Centers and is planning to open additional ones. The program currently benefits more than 12,000 refugees. It takes place from July 2019 to December 2020.²⁷

NADINE is an EU-wide program involving partners from 7 countries. Its goal is to create an adaptable online platform able to provide skill assessment, create individual training programs adapted to required skills in host countries, provide a digital companion to help refugees with administrative tasks and collect data for public administrators to better organize migration flows. It started in November 2018 and ends in October 2021.²⁸

The OAED pilot program on VET for beneficiaries of international protection aims to

²⁵<https://www.refugee.info/greece>

²⁶Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

²⁷IOM. (2020). Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection. <https://greece.iom.int/en/hellenic-integration-support-beneficiaries-international-protection-helios>

²⁸NADINE Project. (2020). Accessed on 27.07.2020. <https://nadine-project.eu/>

improve labor market integration of 1,000 refugees registered with OAED through language and culture training, personal skills mapping, personal counseling and VET. It aims to align with the needs of employers in specific vocational fields. Lastly, it aims to summarize beneficiaries' qualifications in an "individual electronic portfolio." It is estimated to begin in December 2020.²⁹

Few NGOs in our study were aware of these programs, including their possible benefits for beneficiaries in terms of labor market integration.

3.2 The Economic and Business Environment

3.2.1 Relevant Industries: Where do refugees work?

While Greek statistical authorities provide detailed labor market assessments, data on the employment of refugees is lacking since they are subsumed into the category of TCNs. Additionally, given the predominance of refugees working in informal settings, the information in official census data is often biased.³⁰

Based on our literature review and interviews, the industries most relevant for refugees' employment are: Agriculture, tourism, services (e.g. retail) and the restaurant industry. For women, employment in private care, domestic services and cleaning is regarded as relevant.³¹

These industries are considered "the most dynamic ones in the market", as an interviewee noted. They are characterized by precarity, low-status and low security, low wages and a low "upward mobility", i.e. the possibility to get promoted and ultimately build a career. Often, refugees are also driven into informal work (see chapter 3.2.5). This assessment is confirmed by a survey among refugees published by Caritas (Figure 1) – next to highlighting the industries in which refugees were employed, this survey also confirmed the high prevalence of informal work: 97% of respondents worked informally. Also, they declared low salaries, ranging from 163 to 260 EUR monthly.³² This is substantially lower than the Greek monthly minimum wage of 758.33 EUR.³³



Figure 1: Job categories of refugees (n = 98, Source: Own illustration adapted from Caritas³⁴)

²⁹Secretariat General of Migration Policy, Ministry of Migration & Asylum. (2020). Personal inquiry in July 2020. No official information on this program was available at the time of this study.

³⁰Official employment data in Greece is provided by Social Insurance Institution (EFKA, <https://www.efka.gov.gr/>) or the National Institute of Labor and Human Resources (EIEAD, <https://www.eiead.gr/>) - both of which only count the officially registered part of the employed population.

³¹European Migration Network. (2018). Labor Market Integration of Third-Country Nationals in Member States: Focussed Study 2018. www.emn.europa.eu

³²Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

³³Eurostat (2020). Monthly minimum wages. Accessed on 15th of November 2020. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/earn_mw_cur/default/table?lang=en

³⁴Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/>

Throughout our interviews, these dynamic occupations provide little upward mobility. Across all our interviewees, only one job counselor had witnessed a job promotion during an individual's career, when a highly qualified refugee was promoted from call center agent to manager.

In addition to the above-mentioned status quo, experts estimated several other fields as relevant to refugees' employment now and in the future. These sectors and occupations are listed in Table 1.

Sector	Occupations
Tourism	Tour guides, tour operators, travel agents, hotel management, attractions management, drivers
Food & Beverages	Food & beverage production, service and trade, restaurants/bars
Facility management & maintenance, construction	Reception and mailroom, landscaping, cleaning, pest control, security, waste management, technical services, energy management, health and safety, construction
Healthcare services	Domestic cleaning, babysitting and childcare, elderly care
Translation and languages	Translators, teachers
Creative industry (crafts)	Writers, artists, handicrafts artisans (sewing, embroidery, arts and crafts, weaving, pottery, glassblowers, metalsmith, etc.), musicians, designers, photographers, videographers
Creative industry (digital)	Marketing, social media, website and app design
ICT	App development, coding, website development
Logistics	Loading and unloading, transportation, low-skilled jobs
NGOs	Translation services

Table 1: Possible occupations of refugees by sector (Source: Caritas³⁵)

3.2.2 Why it's Hard to Find a Job: Barriers to Employment

When seeking employment, refugees are faced with unique barriers of the Greek labor market. The most important ones are (1) the overall economic situation and its impact on corporations, (2) the dependence of the labor market on formal education, (3) the unavailability of legal frameworks enabling internships and on-the-job training as entryways into the labor market and (4) the inability to fulfil necessary skills required by employers. Such barriers are less severe depending on the social status of a job, and aggravated when moving to high-skilled employment.

3.2.2.1 The economic situation and the role of Corporate Social Responsibility

Greece is one of the EU's economically weakest member states, with a high unemployment

uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf. Survey conducted in Athens. Respondents age: Between 18 and 45 years.

³⁵Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

rate especially amongst the youth. This economic downturn creates unfavorable conditions for refugees' employment: Some studies have found a "poor vs. poor" conflict arising, where 56% of the Greek population fears that refugees would take employment away from them and 37% believing that refugees are given too much support from the government.³⁶ In another study, 44% considered refugees a threat to Greece's security.³⁷ This lays out the playing field for initiatives on labor market integration, which, for the sake of "social cohesion and equality", have to take into account unemployment rates and a generally weak economy that affect both refugees and local population.³⁸ As a 2018 study stressed: "the Greek state is unable to secure [third-country nationals'] recruitment, as it is unable to secure a job for the average Greek citizen"³⁹ The country's economic situation thus also defines the "design and implementation of integration policies" through "lack of resources, staff and facilities."⁴⁰ Across our study, the difficult economic playing field for labor market integration was stressed as possibly the largest influencing factor.

Faced with high unemployment numbers amongst natives, Greek companies are unable to make large public commitments to hiring refugees.⁴¹ As several interviewees noted, corporate partners feel the urge to help refugees, but in the context of Greece, rarely enter public employment partnerships with NGOs. This is especially relevant for jobs that are less dynamic and precarious, and thereby also attractive to the native workforce. Thus, corporate social responsibility (CSR), a helpful instrument enabling the hiring of vulnerable groups, is rarely applicable in Greece. One interviewee noted: "CSR is a way to create and follow a narrative. And the narrative of integrating refugees does not help companies in their current situation."

However, there are also different perspectives: One study highlighted employers' willingness to hire refugees to improve their company's image, especially when they are trying to appeal to young professionals who often prefer philanthropic and international employers. Still, participating companies expressed the need to be supported and trained on how to build CSR skills and informed about the opportunity of improving their social image through employing refugees.⁴²

3.2.2.2 Why Formal Education is so Important

Formal education (i.e. education that leads to certifications by EOPPEP or the Ministry of Education) is valued very highly in Greek society and by Greek employers.^{43,44}

For most occupations, a definition of required skills and qualifications is available in the Hellenic Qualifications Framework (HQF), listing more than 600 formal qualifications. The HQF is managed by the Ministry of Education and the National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP). It includes all formal

³⁶ Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. Page 32. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

³⁷ OECD. (2018). Working Together For Local Integration Of Migrants And Refugees In Athens. Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Athens | en

³⁸ Ministry of Migration and Asylum. (2019). National Integration Strategy. Εθνική Στρατηγική για την Ένταξη

³⁹ European Migration Network. (2018). "Labor Market Integration of Third-Country Nationals in Member States: Focussed Study 2018". Page 32. www.emn.europa.eu

⁴⁰ European Migration Network. (2018). "Labor Market Integration of Third-Country Nationals in Member States: Focussed Study 2018". Page 50. www.emn.europa.eu

⁴¹ Partnerships with NGOs are not uncommon, however, and company logos appear publicly on selected NGOs' websites.

⁴² REST. (2017). Transnational research report: Barriers and best practice examples of labour market integration of refugees in Europe. https://rest-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/REST.transnational.research.report.final_.pdf

⁴³ Manoudi, A. (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Greece.

http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Greece.pdf

⁴⁴ REST. (2017). Transnational research report: Barriers and best practice examples of labour market integration of refugees in Europe. https://rest-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/REST.transnational.research.report.final_.pdf

educational profiles from university education to vocational training.⁴⁵

Similarly, it defines more than 202 occupational profiles (OPs), including their knowledge, skills and competences. Educational programs, for example in vocational education and training (VET), are designed to fulfil the exact requirements defined in the HQL. Officials of VET programs or universities are involved in designing the HQF definitions and OPs.

Standardization plays a major role in the value of formality. An education officially certified by EOPPEP signals to employers that the qualification corresponds to the specifications set in the OPs. Additionally, some OPs have been used as basis for licensing procedures for a number of occupations, defining the necessary knowledge and skills for someone licensed to work in that occupation (e.g. plumber or hairdresser).⁴⁶

Reaching the desired or required level of formalization is difficult for refugees. Specifically, they are left with two options: (1) certifying of their existing qualifications by the Greek state, or (2) accessing and completing a degree in the Greek formal education system.

