



Strengthening employment opportunities for refugees in Greece

In November 2021, ahead of the one-year anniversary of the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) brought together businesses and policy makers to identify opportunities to strengthen integration policies in Greece. The rich discussion highlighted the collective agreement from all stakeholders that refugees have a vital role to play in contributing to the economy and the commitment of businesses and the government to work together to achieve this.

In particular, we heard from Workathlon and Webhelp as employers of refugees in Greece, refugee-led organisation [the Greek Forum of Refugees](#), Ben & Jerry's, Citi Greece, the [Ministry of Migration and Asylum](#) and the [European Commission](#).

This topic was particularly pertinent given the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit Greece after a 10-year economic crisis and exacerbated challenges for the country's most vulnerable groups. Indeed, IRC's most [recent research](#) undertaken in collaboration with the Overseas Development Institute, found that 96 percent of refugees and vulnerable host communities interviewed in Greece had had their prospects of work impacted by COVID-19, with refugee women hardest hit. As Greek society builds back from the pandemic, shaping a more inclusive economy will be crucial.

Participants discussed both the benefits and challenges to employing refugees in the Greek context. Refugees are accorded the right to work by the 1951 Refugee Convention and Sustainable Development Goal 8 promotes decent work for all. However, in practice refugees and asylum-seekers often experience a number of barriers to attaining employment in host countries, including Greece.

Benefits of employing refugees	
The skills of refugees can support meeting demand in the labour market.	For instance, Workathlon reported staff shortages in the hospitality industry during 2021 and Webhelp highlighted that their operations rely on a multilingual workforce, that has always on relied on recruitment from across Europe and third countries.
Higher retention rates and recruitment networks.	For instance, Webhelp noted that in an industry such as outsourcing, turnover tends to be high. However, they found that turnover for refugees working with the company stands at 15 percent, in contrast to 35 percent overall turnover. Additionally, refugees working for the company often share information on recruitment opportunities with their networks of family and friends.
Economic case for the integration of refugees.	For instance, research from the Tent Foundation shows that "investing one euro in welcoming refugees can yield nearly two euros in economic benefits within five years." ¹
Employing refugees drives stronger integration outcomes.	Employment enables self-sufficiency and helps new arrivals build social connections and strengthen language skills.

1. <https://www.tent.org/resources/refugees-work-humanitarian-investment-yields-economic-dividends/>

Challenges to employing refugees

Administrative barriers.	Employers noted that the greatest challenges they faced in employing refugees were administrative. For instance, refugee employees need all the relevant paperwork (AMKA and PAAYPA) before going to an island to work in hospitality, but this is often difficult to secure and can dissuade potential employers. Moreover, there is uncertainty among employers about the documents required and how to assess their validity. In some cases, administrative and structural issues can combine to impede access to a particular industry. For instance, while refugees and asylum-seekers may be permanently located in big cities such as Athens, and required to report back there regularly, many jobs in the hospitality industry are available on the islands.
Equivalence of qualifications.	The Greek Forum of Refugees emphasised that it was difficult to translate overseas qualifications into the Greek context. Moreover, refugees often must have their qualifications certified by the government of their home country which may be impossible due to their reasons for fleeing.
Racism and negative narratives.	The discussion highlighted negative attitudes towards refugees can act as a barrier to their employment. Workathlon noted the impactful role of success stories in countering such narratives and identified expanding and amplifying these as crucial.
Language, skills development, and permanent residence.	Investment in language support and skills development is important but can be integrated into on-the-job training. It was noted by Webhelp that for a company to accept a refugee camp as a permanent address can work until a more permanent residence is possible.

Next steps

During the event, speakers called for the publication of a new national strategy on integration and businesses offered to work with the government on employing refugees. Since then, the new national strategy for Greece has been published and is open for public consultation. The government also committed to sharing employment guidance with businesses, and highlighted the potential for a review of the ban on asylum-seekers working until six months after their application has been lodged.

- For further information on the discussions, please see the IRC's event summary [here](#).
- For further information on the IRC's influencing work on integration in the EU, please read this web article [here](#).