



Mapping of social orientation: the case of Greece

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Content

I.	Introduction	3
II.	Legal and institutional framework	3
1.	Legal framework of social orientation	3
2.	Course/module providers	5
III.	Audience	8
1.	Coverage of social orientation courses, by category of non-nationals.....	8
2.	Initiatives targeted at specific non-national groups.....	8
IV.	Courses/modules' characteristics.....	8
V.	Content of courses.....	9

I. Introduction

Since 1990, Greece has become a country of destination for a significant number of third-country nationals. The country's geographical location led to receiving, from early in the 1990s, people from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics, Albania, Africa, Middle East and Asia due to the fall of the regimes, the collapse of the economies of these countries, low level of economic growth, population size, war conflicts, tensions and political persecution, economic crisis, etc. From 2015 to today, Greece experienced an unprecedented influx of migrants and refugees. Until March 2016, Greece being a transit country rather than destination country, its main policy investments focused on reception rather than integration measures. The closure of the border between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece, which followed, changed the scene. Thousands of refugees and migrants were stranded in Greece often without adequate accommodation, healthcare, and access to education.¹

Under these circumstances the integration prospects for immigrants, refugees and subsidiary protection holders in Greece remain blurred. Although the legal framework is in place, it is still not fully implemented as there is a lack of a long-standing tradition in policies to support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

Attempts for integration of TCNs through social orientation courses were made by public entities until 2016. These programmes included language and history courses for migrants and were applied on national level. However, they were implemented temporarily without clear monitoring and evaluation and, as a result, they have been fragmented and ad hoc.

Social orientation courses for TCNs in Greece are provided by numerous NGOs, universities, voluntary associations and others. The "Online information on social benefits for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants" project has created an online platform, that aims to update every refugee and migrant who needs to come into contact with organisations, who offer all kinds of social benefits.² The basic services/benefit categories that make up the backbone of the programme include language courses and 40 stakeholders appear to offer such courses for adults TCNs.

Nevertheless, these are small scale projects which cannot cover the needs of TCNs for social orientation, have a minimum impact on their integration process and no impact on the legal status of TCNs.

II. Legal and institutional framework

1. Legal framework of social orientation

Law No 4251, which was adopted in April 2014, named "Immigration and Social Integration Code and other provisions"³ gathers all the provisions on migration previously contained in 20 laws, 6 presidential decrees and 42 regulatory acts. The same Law sets the framework of the integration policies for Greece. More specifically under part three: "Social Integration- Organisational arrangements – Transitional and other provisions – Chapter A Social Integration" and Article

¹ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission, last updated 11/1/2018.

² <http://refugees.gr/>.

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/law-4251/2014---immigration-social-integration-code-and-other-provisions>.

129 “Basic principles of social integration - Integrated Action Plan/For the purpose of integrating third-country nationals who legally reside in the country”, the Ministry for the Interior implements, in collaboration with the competent ministries and authorities, a strategy that includes an Integrated Action Plan.

The National Strategy for the Integration of third-country nationals and the Integrated Action Plan, which is based on the fundamental principles of avoidance of any form of discrimination, on the basis of criteria laid down in the Greek Constitution, and respect of fundamental rights and protection of cultural specifics - consist of sub-plans which among others include: a) learning of the Greek language, history and culture; b) information campaigns addressing third-country nationals in relation to health, social security and work; c) intercultural mediation; and d) enhancing the participation of third-country nationals in collective action in immigration integration boards.

The National Strategy contains the following definitions:

“The National Strategy borrows the term [integration] from the 1st Common Basic Principle of European Union [Council of the European Union (2005), Common Framework for Integration: Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union, COM (2005) 389]: “Integration is a dynamic, interactive process of mutual adjustment both of migrants and of the citizens of member-states”.

[...]

“Social Integration aims to secure the rights of the Third Country Nationals, rights that guarantee their equal participation in the economic, social and cultural life of the country on the one hand, while on the other they aim to secure the responsibility [by the migrants] to respect the fundamental terms and values of the Greek society” [National Strategy, p. 47]

The strategy places emphasis on training and developing the skills of third country nationals and includes policy objectives on access to reception, language and introductory courses and social and health services. However, it served more as a roadmap with integration proposals rather than an explicit commitment of the state to implement the suggested policies.

One of the reasons that led to this was that integration policies have been considered as a luxury in Greece the last 3 years due to the fact that the country has experienced an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants which reached its peak with the closure of the border between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece in early March 2016. That had the effect of leaving thousands of refugees and migrants stranded in Greece – often without adequate accommodation, healthcare and access to food and clean water. After almost 3 years since the beginning of the “refugee crisis”, the situation in Greece today can still be characterised by a series of upheavals and uncertainties regarding the services provided. The policies implemented have focused in ensuring accommodation, cash assistance, access to health and education for the children.