Refugee qualification levels: *Despite differing public perceptions, 75% of refugees arriving in Greece have completed at least secondary school, 13% underwent VET, 18% have a graduate degree and 3 percent have a post-graduate qualification.*

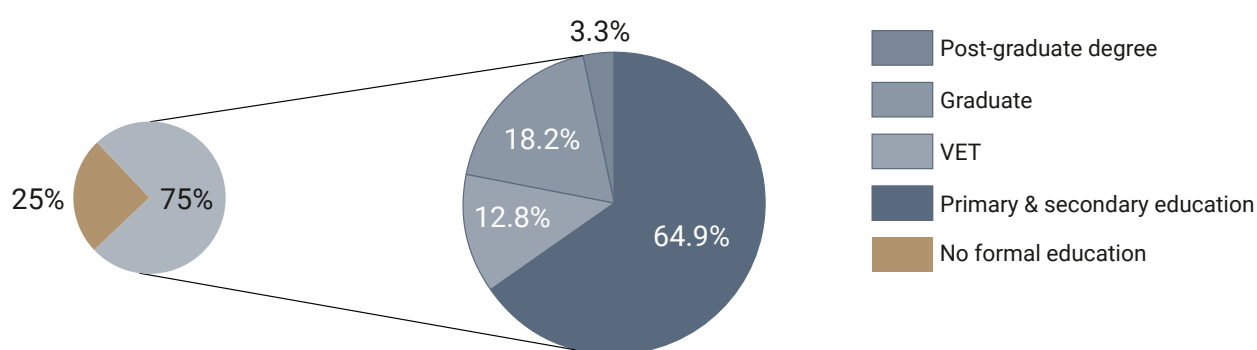


Figure 2 Education levels of refugees upon arrival (Source: Own Illustration, adapted from Caritas⁴⁷)

These two options can be reciprocally related, since access to formal education often requires approved certification in the first place.

Certifying existing qualifications: The certification of foreign diplomas in Greece is difficult due to high Greek standards to education, as well as the often missing or incomplete documentation of refugees' degrees. In a recent survey, only 19% of respondents with an education diploma from their home countries thought their diploma was valid in Greece (the remainder didn't know or knew it was invalid). The most prominent reason for an invalid degree was either that the degree did not comply with Greek standards or refugees were missing necessary documents from their home countries to prove the validity.⁴⁸ Regaining these formal documents from home countries is often impossible for refugees, since it would require them to make contact with their home country or its embassy. This would in turn undermine their refugee status because it "indicates that they are not fearing political persecution by home authorities", as an expert stated. Thus, in terms of certifying

⁴⁵The full register is accessible at: <https://proson.eoppep.gr/>

⁴⁶EOPPEP (2020). NQF & Qualifications Certification. Accessed on 26.07.2020. <https://www.eoppep.gr/index.php/en/qualifications-certification-en>

⁴⁷Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁴⁸Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

available degrees, refugees find themselves in a deadlock. However, our study highlighted some options for refugees to overcome this barrier:

1. Certifying existing skills through the European Qualification Passport (EQPR): The EQPR aims to provide quasi-formal certification of upper-secondary to higher education.⁴⁹
2. Certifying newly acquired as well as existing skills through micro-certifications. Micro-certifications exist for various skills. ECDL, for example, is offering certification of digital knowledge for c. 35 EUR.⁵⁰

Accessing formal education: Refugees face several barriers to formal education, such as lacking language skills and missing proof of required education. In our survey, 69% of respondents found it difficult to access Greek education. However, the Greek system provides some support:

1. Affidavits by NGOs (applies to General Lyceum and selected VET programs): For students who completed secondary school in their home countries, but lack official certification to enroll in Greek education, NGOs can provide affidavits certifying beneficiaries' qualifications.⁵¹ The affidavits allow beneficiaries to enroll in higher secondary education without having to provide official certification from their home countries.
2. International schools: Refugee youth have access to intercultural schools, reception and tutorial classes⁵² and Reception Facilities for Refugee Education⁵³ ("DYEP"). These schools put a focus on the education of foreign pupils, e.g. prioritizing Greek language learning.
3. Second Chance schools: Adult migrants can obtain secondary school diplomas at Second Chance schools, which allow them to enroll in VET and general education.⁵⁴
4. Training at Lifelong Learning Centers (KDBM): For refugees, it is often easier to enroll in non-formal education provided by NGOs. Within Greece's Lifelong Learning Strategy (established in 2010) NGOs, as providers of non-formal vocational training, can apply at EOPPEP to become recognized centers of lifelong learning. While this does not mean access to formal education, it provides additional connection to governmental stakeholders and the labor market.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, experts in our study stressed that formal education and attached certifications are not replaceable: "Informal education and vocational training that is not provided by a formalized actor is by default a problem. Even if [beneficiaries] become the best carpenters in the world, if they don't get to validate it through the existing system, the efforts remain inexistent."

Formal validation of vocational skills (e.g. carpentry) is provided mainly through vocational training institutes (EPAL and EPAS), which, once completed, allows students to partake in national professionalization exams for their degree (see chapter 3.2.3).

Note: In the rare case that refugees do have formal certifications from their home

⁴⁹Council of Europe. (2020). European Qualifications Passport for Refugees. Last accessed on 24.07.2020. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications#:~:text=The%20European%20Qualifications%20Passport%20for%20Refugees%20is%20a%20document%20providing,work%20experience%20and%20language%20proficiency>.

⁵⁰www.ecdl.gr (2020). Accessed on 25.07.2020. <https://www.ecdl.gr/>

⁵¹See more at Electronic Registrations for GEL and EPAL under <https://e-egrafes.minedu.gov.gr/#/>

⁵²Law 2413/1996 and Law 4415/2016

⁵³Ministerial Decision Φ10/20/Γ1/7-9-99, L. 3879/10, Ministerial Decision Φ1/63691/Δ1/2017

⁵⁴Law 2525/1997

⁵⁵EURYDICE (2020). Main types of VET provision. Accessed on 26.07.2020. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/main-types-provision-32_en

countries, case-by-case certification is provided by EOPPEP (for foreign VET certifications),⁵⁶ the Ministry of Education (for foreign primary- and secondary school certificates),⁵⁷ and the Hellenic National Academic Recognition Information Center (NARIC, for university or vocational training certificates).⁵⁸

3.2.2.3 Lacking Legislation for Internships

Given the hurdles for refugees to access formal Greek education, NGOs stress the importance of internships enabling on-the-job training.⁵⁹ Employer studies in Greece have found a high interest in the provision of internships to TCNs if their regulatory status and support for employers is established.⁶⁰

In Greece, internships are not foreseen in the legal framework and are thus not common.⁶¹ An exception to this are internships conducted within tertiary education programs such as university, on-the-job training through apprenticeship programs EPAS and EPAL, and publicly-managed internships for positions such as doctors, lawyers and other civil servants.

In the absence of internship legislation, working contracts between refugees and employers are subject to standard regulations of Greek labor law, such as minimum wage, registration at OAED, and social insurance.⁶² This increases the entry hurdles for employers.

3.2.3 Possibilities of Vocational Education and Training

While some experts in our study indicated that formal education through the Greek high school system (GEL) remains the best option for labor market access and overall societal integration, language barriers, age gaps and the issues relating to theoretical education make this option difficult for many refugees.

At the same time, combinations of practical work and theoretical education (Vocational Education and Training, VET) seem highly promising for refugees. In other countries, such as Germany, VET has proven highly effective in fostering refugees' integration.⁶³ While Greece has a strong tradition of VET, up to 71% of refugees report they have never tried to access training or courses in Greece.⁶⁴ Similarly, few NGOs in our study had made experiences with formal VET.

The Greek system offers two apprenticeship schemes: Upper Secondary VET Schools (EPAL) and Dual System Professional Schools⁶⁵ (EPAS).⁶⁶ Both programs are open to refugees.

⁵⁶See more at <http://www.eoppep.gr/index.php/el/qualification-certificate/equivalences>

⁵⁷See more at <https://www.minedu.gov.gr/g-grammateia-paideias/>

⁵⁸See more at <http://www.doatap.gr/gr/index.php>

⁵⁹Internships are instruments of education rather than employment, and help interns gain practical knowledge on the job. For this reason, responsibilities of the employers concerning wage and insurance are lowered. As described by the Research Department of the German Parliament. (2015). "The legal framework for internships". <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/409968/8ed7f5c93e-2774a539b805d87f918981/WD-6-006-15-pdf-data.pdf>

⁶⁰Project MILE. (2019). Voices Of European Employers: Challenges And Benefits Of The Inclusion Of Migrants In The Labour Market. <https://projectmile.eu/library/>

⁶¹Project MILE. (2019). Voices Of European Employers: Challenges And Benefits Of The Inclusion Of Migrants In The Labour Market. <https://projectmile.eu/library/>

⁶²LEXOLOGY. (2018). Employment & Labor Laws in Greece. Access on 28.07.2020. <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=38ce7ce9-32a9-42b7-a4c2-1129614bace2#:~:text=A%20written%20employment%20contract%20is%20required%20by%20law%20for%20part,permit%20to%20work%20in%20Greece.>

⁶³Federal Institute for Professional Education (BIBB). (2020). "Professional education provides additional specialists." Accessed on 28.07.2020. https://www.bibb.de/de/pressemitteilung_120726.php

⁶⁴Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁶⁵English naming convention adopted from Cedefop, see: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/countryreports/developments-vocational-education-and-training-policy-2015-19-greece>

⁶⁶Cedefop (2020). Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015-19: Greece. Cedefop monitoring and analysis of VET policies.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/countryreports/developments-vocational-education-and-training-policy-2015-19-greece>

The main difference in these programs is that EPAS apprenticeship starts directly by 2 years of mixed practical and theoretical training, while EPAL apprenticeship is a 9-month program available only to graduates of the 3-year EPAL vocational high school (“EPAL school”). Table 2 provides a comparative assessment of both programs.

