



Labour market integration for vulnerable populations

Background

According to the National Strategy on Integration, there are over 650,000 third country nationals in Greece¹, including refugees and asylum seekers. Without Greek language skills, they are at a disadvantage in navigating the labour market. Additional prerequisites to securing decent work include finding information about jobs, having market-relevant skills, and knowing how to navigate the complex legal environment – all of which pose particular difficulties for new arrivals. Women and youth are especially vulnerable and have particular challenges in finding employment.

Current IRC labour market integration programming:

The IRC's labour market integration programming focuses on interventions to support vulnerable people, whether refugees, migrants or Greeks, to attain financial independence and stability. Since 2017, together with Greek NGOs, the IRC has provided employment and self-employment services and training to over 1,500 people. As part of the "Curing the Limbo" initiative, the IRC currently trains and supervises career counsellors working for the Municipality of Athens.

Moreover, the IRC co-leads the Livelihoods and Empowerment Working Committee of the Athens Coordination Center for Migrants and Refugees (ACCMR).

The IRC and its partners deliver:

- **Employment services:** With support from the *Stavros Niarchos Foundation* and as part of the "Curing the Limbo" initiative of the Municipality of Athens, supported by *Urban Innovative Actions (UIA)*, the IRC, Generation 2.0 RED, Organization Earth, and the Municipality of Athens have provided market-relevant employment services to over 1,200 refugees and asylum seekers residing in broader Attica. Services include individual career counselling and employability workshops that develop crucial skills (such as creating CVs and cover letters, job search techniques, job interview preparation, financial literacy and soft skills) as well as an introduction to labour rights and familiarization with Greek work culture. Participants also have the opportunity to participate in weekly "Business Greek" and group job search sessions. Collaborations with external partners have created opportunities for certified trainings on cultural mediation or web development. In parallel, the IRC and its partner Generation 2.0 have built up an extensive network of employers committed to diversity to facilitate job placement for participants of the programme.
- **Business Trainings, Mentoring and Business Grants:** With support from the *Citi Foundation*, the IRC, Solidarity Now, and Knowl have trained over 330 young people, regardless of nationality and status, in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and soft skills to prepare them for self-employment. Based on business plan competitions, the IRC provides mentoring and cash grants to people who are starting their entrepreneurship journey. Employees from CitiBank – with extensive financial literacy skills – have recently started to volunteer as valuable mentors to programme participants.

¹ <http://www.opengov.gr/immigration/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/kef-2.3.1.pdf>

Sample data

The following data are from a sample of about 450 refugees and asylum seekers who attended services at IRC's partner, Generation 2.0, between November 2017 and November 2018.

- ❖ The majority (85%) of participants are male.
- ❖ Almost half (47%) are between 25 and 34 years old. 26% are under 24 years, 20% between 35 and 44 and 7% over 45.
- ❖ Top countries of origin are Afghanistan (21%), Pakistan (13%) Iran (12%) and Syria (9%).
- ❖ The majority (75%) are asylum applicants.
- ❖ 73% on average showed improved knowledge in topics of job readiness, labour rights and other market relevant skills after the programme.
- ❖ 53% have applied to at least one job, and 19% have attended at least one job interview.
- ❖ 18% received a job offer after attending the program.

Diversity in the Workplace

The "Diversity in the Workplace" campaign is an IRC-supported initiative of Generation 2.0 that aims to create a network of companies willing to support and invest in diversity. To date, over 50 companies have joined the network and are in close collaboration with career counselors to facilitate job matching.

- Top sectors of employment were **hospitality** (36%), **tourism** (12%), **facility management and household support services** (10%) followed by the humanitarian sector, production, construction, logistics and customer service.

- 72% of those who received a job offer were under 35.

Lessons Learned & Best Practices

- Lack of language skills remains the most significant barrier to labour market integration. Greek Language training that is geared towards employment can facilitate a rapid acquisition of the language capacity needed for an entry level job.
- In a feedback survey conducted in the summer of 2018, 60% of participants of the one-on-one career counselling sessions said they were the most helpful service of the programme.
- Women face additional barriers to work, such as limited mobility for work outside the home due to childcare needs and disproportionate responsibility for domestic work. Poorer literacy levels as well as cultural barriers further limit their access to work and employment programs, and women consistently represent a minority in seeking out employment services. The provision of childcare support, the location of the service and/or the formation of women-only groups can lead to higher participation and enhance equal opportunities.
- Employers still lack basic information regarding the eligibility of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to work, while many maintain deep-rooted stereotypes concerning specific populations. With that in mind, the IRC and partner Generation 2.0 paid special attention to communication activities to raise awareness and share information on the right of refugees to work and the many skills they bring with them. – After all, they are people who survived crisis and had the strength to leave everything behind to start a new life in a new place. They have proven to be incredibly resourceful!