Currently, preparation of a new Immigration and Social Integration Action Plan by the Ministry of Migration Policy is expected to be announced. The General Secretary of the Ministry of Migration Policy, Mr. Miltiades Klapas, announced in the 4th Coalition Meeting for the Social Integration of Refugees organised by ANTIGONE (Information and Documentation Center on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non Violence) on 11 December 2017 that at the beginning of 2018 it will be open to public consultation and will entail a project for adult third country nationals who reside legally in Greece to follow Greek language courses in collaboration with Greek Universities.

There are currently **no social orientation courses obligatory by law** in Greece nor were any in the past.

In order for a course to be obligatory it should be able to cover the whole TCN population. The vast number of TCNs since the early 1990s “prohibited” obligatory initiatives and no such policies could be supported by the state.

The social orientation courses have **no impact on legal situation/status**. Sufficient knowledge of the Greek language however is one of the requirements for obtaining long-term residence status (Art. 89, 90) as well as for the naturalisation process.

According to the Migration Code of 2014 (Art. 107, para. 1), sufficient knowledge of Greek language, history and civilisation is certified – among other ways – by a language certificate of minimum level B1, provided according to law 60/2010. In exceptional cases, sufficient knowledge of Greek may be certified by language level A1 or A2, if the ministers of the interior and education submit a specific ministerial act (Art. 107, para. 3). Moreover, beside the language test, Greek language attainment can be certified in one of the following ways: a) by certification of a Greek primary or secondary school, b) by certification by foreign Greek schools, c) by certification issued by Greek language departments of foreign universities, d) by certification attesting to the knowledge of the Greek language. In relation to the modification of the Greek Citizenship Code, the competent committees of the Ministry of Interior examine the level of knowledge of language based on specific criteria.

According to Circular No 8 on the modification of the Greek Citizenship Code the candidate must be able to comprehend a conversation between two native speakers about simple everyday issues and understand simple public announcements. He/she must also be able to comprehend simple advertising, notes and instructions. As regards writing, he/she must be able to write simple short texts related to everyday situations and give basic information. He/she must also be able to fulfil simple everyday language functions in simple communication situations, such as greeting, introducing, apologising, talking on the phone, writing simple letters, exchanging information on simple topics, understanding and making simple announcements, expressing positive or negative feelings, desire or obligation to do something, offering something, inviting and making suggestions.

It is noted that weakness in writing is basically an indication of reduced integration. However, in the case of persons that otherwise communicate in writing in another language (e.g. their mother tongue), illiteracy cannot be regarded as a negative factor, especially when it is offset by appropriate oral communication in the Greek language and appropriate integration in social and economic life. It is noted that the applicant has the option to submit documents certifying their level of knowledge of Greek. However, the Committee is not obliged to take them into account.

2. Course/module providers

Two major integration projects have been implemented on **national level** in Greece:

✓ **The programme “Odysseus”**

The Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation, in the context of education of migrants in the Greek language and Greek culture, set in 2014 the second phase of the implementation of the programme “Odysseus”. This programme is addressed to European Union citizens and third country nationals irrespective of their origin from the age of 16 years and older, who are legally residing in Greece. The programme is integrated in the Operational Programme “Education and Lifelong Learning” of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs and is co-funded by the European Union and the Hellenic State. The purpose of the Training Programme is to help learners acquire the language skills and practices, social and intercultural skills that are required for their and their families’ social integration. The training Programme is structured in levels A1 (duration of 125 hours) and A2 (duration of 175 hours) B1 (185 hours) and B2 (195 hours) and the courses are provided free of charge. This programme is held in every regional unit of the country.

After successful completion of each level, the trainees could participate in the respective Greek language exams (which are conducted twice a year under the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning, of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs). According to the project announcement, apart from their main educational purpose, the classes aim to develop the trainee’s competences necessary for the certification of knowledge of the Greek language, history and culture. This knowledge will facilitate both the effective social inclusion and the lingua-cultural competence required for the certification exams. Finally, the educational process is based on a standard certification system relating to the recognition of the political and social rights of the trainee (e.g. the long-term resident status). 2015-2016 was the last

year the lessons took place. It has not been possible to retrieve information on the numbers of trainees and/or the municipalities in which it took place.