Program	General facts	Main barriers	Main opportunities
EPAL	<p>Managed by Ministry of Education</p> <p>Enrolment age: 18+ (EPAL apprenticeship), no age limit to EPAL school</p> <p>Level of degree: Hellenic Qualification Level (HQL) 5</p> <p>Length: 9 months (EPAL apprenticeship) / 3 years (EPAL school)</p> <p>Required education: EPAL school completion (EPAL apprenticeship), lower secondary education (EPAL school)</p>	<p>Greek-only</p> <p>Completion of EPAL school required</p> <p>After finishing EPAL school, there is no guarantee for a spot in EPAL apprenticeship</p>	<p>EPAL is offering refugee reception classes and decreased entry hurdles on formal certification (NGO affidavit)</p> <p>EPAL apprenticeship is paid at competitive levels (compared to average reported salary)</p> <p>Completing EPAL school opens various paths in the education system, including university</p> <p>Subsidies for EPAL apprenticeships mean higher motivation for employers</p>
EPAS	<p>Managed by OAED</p> <p>Enrolment age: 16 to 23</p> <p>Level of degree: HQL 4</p> <p>Length: 2 years</p> <p>Required education: First grade of upper secondary education</p>	<p>Greek-only</p> <p>Age limit: Refugees have to be enrolled before turning 23</p>	<p>Practical training from the start</p> <p>Competitive pay</p> <p>Employer subsidies apply</p> <p>An access reform is currently discussed, potentially making EPAS HQL 3 and lowering entry hurdles further</p>

Table 2: Comparison of EPAL and EPAS schemes (Sources: Own illustration, Cedefop⁶⁷)

Note: EPAS apprenticeship will be evaluated after the school year 2020/21, which might result in changes to the program structure or its discontinuation.

While our research did not indicate a widespread knowledge on the opportunities of EPAL and EPAS amongst NGOs and job counselors, those who did know about the programs gave a positive estimate of their potential and were making use of them throughout their work. One counselor, who focused on young refugees, described the future paths of her beneficiaries as “80% go to EPAL, 10% go to EPAS, and the last 10% enter the labor market - mostly in low-skilled labor.”

⁶⁷Cedefop. (2020). Apprenticeship schemes: Country fiche Greece. Accessed on 29.07.2019. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/apprenticeship-schemes/country-fiches/greece>

In assessing the potential of EPAL and EPAS for refugees, several factors are relevant: Financial compensation, learning format and time commitment, ease of access and completion, and subsequent career options.

Financial compensation: Both EPAL and EPAS apprenticeships are paid at 75% of the Greek minimum wage (equaling 21.78 EUR per working day). This is higher than most reported incomes of refugees in previous studies, and comparable to the self-reported financial needs of refugee households.⁶⁸ Importantly, three quarters of the financial compensation is subsidized by the European Social Fund (ESF), and only the remaining 25% as well as the social insurance are paid by employers. Since the subsidized part of the income is tax-free, this remainder falls below taxable thresholds for students. For employers, this financial structure provides incentives to enroll apprentices. Further optimization could be applied: Experts mentioned the possibility of NGOs taking over the non-subsidized part of apprentices' salary, further decreasing financial commitment for employers.

Format and time commitment: While EPAS is a straightforward, two-year program with mixed theoretical and practical on-the-job training, EPAL apprenticeship is an optional follow-up program to EPAL school. Thus overall, completing the EPAL apprenticeship program takes close to 4 years, while EPAS takes only 2. Additionally, 3 of the 4 EPAL years are spent in conventional education. This means students are not exposed to the labor market or making practical experience. Also, refugee youth often have problems following theoretical education, let alone in Greek, which makes the completion of such programs especially difficult.

Ease of access and completion: Since 2019, EPAL schools are allowed to offer refugee reception classes which include language courses and special counseling. The purpose of such language classes is to decrease students' drop-out rates and improve their learning outcomes.⁶⁹ So far, no assessment of the effectiveness of such refugee reception classes is available. Additionally, in case of unavailable school certification, EPAL schools are allowing NGOs to provide affidavits of their students' completion of the necessary education in their home country (see chapter 3.2.2.2).⁷⁰ However, such reception classes are only offered at EPAL schools, and EPAL apprenticeship does not offer additional reception classes or support for refugees. For EPAS, similarly, no reception classes are available or planned upon our investigation.

For both programs, the language remains a difficulty for refugees. A level of A2 Greek is required as minimum upon enrolment, proof of which can be provided via official test or an assessment of enrolment committees. EPAS, additionally, has an age restriction which can be challenging for refugees. Since the maximum enrolment age is 23, they are limited in the time they have to learn Greek before enrolling.

Compared to EPAL, the EPAS program has increased hurdles to completion due to the time commitment associated with morning and afternoon classes. As reported by an official, refugees in EPAS have had several problems with following lessons due to the language barrier and ultimately chose to leave the program at the age of 18.

⁶⁸ Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁶⁹ EURYDICE. (2020). National Reforms in Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning. Accessed on 28.07.2020. National Reforms in Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning | Eurydice

⁷⁰ Official registration for EPAL and GEL. (2020). Accessed on 29.07.2020. <https://e-egrafes.minedu.gov.gr/#/>

NGOs have collaborated with the EPAS program in the past, as an official of OAED confirmed. However, a structured connection to the humanitarian sector has been missing so far.

At the time of this study, a reform was discussed concerning the legal status of EPAS apprenticeship, decreasing it from HQL 4 to HQL 3. In this case, the requirement of completion of the first class of secondary education will be redundant, further lowering the entry barriers to refugees.

Subsequent career: While EPAL's theoretical approach increases difficulties for refugees to complete the program, it offers a bigger range of possibilities to students after completion. Graduates of EPAL gain access to tertiary education (i.e. university). From 2019 onwards, graduates even gain preferred university access, with fixed percentages of university spots held back for EPAL graduates and an additional EPAL-only university course (KEE program) having been established.⁷¹ Additionally, EPAL graduates qualify for IEKs, next to having the prior discussed possibility to enroll in EPAL apprenticeship. Graduates of EPAS are limited to the possibility to transfer to a higher grade at EPAL school or enroll in Institutes of Vocational Training (IEKs).

A last option within VET in Greece are Institutes of Vocational Education (IEKs). Education is offered by public as well as private IEKs. IEKs are not considered a part of Greece's official VET system and are classified as tertiary education (on the same level as university studies), meaning students have to complete upper secondary education to be able to enroll (independent of whether the IEKs are private or public). Furthermore, public IEKs require students to speak at least B2 level Greek, an additional barrier for refugees. In private IEKs, the language barrier is sometimes lowered or non-existent, however these institutions require tuition. As our study showed, IEKs are not running refugee reception classes, and there are no plans to improve the accessibility of the program for refugees. Officials also confirmed that at the time of our study, no refugees were known to be enrolled in IEK.

3.2.4 Chances and Pitfalls of Entrepreneurship

While entrepreneurship is a recurring buzzword around refugees, our study did not confirm the high hopes frequently associated with it.

One reason for the low applicability of entrepreneurship for refugees is that Greek regulations prove challenging even for native entrepreneurs, with Greece ranking 72nd of 190 countries in the 2019 Ease of Doing Business report, just behind Ukraine and Kyrgyz Republic.⁷² On top of complex business registration processes and the acquisition of permits, refugees face the previously mentioned language barriers. Additionally, access to start-up financing, a critical issue for native entrepreneurs, is even more difficult for refugees since they lack collateral for loan acquisitions. Thus, the challenges to accessing formal employment, as mentioned before, are even magnified in self-employment.

Based on our research, self-employment of refugees most often takes place in low-skilled areas, with refugees owning restaurants, mini markets or cafeterias. This is in line

⁷¹Cedefop (2020). Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015-19: Greece. Cedefop monitoring and analysis of VET policies. Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015-19: Greece

⁷²World Bank Group. (2019). Doing Business 2019 - Training for Reform. https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/media/Annual-Reports/English/DB2019-report_web-version.pdf

with findings by previous studies, where 87% of respondents who reported to be “self-employed” had not exceeded secondary education.⁷³

While there is a wide spread of entrepreneurship programs across NGOs, seeking to provide refugees with necessary business skills to run a venture, our study did not indicate a high effect of these programs. Across our interviews, no expert had made experiences with successful self-employment of refugees. An exception was the story of a refugee with plans of becoming an entrepreneur, whose plans of founding a cosmetics company had, at the time of our study, been halted by COVID-19.

Additionally, refugees appear to have a limited preference for entrepreneurial careers. In our survey, only 8% of respondents planned to become self-employed as the next career step. This confirms existing research, which did not find indications of high entrepreneurial spirit amongst refugees.⁷⁴

3.2.4.1 The Opportunity of Social Cooperative Enterprises

A special case for refugees’ self-employment are Social Cooperative Enterprises (SoCE). SoCEs are non-profit structures by law and mainly have a welfare function, aiming at the integration of special groups into economic and social life.⁷⁵

Greek law provides a basis for “Integration SoCEs” with the purpose of integrating “special social groups” such as refugees. SoCEs provide limited liability, room for voluntary work, membership of legal persons and reduced registration barriers: To establish an Integration SoCE, 7 founding members and 700 EUR of cash reserves are required. At the same time, only 35% of profits can be used as salary to employees, with the rest needing to be invested back into the SoCE. Across NGOs, there seems to be low awareness of the legal framework of SoCEs, as well as the role it can play in the integration of refugees. Thus, no evaluation or experiences are available - however, Integration SoCEs are a means for refugees to create their own working-while-learning structures and work experience: The NGO Project Layali is successfully making use of the SoCE framework, providing refugee employment across several social businesses in Athens (see chapter 4.7).

3.2.4.2 The Difficulties of Online Self-Employment

Online self-employment, mainly in the fields of IT and creative crafts (see chapter 3.2.1), is sometimes considered a fitting model for refugees, presumably being less dependent on formal education than conventional employment and offering lower entry hurdles than other forms of entrepreneurship. Our research indicated that, challenges still prevail.

Regarding the importance of formality, online freelancers are indeed less dependent on qualifications. However, the necessity for proving one’s skills is shifted: Instead of formal qualifications, a track record and the importance of “being able to show what you can do” is increased. For example, online freelancers need portfolios to give potential clients an idea of a freelancer’s skills.

⁷³Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁷⁴Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁷⁵Kornilakis, Angelos. (2017). Report from Greece: The New Law on Social Enterprises in Greece. 14. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325603061_Report_from_Greece_The_New_Law_on_Social_Enterprises_in_Greece

The extent of lowered barriers in comparison to formal education is also less significant than assumed, as our analysis of 47 Greek freelancer profiles on the platform Upwork⁷⁶ showed: 94% of freelancers working in the creative industry (i.e. graphic- or web-design) held at least a Bachelor's degree, and almost 90% had 3 or more years of working experience.

Additionally, online self-employment is equally subject to regulations as other forms of entrepreneurship. Also, language barriers apply, both to Greek and, for international freelancers, English.

Research further indicates that the infrastructure needed for successful online self-employment is not widely available amongst refugees. Online self-employment, as a minimum, requires access to the internet as well as a computer - as shown by previous studies, such access is only available to around 5% of refugee households.⁷⁷

As one of our interviewees stressed, however, working online gives refugees access to their home community, which in turn removes the language barrier altogether. In this case, our interviewee was working for clients in his home country Syria, which he had acquired via word-of-mouth.

Thus, refugees, provided with a valid registration and sufficient technological equipment, as well as highly developed skills and a portfolio to show-case them, might be able to use their contact with their home community (including their proficiency in their native language) to gain access to customers – working in Greece or the EU, they will be subject to high competition from (formally) more qualified freelancers.

3.2.5 The “Cushion” of the Informal Economy

Informal work (characterized by wage work, lacking registration and thus limited social benefits and legal rights) is the predominant form of employment amongst refugees and migrants in Greece: A recent survey showed 97% of respondents working without a contract.⁷⁸ It is important to note that informal work is not a refugee-specific phenomenon, with 24% of Greece's GDP being created in the shadow economy.⁷⁹ The informal economy is largely made up by TCNs from Eastern Europe, many of which have arrived in Greece decades ago.⁸⁰

From a legal standpoint, working informally does not have an impact on an individual's labor rights as guaranteed by Greek law - even undeclared workers have a right to a fair wage or employment protection.⁸¹ In practice, of course, these rights are hardly attainable.

For refugees, informal employment poses one of the biggest hurdles to their integration into society, creating “individualistic attitudes towards themselves and others in Greek society [and their] complete alienation from collectives, associations, workers' centers

⁷⁶<https://www.upwork.com/>

⁷⁷Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁷⁸Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁷⁹ILO. (2016). Diagnostic report on undeclared work in Greece / International Labour Office, Employment Department, Informal Economy Unit. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_emp/documents/projectdocumentation/wcms_531548.pdf

⁸⁰BalkanInsight (2020). Rights Denied: Albanians in Greece face Long-term Limbo. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/07/01/rights-denied-albanians-in-greece-face-long-term-limbo/>

⁸¹Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

communities and networks of solidarity.”⁸² Research also indicates that once they enter the informal economy, individuals remain in it for particularly long periods.⁸³

Reliable data on occupations in the informal economy, including employees’ residency status, is scarce. However, anecdotal evidence and experiences of experts in our study, combined with previous assessments, shows the following industries as relevant for informal work: Manual labor, agriculture, construction, crafts, domestic work, food services (e.g. restaurants), hotels, cleaning and personal care. Another field is illegal labor, such as organized crime or human trafficking.⁸⁴

The exact types of informal work depend on an individual’s location, typically with urban informal work being in restaurants, and rural informal work being in agriculture. Figure 1 (see chapter 3.2.1) provides a glimpse into the structure of the informal economy for refugees, since 311 of the 321 respondents of the survey worked without a contract. This indicates that services and sales is by far the largest sector for the employment of refugees in the informal sector, at least in Athens.

Our field work in the area surrounding Acharnon Street in Athens confirmed the precarious situation of refugees working informally. Among our interviewees, we witnessed isolation, helplessness and despair, but often also lacking awareness of alternative possibilities. For example, interviewees reported working 15-16 hours daily, up to 7 days a week, at wages “barely covering the rent”. Most of our interviewees had gotten their jobs through their ethnic communities, e.g. friends or family. While our interviews provided valuable insight, a telling experience were those individuals who were unwilling to talk to us: Often, this was due to insecurity on whether their manager (often the owner of the shop) would suddenly appear.⁸⁵

Overall, our study indicates two reasons why refugees end up in informal work: (1) the ease of accessing the informal economy, and (2) the perceived difficulty of entering the formal economy. Unfortunately, our research did not show the possibility of an easy transfer of individuals into formal work.

The ease of entering informal work: The main reason the informal economy is so accessible to refugees seems to be its organization by ethnic communities. As other studies showed, personal connections are the main channel into (undeclared) jobs. This channel is especially strong for those refugees who are self-accommodated and have no strong access to counseling programs, e.g. by NGOs.⁸⁶ Here, the ethnic community is providing a safety cushion for refugees to access employment.⁸⁷ Often, the importance of quickly earning a salary provides an additional driver to accept undeclared work given its accessibility.

The perceived difficulty of entering formal work: Due to non-formal barriers, the process of getting hired formally is much more complex than entering undeclared work, and often cannot be completed by refugees alone. In our research at NGOs’ job counseling

⁸²European Migration Network. (2018). “Labor Market Integration of Third-Country Nationals in Member States: Focussed Study 2018”. Page 33. www.emn.europa.eu

⁸³European Migration Network. (2018). “Labor Market Integration of Third-Country Nationals in Member States: Focussed Study 2018”. www.emn.europa.eu

⁸⁴European Migration Network. (2018). “Labor Market Integration of Third-Country Nationals in Member States: Focussed Study 2018”. www.emn.europa.eu

⁸⁵To protect our informants and gain unbiased insights from them, we made sure that no manager or shop-owner was present during our interview. In cases where this could not be guaranteed, we did not conduct interviews.

⁸⁶Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁸⁷European Migration Network. (2018). “Labor Market Integration of Third-Country Nationals in Member States: Focussed Study 2018”. www.emn.europa.eu

offices, we found that the process of providing formal work to refugees takes up to 6 or 7 meetings with job counselors, in addition to the process of getting AMKA, AFM or a bank account. While it is clear that for someone in desperate need of money, the duration of this process might prove too high of a barrier (compared to the ease of entering informal work mentioned before), this also confirms the complexity refugees might see when aspiring to work formally. On top of that, lacking awareness of the possibility of formal work poses a barrier.⁸⁸ For example, during our field work in Athens, we met a young Afghan who was strolling the street searching for employment, complaining that “everyone here wants AMKA” - something that he felt he could not provide.

3.3 The Perspective of Employers

Employers’ perspectives are a major influence on the employment of refugees. A recent survey among 33 Greek employers from ten industries (including agriculture, services, tourism and media) shed light on employers’ views on the employment of third-country nationals, including the main perceived barriers to employment and in the workplace, as well as employers’ preferred soft-skills.⁸⁹

The main barriers to employment of third-country nationals (TCNs⁹⁰) are:

Barrier to employment	% ⁹¹
Insufficient support from Greek authorities ⁹²	82
Low language skills	72
High training needs of TCNs	71
Lack of necessary qualifications	66
Inexperience of employers hiring and retaining TCNs	65
Lacking interviewing skills of TCNs	63
Lacking ability to validate education and training credentials	62
Lack of TCNs’ work experience in Greece	57
Insufficient general education of TCNs	54
Lacking willingness of TCNs to work in entry-level positions	53
Lack of suitable recruiting channels for TCNs	51

Table 3: Employers’ main barriers to employment of TCNs (Source: Project MILE⁹³)

In addition to the above findings, NGOs in our study frequently reported that many employers are unaware of refugees being legally allowed to work - a finding of high relevance, since 96% of respondents rated “restricted working rights due to citizenship or residence permission” as a significant obstacle to the employment.