✓ **ESF projects**

The Department of Social Integration of the General Secretariat for Population and Social Cohesion of the Ministry of Interior implemented several social inclusion programmes with co-financing from the European Integration Fund (EIF) in the framework of the Annual Programme (AP) of 2013. They were designed, announced and implemented in June 2014, January and March 2015. The target group of the European Social Fund (ESF) was third country nationals who reside legally in Greece, while it was predicted that the implementation of the actions should primarily focus on actions relating to the integration of newly arrived third country nationals.

Programs included language and history courses for migrants. However, many of these integration measures were implemented temporarily without clear monitoring and evaluation and, as a result, were fragmented and ad hoc.

The Project was entitled: “Greek language courses, of history and culture to immigrants, unemployed individuals, single mothers, individuals with disabilities, and illiterate individuals”, and, through the learning of the Greek language and components of the Greek history and Greek culture (and the parallel creation of the corresponding teaching material) on targeted groups of third country nationals (TCN), aimed at:

- a) strengthening the process of integration of vulnerable groups of migrants, the development of the language skills of unemployed individuals which would contribute to better use of their professional/occupational qualifications;
- b) the educational empowerment of migrants with disabilities (via the creation of electronic and printed educational material and via methods of training specifically tailored to the needs of all disability categories) and
- c) the acquisition of language skills of immigrant mothers aiming at understanding of the educational programmes of their children and their potential support in the educational process.

Through this project lessons were organised in 7 cities in Greece. The project was implemented by NGOs, universities and other stakeholders.

✓ **Greek universities language courses**

Many Greek universities provide language lessons through their respective departments of languages. Online and in-class programmes are implemented. These lessons usually carry a fee except for free courses, funded under projects.

The Modern Greek Language Teaching Centre of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens has been functioning since the 1950s, initially with a very limited number of students. In the decades that followed the number of students increased exponentially.⁴

The Teaching Centre is under the auspices of the Interdepartmental Programme for the Teaching of Modern Greek as a second/foreign language along with the similarly titled Master's Degree Programme of the Department of Philology and the Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology.

The aims of the Modern Greek Teaching Centre are as follows:

⁴ The Modern Greek Teaching Centre is the largest of its kind in the world. Many of its graduates are today teachers of Modern Greek and Philology at Universities throughout the world, members of the diplomatic corps in their own countries, church leaders, renowned scientists, company managers, respected artists and business professionals.

- ✓ The teaching of Modern Greek as a second/foreign language;
- ✓ The certification of the level of knowledge of Modern Greek as second/foreign language;
- ✓ The exposure of foreigners to various facets and themes of Greek culture;

Furthermore, the E-Learning University of Athens, recognising the necessity of actions and programmes specifically focused on refugees currently fleeing their countries and seeking a better life in Europe, has designed a Greek language learning programme specifically addressed to them. The program is free of charge and can be followed remotely through a specially designed educational platform.

Foreigners and expatriates can take lessons of Modern Greek in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. There are also courses for special purposes and seminars for teachers. Additionally, Greek language is certified with participation in the examinations of N.L.C. (National Language Certificate) for foreigners interested to be introduced to higher Greek education institutions. Tuition fees vary, depending on the different circumstances, but there are occasionally dispensations and free courses specifically for the refugees through project funding.

Local authorities are neither responsible nor actively engaged in policies concerning social orientation or integration of third country nationals. Only recently a number of municipalities (11 at the time of drafting the report) have agreed to provide urban accommodation and cash assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in Greece through the 'Employment enhancement and Social services integration in Athens Municipality' (ESTI@). Urban accommodation provides a normal daily life for refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, facilitates their access to services, including education, and the eventual integration for those who will remain in the country but no other policies related to social orientation courses for adults have been adopted in this framework.

Initiatives through European projects are implemented by municipalities but those are small scale pilot projects addressing a very low proportion of the TCNs population.

Many **volunteer and social organisations** are making an effort to help and provide actual solidarity to immigrants and political refugees by teaching them the Greek language. Apart from teaching the Greek language, these initiatives are generally aiming at the legal support of immigrants, their integration in the Greek society and the development of personal relationships between nationals and non-nationals.

The Greek Forum of Refugees created an online platform, that aims to update every refugee and migrant who needs to come into contact with organisations, who offer all kinds of social benefits. That can be achieved with direct access to these organisations through the online information platform, which is displayed in a special category on the site of the Greek Forum of Refugees⁵ in the Social Services category. The basic services/benefit categories that make up the backbone of the programme include Greek language Lessons. There is a database of 40 NGOs, volunteer organisations, social organisations and Universities which provide lessons either free of charge or not. Information on those was gathered in April-June 2016.