⁸⁸Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁸⁹Listing only skills rated relevant by 50% or more respondents. Project MILE. (2019). Voices Of European Employers: Challenges And Benefits Of The Inclusion Of Migrants In The Labour Market. <https://project-mile.eu/library/>

⁹⁰The study makes no further differentiation between TCNs and refugees

⁹¹Percent of respondents considering this barrier insurmountable/significant

⁹²Support is needed in finding qualified candidates, providing guidance on proper integration training of TCNs, provision of financial grants and information on resources and materials for hiring TCNs.

⁹³Listing only skills rated relevant by 50% or more respondents. Project MILE. (2019). Voices Of European Employers: Challenges And Benefits Of The Inclusion Of Migrants In The Labour Market. <https://project-mile.eu/library/>

Next to barriers preventing the hiring of TCNs, employers also report two main obstacles within the workplace:

Barrier within the workplace	%
Lack of language skills	88
Restricted rights due to lack of recognition of TCNs foreign qualifications	60

Table 4: Main barriers faced by TCNs in the workplace (Source: Project MILE⁹⁴)

These barriers reflect previous findings concerning the importance of Greek language, as well as the societal preference for formalization. Importantly, neither differences concerning cultural or social background, nor origin or religion were considered significant barriers to working with TCNs.

Finally, employers also listed a number of relevant soft-skills:

Most relevant soft-skills of TCNs	%
Resilience	97
Professionalism	97
Structured working style	97
Team working	96
Conflict management	94
Willingness to learn	94
Working with people from different backgrounds	93
Critical thinking	91
Stress resistance	90
Problem solving	90
Previous work experience	84
Working independently	80

Table 5: Most relevant soft-skills of TCNs for employers (Source: Project MILE⁹⁵)

3.4 The Perspective of Refugees

Lastly, our study investigated refugees' perspectives on the labor market and their professional future. This survey was conducted with 26 refugees aged between 12 and 30. 31% of respondents were male, 69 percent female. Respondents included both asylum seekers and recognized refugees. Of the 26 surveyed, 10 had completed primary education, 6 secondary education, 4 had completed VET and 1 earned an undergraduate degree. A limitation to this study is that all respondents were visitors or students of Faros' Horizon Center, where they experienced interpersonal support and gained design education.

⁹⁴Listing only skills rated relevant by 50% or more respondents. Project MILE. (2019). Voices Of European Employers: Challenges And Benefits Of The Inclusion Of Migrants In The Labour Market. <https://project-mile.eu/library/>

⁹⁵Listing only skills rated relevant by 50% or more respondents. Project MILE. (2019). Voices Of European Employers: Challenges And Benefits Of The Inclusion Of Migrants In The Labour Market. <https://project-mile.eu/library/>

Firstly, refugees in our study report low knowledge on how to access the job market in Greece (Figure 3).

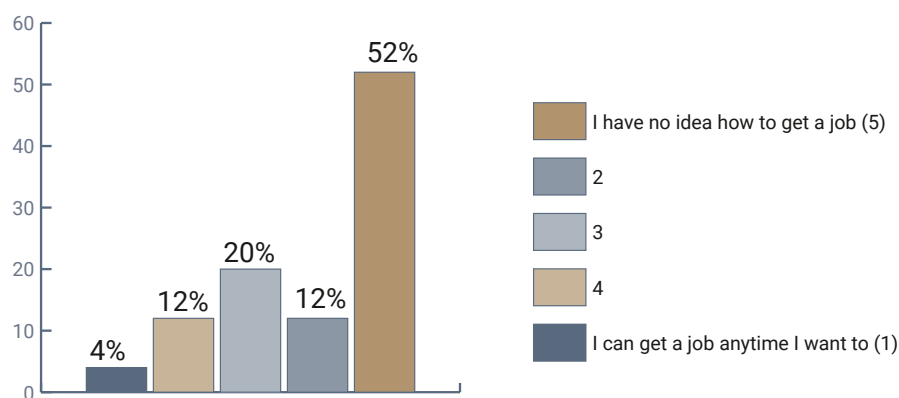


Figure 3: How well do you know how to get a job in Greece? (Source: Own illustration)

The main channels for accessing jobs were friends and family, followed by NGOs (Figure 4). Only two respondents listed government offices or the labor office as channels to access jobs. The type of jobs refugees reported having access to were diverse, ranging from office work, tailoring, restaurants and agriculture to barber shops.

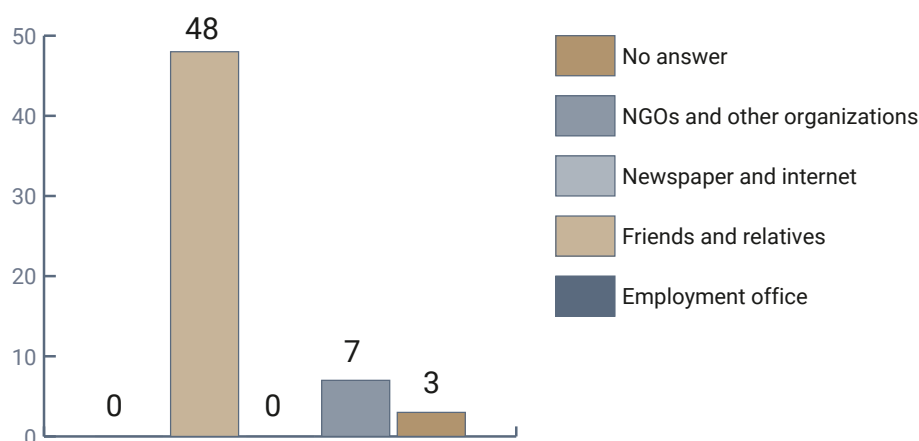


Figure 4: How did you find your current job? (Source: Adapted from Caritas⁹⁶)

This is in line with previous studies, which found personal connections as most relevant for refugees to access jobs: 79% of migrants find their jobs through personal references.⁹⁷ (see Figure 4). This dependence on a personal network is posing severe limitations to the type of jobs that refugees are able to acquire. As an interviewee put it: “You have access to the type of jobs that your network has access to.” For refugees, these jobs are almost never in the high-skilled sector.

Concerning their overall career planning, respondents exhibit a divergence of short- and long-term aspirations, as shown in Figure 5. The most relevant differences between long- and short-term career planning are in the decreased attractiveness of office work. At the same time, becoming a merchant or opening a shop (mostly related to crafts and design) showed the most increase. Importantly, creative work was valued both in the short- and long-term perspective for refugees.

⁹⁶Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁹⁷Project MILE. (2019). Voices Of European Employers: Challenges And Benefits Of The Inclusion Of Migrants In The Labour Market. <https://projectmile.eu/library/>

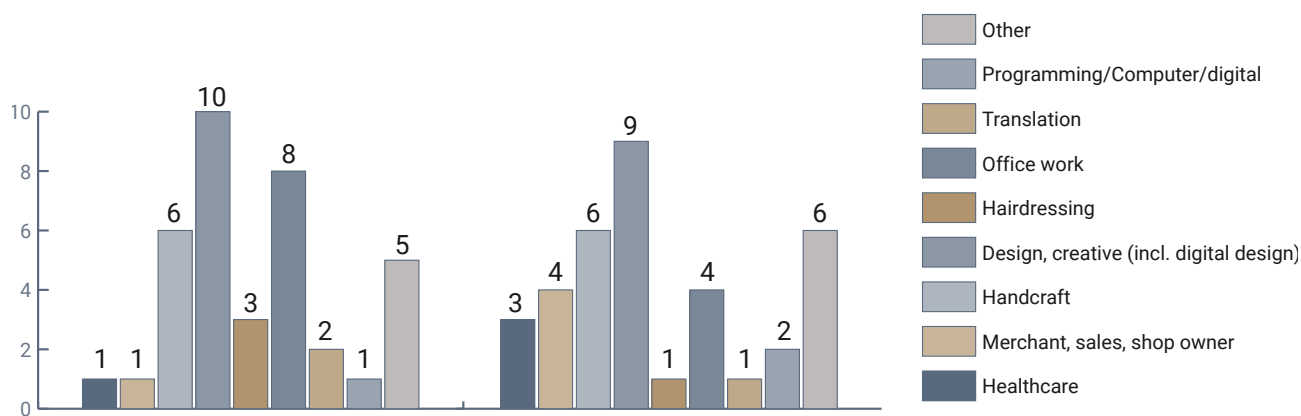


Figure 5: Short- and long-term professional aspirations of refugees (n = 26, Source: Own illustration)

The self-ascribed talents of refugees correlated with both short- and long-term professional goals, as seen in Figure 6. Most respondents reported having interpersonal skills (e.g. teamwork, patience) and soft-skills (being able to work hard, understanding things quickly) - skills that are valued by employers. Additionally, respondents reported having creative and handcraft skills.