Some representative courses are presented below:

Since September 2010, **METAdrasi**⁶ has been active, either through the implementation of ERF projects, or voluntarily, in teaching Greek as a foreign language to asylum seekers and refugees. According to METAdrasi, this activity differs from the usual language teaching methods since it has been specifically designed for the needs of the target group: the courses are intensive and adjusted to the language particularities/abilities of the participants, as well as to their subsistence and integration needs.

⁵ <http://refugees.gr/>.

⁶ <http://metadrasi.org/en/campaigns/greek-language-courses/>.

The main aim is to achieve fluency in oral communication for beginners (mostly in order to facilitate access to the labor market) in a short period of time, and to certify proficiency in Greek through the appropriate university exams at an advanced level. This particular action is implemented in cooperation with the Modern Greek Language Teaching Centre of the University of Athens. The cooperating professors, the methodology and the teaching material all come from this particular University Department.

The “**Sunday School for Migrants**” (Kyriakatiko Sxoleio Metanastwn) is an initiative organised by both Greeks and migrants which provides Greek language courses for migrants, targeting migrant integration.⁷ It provides every Sunday on a volunteer basis Greek language courses in the premises of an elementary school.

The Open School for Migrants is an association that operates in the 14th highschool of Pireus and was established in 2005 by teachers. The aim of the Open School is to “promote the cultural and social development of migrants and refugees”, by offering Greek language courses, providing legal support, assistance in cases of racist violence and bringing migrants and Greeks⁸ into contact with each other. The volunteers of Kypseli ‘GEFYRES” and the Social Center “Steki Metanaston” in Thessaloniki are also active in providing Greek language courses.

No **private sector providers** of course have been noted.

III. Audience

1. Coverage of social orientation courses, by category of non-nationals

There are no statistics on the coverage of social orientation courses, by categories of non-nationals having access to/obligation to attend social orientation courses/modules.

2. Initiatives targeted at specific non-national groups

There are no initiatives targeting a specific group. As mentioned above the most common social orientation course in Greece is language courses which are referring to all non-nationals.

IV. Courses/modules’ characteristics

✓ The programme “Odysseus”

The programme was delivered in person, in the Greek language. The training Programme was structured in levels A1 (duration of 125 hours) and A2 (duration of 175 hours) B1 (185 hours) and B2 (195 hours):

A1: Introductory courses in Greek language, history and culture, as well as in the lifestyle of the Greek society. The learners develop their linguistic skills but also useful social skills, in order to deal with communication situations of everyday life and familiarise with the social environment, history and culture of the country

⁷ Greece, [Sunday School for Migrants](#).

⁸ Greece, [Open School for Migrants](#).

A2: Courses on Greek language, history and culture

B1: The candidate is able to act in an autonomous and effective way under common communication circumstances. At this level, the learner, who has successfully completed the level A2 and is well aware of the living conditions and the social conventions governing various activities, will be trained to a higher level of comprehension and production of written and oral word, thanks to which he will be able to meet situations like ordinary transactions of everyday life that require the use of highly stable linguistic structures.

B2: with emphasis on speaking skills: The development of speaking skills (i.e.comprehension and production of oral word) meets the daily communication needs of the target group (adult immigrants), when this group comes in contact with the native speakers of modern Greek in the host country. The learner is trained on communication activities, in order to be able to understand the main topic of radio and television shows, to spontaneously participate in a conversation on subjects which directly affect his life (family, work, hobbies, travel/transport, news) and express his/her experiences, views, needs, desires and goals. At this level of knowledge of the Greek language, the learner must also acquire basic knowledge of history, culture and sociopolitical organisation of the host country (Greece). The certification of this knowledge can be also performed through an oral exam.

The programme was co-funded by the European Union (European Social Fund) and National Funding and was provided free from charge. No financial support was given for attendance.

After successful completion of each level, the trainees could participate in the respective Greek language exams which are conducted twice a year under the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning, of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. They were given a certificate for participation.

✓ **The volunteers of Gefyres, Kypseli-Athens**

Those are in-person, everyday evening courses in the premises of a public school, delivered in Greek, or English, when necessary. The courses have 3 Levels (beginners/medium/ advanced), 2 hours lesson per level and twice per week. They are free from charge, based on volunteer contributions and donations. No exams are held and no certification is provided.

V. Content of courses

The courses **aim to** provide TCNs Greek language lessons as a first step to integrate in societies, and, as a result, to introduce them into the main norms, the principles and history of the hosting society.

The **themes covered** are mainly language, and in some cases history and law.

Teaching methods consist of lectures, interactive discussions, study visits.

The **host societies** are not participating in these courses although in some of the initiatives the teachers are volunteers and there are individual efforts on bringing together the host and foreigners' communities.