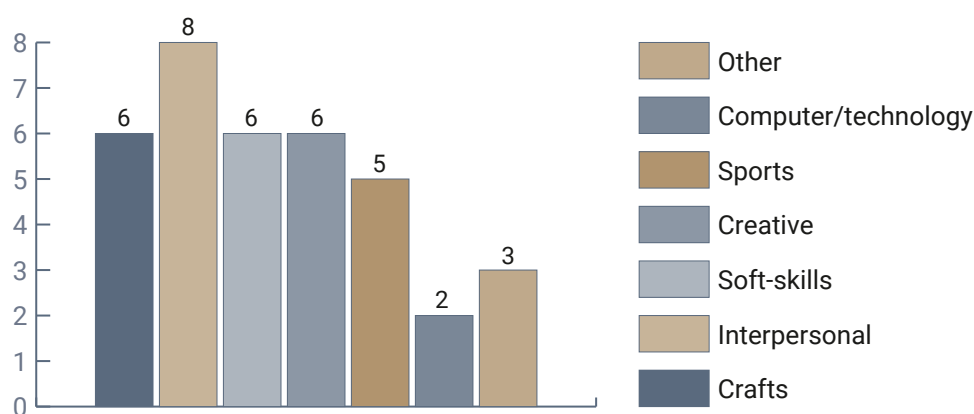


Figure 6: Self-ascribed talents of refugees by category (Source: Own illustration)

However, few respondents estimate the possibility of finding a job that matches their talents as high, as the following graph depicts:

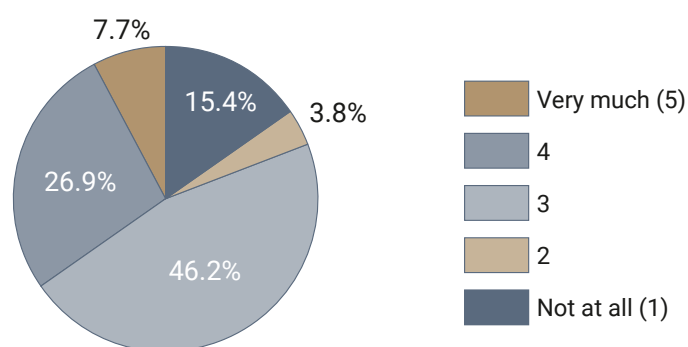


Figure 7: Do you feel like you can find a job that matches your talents in Greece? (Source: Own illustration)

Lastly, our survey showed that next to monetary needs, refugees value finding meaning and doing good in their work:

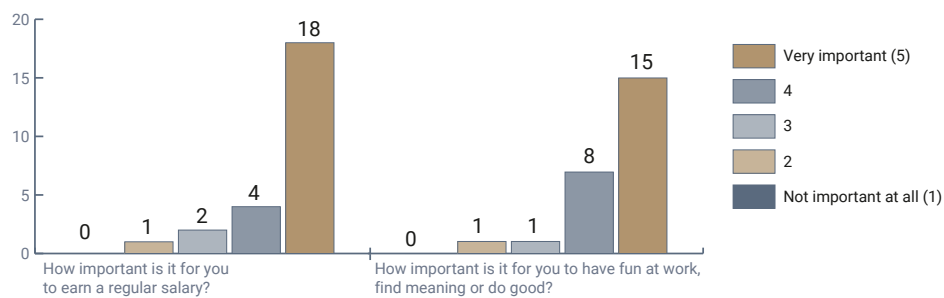


Figure 8: Perceptions on doing well vs. doing good (Source: Own illustration)

While all respondents acknowledged the need for a salary to survive, women especially explained that having a regular salary allowed them to have a monthly budget plan for their families. At the same time, almost all respondents explained that if their job was not fun, they would eventually lose interest in it. However, some few respondents explained that “it’s important to have fun, but sometimes we should focus on our job”, indicating a strong preference for earning money rather than self-fulfillment.

3.5 Deep-dive: The issue of Greek language

An interesting dynamic was discovered in our survey: While most respondents wanted to stay in Greece (Figure 10) and felt happy in the country (Figure 9), the majority preferred to learn English over Greek (Figure 11).

Our survey did not highlight any correlation between neither gender nor age and the willingness to learn Greek or the amount of time respondents wanted to stay in Greece. This indicates that there is no specific demographic group of refugees that has a higher or lower willingness to learn Greek or stay in Greece for longer times than others.

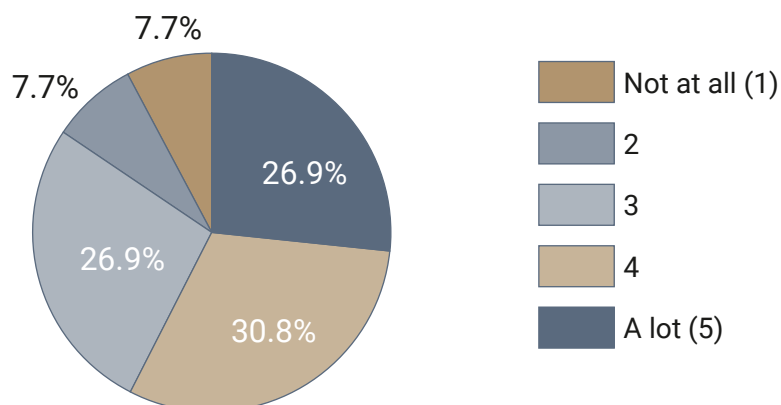


Figure 9: How happy do you feel in Greece? (n = 26, Source: Own illustration)

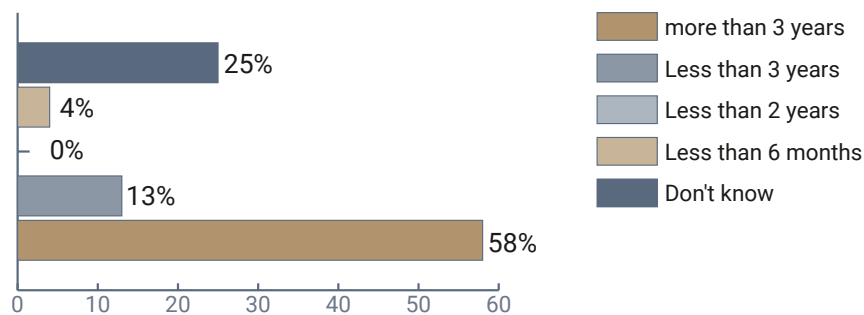


Figure 10: How long do you plan to stay in Greece? (n = 26, Source: Own illustration)

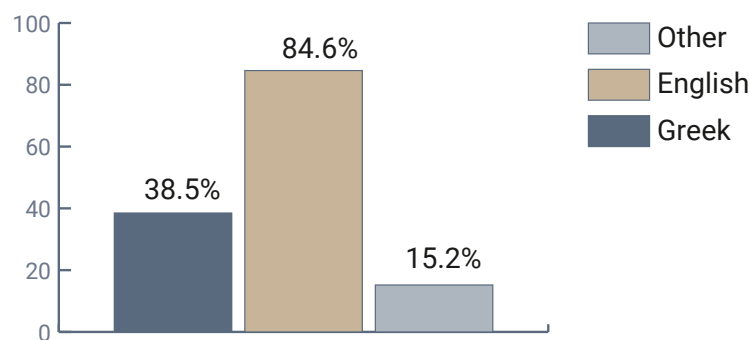


Figure 11: Which language would you like to learn the most? (n = 26, multiple answers possible. Source: Own illustration)

Based on our research, this dynamic is counterproductive: Greek language skills are one of the most important barriers to the labor market- and societal integration of refugees, and may lead to refugees not even applying to jobs in the first place.^{98, 99, 100, 101} Thus, if the goal of refugees is to live in Greece, learning Greek should be a main priority.

A 2019 study similarly illustrated the issues relating to Greek language skills: While 92% of surveyed refugees spoke Greek poorly or not at all, only two thirds took language classes. A reason for the low participation was, as the study assumed, a lacking awareness of free language classes. Women, at the same time, were often unable to take language classes as they were bound by household responsibilities.¹⁰²

Generally, Greek language courses are available from a variety of sources, both by NGOs and governmental agencies like the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs. However, one study found less than a third of refugees having attended such courses.¹⁰³ Our study highlighted that the reason for this low participation in language classes might be the design of the course system: Respondents indicated that, for language classes to be more effective, two criteria should be implemented: (1) Course schedules and outcomes need to be defined centrally by Greek authorities and (2) decentralized efforts by NGOs need to be aligned with authorities' objectives and between organizations. In the following we'll define both measures in more detail:

⁹⁸ Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. Page 32. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

⁹⁹ OECD. (2018). Working Together For Local Integration Of Migrants And Refugees In Athens. Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Athens | en

¹⁰⁰ UNHCR. (2018). Inter-agency participatory assessment report. COUNTRY REPORT GREECE 2018

¹⁰¹ OECD. (2016). Labour Market Integration of Refugees.

¹⁰² Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. Page 32. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

¹⁰³ Skleparis, D. (2018) 'Refugee Integration in Mainland Greece: Prospects and Challenges'. Policy Brief 02, Yasar University UNESCO Chair on International Migration

Central definition of course schedule and outcomes: While many NGOs and governmental agencies are offering language classes, few classes fall within a predefined curriculum and lead to standardized certification of the learners. Given the many stakeholders in this process, central authorities should publish a guideline that helps others (e.g. NGOs) to target their efforts on concrete outcomes. A such curriculum might even include predefined learning material that gets distributed across a network of partnering organizations.

Alignment of decentralized efforts to fit this schedule: Without a common definition of what language courses should teach and which goal (i.e. language certificates) they should aim for, different NGOs provide language classes on different levels and in different rhythms. This makes it difficult for refugees to combine language classes or switch between different schools – for example if they want to take more lessons or take a new job which prevents them from attending elsewhere. Additionally, the limited lessons NGOs can offer prevents them from teaching deep language knowledge: NGOs in our study reported barely reaching B1 language levels in English for their beneficiaries, let alone communicable Greek. If NGOs were able to synchronize their efforts, a decentralized network of language classes could be used to provide a funnel from low- to high-level language knowledge. This would also allow refugees to be more flexible and adapt language classes to their personal schedule.

A role model in this regard can be seen in Germany: Here, language courses are managed centrally by governmental agencies (e.g. Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, BAMF). The courses are organized in modules and follow a progressive schedule, starting with basic language and then focusing on German for professional situations. The German system also includes a set of incentives for attending language classes. Also, in some cases, attendance to language classes can be mandatory.¹⁰⁴

4 BEST PRACTICES FOR NGOS

What can NGOs do regarding the labor market integration of their beneficiaries? Through our exchange with stakeholders from various disciplines, eight best practices emerged.

4.1 Facing the Fundamental Trade-off: Employment vs. Psychosocial Support

Amongst the NGOs in our study, we found two sometimes contradictory approaches to labor market integration of refugees: One focusing on providing access to high-skilled labor, and the other focusing on employment in low-skilled labor. While high-skilled labor was characterized by beneficiaries' access in the knowledge economy, for example jobs that require creativity and theoretical knowledge (e.g. design or IT), low-skilled labor was defined by practical work (e.g. carpeting or tailoring).

In our study, NGOs focusing on access to high-skilled labor provided exclusively IT skills, while low-skilled labor manifested both in the industries mentioned above (agriculture, hospitality, services) as well as in handcraft (e.g. woodwork or sewing). Depending on these approaches, NGOs differed in the accessibility and selectivity of their programs as

¹⁰⁴Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF (2020). Immigrants and Course Attendees. Accessed on 22.11.2020, <https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/Integration/ZugewanderteTeilnehmende/zugewanderteTeilnehmende-node.html>

well as the level of psychosocial support provided.

Refugees in Greece are mainly working in low-wage, low-skilled positions. Provided refugees have access to job counseling, finding employment to such jobs is fairly simple – job counselors reported an average of 6-7 one-hour meetings with beneficiaries, as well as additional support to access documents such as AFM or bank accounts, as sufficient to provide them with a job. Some organizations even reported not being able to secure enough employees for the number of open positions available through their programs.

Contrary to the work of such job counselors, some NGOs are focusing on high-skilled employment for their beneficiaries. To give beneficiaries a chance to access high-skilled jobs, these NGOs provide close, individual counseling of beneficiaries and push them to progress (e.g. through drop-out criteria in their curricula). Additionally, their programs are not open to everyone, and selection criteria apply for beneficiaries depending on their language skills, previous work experience and qualifications. The selectivity and filtering within the programs, however, limit the number of beneficiaries starting and completing them. As a result, the majority of beneficiaries are able to secure work in high-skilled sectors after completing the programs: As one organization reported, out of c. 45 graduates, 33 had found a job in IT. However, this success comes at the price of reduced intake, and thus lower support to other, non-qualified groups.

As we have seen in previous chapters, employment is not a simple process of finding access to a job, but also requires character-building in advance. For many of NGOs' beneficiaries, working on fundamentals such as trauma-coping or acquiring soft-skills valued in the Greek society is a crucial service to gain and retain employment in the first place.¹⁰⁵ In both approaches mentioned above, these psychosocial services are not a priority. Still, to provide sustainable access to employment, NGOs must keep their importance in mind. NGOs working to increase the labor market access of their beneficiaries are maneuvering in a field balancing fast access to low-skilled labor, intensive training and counseling for high-skilled labor, and the number of beneficiaries they are able to provide with psycho-social support.

4.2 Focusing on Greek Language

As our study showed, Greek language is the most important factor driving integration in Greece. If an NGOs' goal is the integration of beneficiaries into Greek society, language must be one of its priorities.

An important factor here is to make beneficiaries aware of the importance of Greek. As our survey showed, the desire to stay in Greece did not correlate with the desire to learn Greek.¹⁰⁶

As described in chapter 3.5, language courses should not be fragmented, but follow a clear agenda leading to a predefined degree. In the absence of a nation-wide program on Greek language, NGOs should unify at least their own efforts, providing a certain level of standardization and linear progress amongst organizations offering language classes. Additionally, they should advocate for the central government to take ownership of

¹⁰⁵European Migration Network. (2018). "Labor Market Integration of Third-Country Nationals in Member States: Focussed Study 2018". www.emn.europa.eu

¹⁰⁶Correlation coefficient "Length of period respondents want to stay in Greece" and "Willingness to learn Greek": 0.399

language courses, thereby providing orientation to all involved parties.

An interesting point that arose in our study was the exposure of beneficiaries to the host community. Given the fact that Greeks themselves can often be considered vulnerable, including the host population in programs originally tailored only to refugees might have two benefits: An exposure of refugees to Greek language, and possibly a higher acceptance of NGOs' efforts within the Greek society. However, since resources of NGOs are limited, the ability to absorb further beneficiaries from other groups might not always be present.

4.3 Providing Individual Job Counseling

To increase the chances of labor market access in both high- and low-skilled employment, job counselors play a crucial role by (1) helping refugees bridge legal and social barriers and (2) extending refugees' employment network.

Refugees often experience highly individual situations, not only concerning their skill-set and professional goals, but also their status in Greece, including access to legal documents. Here, individual job counselors play a large role in making sure that refugees have access to legal documents to which they are entitled (see chapter 3.1.3).

Our study also showed that individual job counselors are highly effective in providing beneficiaries with jobs, extending refugees' professional network through their own personal contacts with employers or access to job portals.

Interestingly, refugees have themselves stressed the importance of specialization in job counseling and employment support, and UNHCR has previously recommended that organizations specialize on analyzing the professional experience of beneficiaries and matching their capabilities with the options in the host community.

4.4 Building a Pipeline into High-skilled Employment

While most beneficiaries will resort to low-skilled labor, NGOs seeking to provide their beneficiaries with employment in high-skilled sectors should focus on creating a strong link to practice. This can be done through practical collaborations with firms, such as year-end programs with the involvement of corporate partners, field visits of company sites with beneficiaries, or even by selecting those volunteers with links to suitable companies (e.g. corporate volunteers who are employed in IT).

In any case, building a channel into high-skilled employment is a long-term process and requires personal outreach and commitment by NGOs. Those NGOs successfully providing high-skilled labor stressed that the skill-set required is different from regular job counseling, being closer to strategic partnership building than traditional employability counseling.

4.5 Staying close to Formal Education

Given the importance of formal education in Greece, NGOs should try to remain as close to formal qualifications as possible. This can be done by "informally certifying" one's own

curriculum, formally certifying beneficiaries' education subsequent to the training, and supporting beneficiaries in gaining formal education through other channels. Informally certifying one's curriculum requires NGOs to publish their curriculum online, share it with employers and thus allow them to get an idea of the skill-set gained by beneficiaries. This method was used successfully by organizations providing high-skilled labor, e.g. through IT skills, but would be appropriate for low-skilled labor as well. Of course, the more reputable an NGO and its partners, the more likely will the informal certification be valued by employers.

To formally certify beneficiaries' learnings, NGOs need to provide them with access to officially accredited tests (e.g. ECDL). Since these tests do not correspond to the OPs as defined by EOPPEP, they are not a replacement for formal VET - however, for low-skilled jobs, they can be an addition to refugees' qualifications.

Lastly, NGOs can invest in providing their beneficiaries with the necessary support to complete formal education in the Greek system. This is especially relevant for young refugees, who have the option to enroll in EPAS or EPAL programs. Since drop-out rates here are especially high for refugees, support and counseling from NGOs, as well as education about their future possibilities through the program, can be helpful to beneficiaries. Again, Greek language plays a major role in decreasing drop-out rates.

4.6 Connecting with Peers

Looking at the overall process of labor market integration, from access to legally required documents, to education and training and the acquisition of Greek language skills, it is obvious that no single step by itself automatically leads to the successful employment of beneficiaries. Regarding the specific skills and specializations that NGOs have built up, a distribution of responsibilities across organizations seems beneficial. However, to efficiently make use of networking skills, NGOs need to increase interaction with each other.

One example of how NGOs can profit from increased collaboration and networking showed throughout our research: One NGO, focusing on direct provision of low-skilled labor, had problems finding enough qualified beneficiaries for the amount of jobs that employers offered. At the same time, other NGOs had an abundance of beneficiaries on the search for employment. At the time of our study, there was no exchange between these organizations, ultimately leading to unfulfilled potential on both sides.

Similarly, NGOs providing the same services might have the potential to increase their impact by working together. This connection is sometimes even created by beneficiaries themselves, who are in contact with several NGOs at a time. This indicates potential for synergies, e.g. by combining resources such as machines, tools and knowledge.

4.7 Becoming Employers

To bridge the barriers to employment, including the prevention of refugees working in low-skilled labor, NGOs can become employers themselves. In this model, NGOs can ensure proper payment, working conditions and fulfillment for their beneficiaries. However, it leaves NGOs with increased managerial overhead and regulatory duties, from the

development of a business model and client relationships to the burdens of officially employing personnel.

This model has previously been used by NGOs: For example, an Athens-based NGO reported a collaboration with a German fashion startup, which they supplied with backpacks and accessories made by refugees in the NGO's own tailoring workshop.

A major chance here is the SoCE model, which NGOs can capitalize on. The prime example for NGOs using this model is Project Layali, operating multiple businesses in Athens such as a jewelry shop and beauty salon. Project Layali is also planning to open a restaurant, brewery and hotel, as well as apprenticeships through their beauty salon. Since it is registered as SoCE, all profits are reinvested into the project (and its beneficiaries) itself.¹⁰⁷

4.8 Keeping Women in Mind

While many dynamics described are difficult for male refugees, they are often even more severe for women: Female refugees have responsibilities for their children and household duties that conflict with their career planning, and cultural pressures make it harder for them to become self-sufficient. Additionally, they seemed impacted more severely by the COVID-19 lockdown, being required to constantly take care of their children and experiencing anxiety and fears for their family. Below graphics also illustrate the difficulties for refugee women to apply for jobs and follow language school. In Figure 12, respondents who reported not having time for language classes were mainly female.¹⁰⁸ Figure 13 shows “looking after family and home” as the predominant reason not to look for employment, with women being considerably more affected.

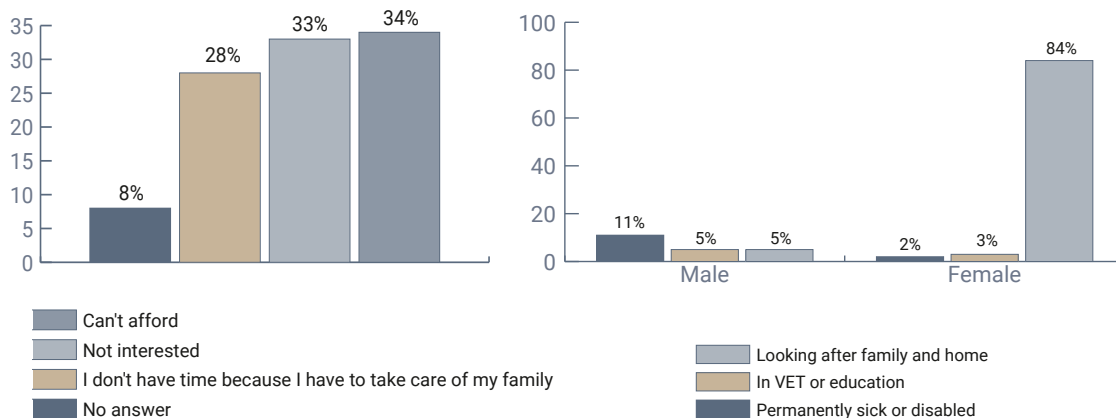


Figure 12 (left): Why don't you take language classes? (Source: Own illustration, adapted from Caritas¹⁰⁹)

Figure 13 (right): Why are you not looking for a job? (Source: Own illustration, adapted from Caritas¹¹⁰)

The specific needs of women have been overlooked by society for a long time. NGOs should take care to always keep in mind the situation of women when designing programs and spaces. One helpful action can be the creation of daycare centers for children, so women can more easily follow the programs. This option also offers high collaboration

¹⁰⁷Project Layali (2020). Accessed 25.07.2020. www.projectlayali.org

¹⁰⁸Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

¹⁰⁹Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Hellas, International Labor Organization (ILO). 2019. Creating the Link: A market system analysis of refugees and host communities in Athens. <https://caritas.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MSA-Study-Final-1.pdf>

¹¹⁰ibid

potential amongst NGOs, who often lie in geographical proximity and might establish mutual daycare centers together (see chapter 4.6).

5 COVID-19: “THE DISEASE OF INEQUALITY”

At the time of this study, the coronavirus pandemic became a driving factor in societal, economic and political dynamics. Since the adverse effects of COVID-19 are augmented for those at the bottom of the pyramid, we used our survey in July 2020 to investigate the effects of the lockdown and other COVID-19-related issues on refugees. Additionally, in our interviews with NGOs, we included questions on their COVID-19 response. Given the complexity of COVID-19’s impact on the Greek economy and society, we will not dive into these topics in the scope of this study.

5.1 The Impact on Refugees

Our study indicates that the lockdown and the phase of COVID-19 from March to July 2020, when our survey was conducted, were main distressing factors for refugees, stemming from the lockdown and the overall situation.

Experiences during the lockdown: 78% of respondents reported having had negative experiences in the lockdown. Especially women gave vivid descriptions of the difficulties of occupying their children “24/7” and having “to protect myself and my family.” 22% of respondents reported neutral or even positive experiences in the lockdown - those respondents were usually younger and male, explaining that they enjoyed having some free time, watching football or movies or simply being bored.

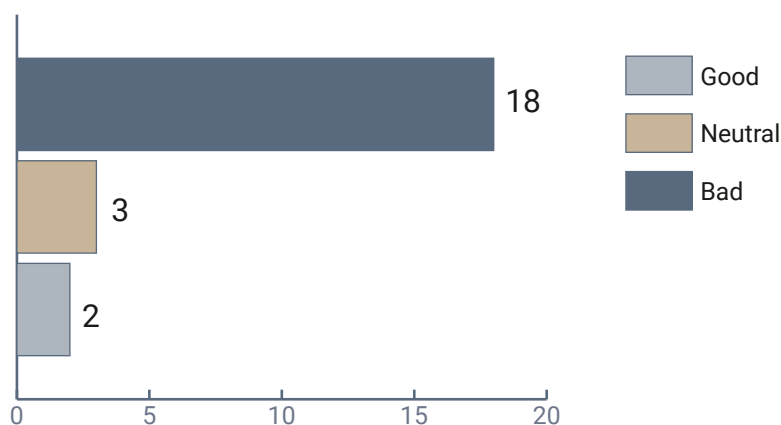


Figure 14: Experience in the lockdown (n = 23, Source: Own illustration)

COVID-19 generally: 81% of respondents reported anxiety, distress or worries caused by COVID-19. Reasons for such negative feelings were the delaying of asylum interviews, infected relatives in their home countries, lacking education options for the kids, falling behind in school and losing time. Again, women reported high distress, worrying about their children and being unable to take care of them.

These findings may not reflect the whole picture, because the interviewed refugees were not part of the most vulnerable groups due to their access to counseling or support services. Our interviews indicated that especially those refugees which did not have any support, such as unaccompanied minors, were unable to understand governmental

information on COVID-19, often lived in apartments with 8-10 others where social distancing was impossible, and were unable to interact with others (e.g. through schools).

Refugees explained that, while confined at home, messages by the Faros team and online courses from the NGO positively impacted their situation.

5.2 What NGOs can do

Most NGOs in our study did not report a large impact of COVID-19 on their work. This was mainly due to the short period under lockdown, which most NGOs bridged well, even though the numbers of beneficiaries reached was limited (for example because the NGOs had to close their facilities during the lockdown). Most NGOs had good security mechanisms in place, with disinfectant largely available and distance measures established. Thus, their services were available in a limited setting for refugees after the lockdown.

NGOs' work is largely dependent on physical interaction with beneficiaries, which makes it especially difficult to manage both lockdown and social distancing measures. Given this importance of interaction, there is no easy way out for NGOs. They often need to reduce the number of beneficiaries they interact with (for example reducing group sizes and creating group clusters to prevent full isolation) and move the locations of their work outside as much as possible.

Digitization, while a major chance for other businesses, does not provide benefits to the work of NGOs with beneficiaries. Nevertheless, digital technology can be used at least to mitigate some problems of vulnerable populations arising during COVID-19, for example through video teaching or providing projects to be completed at home. In addition, digitization and remote work can be used to keep up administrative and management work in the back-office.

In any case, NGOs should strive to keep in contact with beneficiaries, even if the possibility for visits is limited: Our study showed that beneficiaries had experienced the lockdown as less distressing due to the outreach of Faros.

CONCLUSION

This study is intended to be an initial step towards understanding the complex issues of labor market integration for refugees in Greece. It provides insight into the current labor market environment in Greece and the obstacles refugee youth face regarding their access to job opportunities, and recommendations on how to further advance opportunities for this group. To summarize, in unleashing the potential of refugee youth, there are an abundance of benefits, not only for refugees themselves to access job opportunities, but also for companies, and society as a whole.

We recommend that further qualitative and quantitative research is conducted on this topic to inform actors working in the field of refugee protection, education, and integration. The perspective of governmental stakeholders should also be further investigated. Finally, future research should consider the long-term effects of COVID-19 on the economy.

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