

EWSI Analysis on Voluntary and Citizens' Initiative: Greece

1 INTRODUCTION

Are considered as citizens' initiatives all activities mobilising large numbers of volunteers (e.g. in workplaces, schools, local communities, etc.) to support immigrants' long-term integration and/or open up the public to integration matters and diversity. **These initiatives most notably involve people-to-people or mutual learning activities** matching migrants with mentors, peers or people volunteering their time or space. These initiatives may concern housing, mentoring, child or university-level education, extracurricular activities for children, lifelong learning, language learning, information provision, assistance with public services, translation, job preparation, awareness-raising/advocacy, etc.

Given EWSI's thematic focus, the emphasis is placed on citizens' initiatives focusing on long-term reception (e.g. during the asylum procedure) and integration (of beneficiaries of international protection and/or other categories of migrants), and not on the **initial front-line humanitarian reception for asylum-seekers** (e.g. food, clothing, shelter before entering the reception phase).

2 LONG-ESTABLISHED VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of initiatives that have been running for several years.

ASANTE

Asante is a PanHellenic non-governmental, non-profit organisation founded in 2008 by young activists with migrant background. It emerged from the need for a strategic organisation for their activities. In the past few years, Asante has participated in a broad network of partnerships developed with existing NGOs and state structures:

- Asante is a founding member of the Greek Forum for Refugees and the Migrant Integration Council of Athens.
- It is responsible for transforming the celebration of International Migrants' Day in Greece into a two-way process of discussion between state authorities and local governance, and associations of migrants and refugees on the others.
- In 2013, it implemented a pilot program of extracurricular lessons in cooperation with Athens municipality. Lessons were provided to schoolchildren, in cooperation with volunteer tutors.
- Members of Asante regularly organise information seminars focusing on youth with migrant origins (e.g. obtaining and renewing residence permits and citizenship or cultural mediation

Greek Refugees Forum

The Greek Refugees Forum was established in 2012 by a group of activists with migrant/refugee background. The aim of the Forum is to create, on Panhellenic scale, a network of individuals working to support of asylum seekers, political refugees, stateless people, as well all others who may meet the criteria set by the Convention of Geneva and the protocols, or the Greek framework for the protection of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless. The main actions evolved around the following axis:

- Protection of Refugees' and asylum seekers Rights
- Awareness raising towards both the public and authorities
- Encouraging participation and integration of refugees
- Networking in Greece and abroad

The forum cooperates with the following organisations:

- Greece: [Racist Violence Recording Network](#), [Campaign for Access to Asylum](#)
- Europe: [European Council for Refugees and Exiles \(ECR\)](#)
- Internationally: [PICUM](#), [International Detention Coalition \(IDC\)](#)

Greek Forum of Migrants

The Greek Forum of Migrants (GFM) is a PanHellenic network of migrant organisations and communities. Founded in September 2002, it now counts 40 member organisations. It is based on a collective action plan, formed through ongoing consultation, with the objective of representing and strengthening the voice of migrants and their organisations in Greece, as well as to promote their inclusion and participation in the Greek society.

Babel - Day Centre for migrants' mental health

Day Centre Babel provides mental health services to migrants (individuals, families and groups) of all ages. Babel's staff has established partnerships with 200 agencies that either work with or can become accessible to migrants in order to cover a wide range of the needs of the migrant population. 37 volunteers and trainees are involved in Babel's activities and 200 more have participated in various training activities.

With two languages

The initiative started with a group of researchers at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki who work on language development and bilingualism for children and adults. Their aim is to bridge the gap between academia and society by informing bilingual families, educators, and policy makers about the benefits and the costs of bilingualism. They offer information sessions and consultancies to schools, parents, national and international organisations. They also stay in contact with international organisations which are engaged with policy makers in an advisory role and contribute to reports and consultations promoting multilingualism in Greece. This initiative was published as [good practice on the European Website on Integration](#).

Polydromo

It is an inter-university educational and research group focusing on bilingualism and multicultural education. This initiative was published as a [good practice on the European Website on Integration](#).

Its main projects are:

- The '[Greek-Arabic project](#)' was funded by OPAP (Organisation for Football Games Prognostics) that promoted the contact between the two cultures and their languages in Greece. It aimed to build knowledge on the Arabic language and culture and change their stereotypical images.

- 'Dialogos' was a project that aimed to promote and reinforce the cooperation between school and migrant parents and their communities. Its activities include multilingual publications, projects, conferences, workshops etc.

Open school for migrants – Pireia

The Open School for migrants was established in 2005 by volunteer teachers and activists in Pireia. Language courses are proposed free-of-charge and held every Sunday. The members of the school collect financial means from various sources in order to provide migrants with books and learning materials.

The aims of the School are to:

- cover the need to learn Greek,
- provide legal support,
- address issues of racial violence,
- contribute to better coexistence between Greeks and migrants through mutual learning and acceptance of differences, with the aim of allowing smooth integration of migrants as equal members of Greek society.

Social Support Centre for migrants in Chania, Crete

This is a community based centre which operates on voluntary basis and aims at teaching Greek to migrants, but also proposes classes in other languages such as Arabic, Turkish, Spanish, English and Russian. They also organise public discussions aiming at raising issues and promoting initiatives with impact on local level.

Medical and Social Welfare Volunteers Centre in Rethymno, Crete

The Medical Centre of Social Solidarity was established in 2008 by volunteers: doctors, pharmacists, nurses, gynaecologists, midwife, dentists and volunteers employed as public servants at the Municipality of Rethymno. The clinic provides free services to patients who do not have insurance.

Sunday school for migrants

The Sunday School for migrants was an initiative undertaken by migrant and Greek volunteers to teach the Greek language to migrant workers and refugees. Members actively participate in the social movement titled "Deport RACISM" that protects the rights of migrants and refugees against racism and xenophobia in Athens. Classes are held during the weekends. The volunteers are mostly teachers and students.

Generation 2.0

The Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity is an organisation of young people with migrant and Greek origin. Member of Generation 2.0 volunteered their time to organise events and manage the Ithageneia campaign entitled: "Equal citizens. Right to citizenship" was a Greek-wide campaign which stood for the right to citizenship for all children with migrant background who were born and/or raised in Greece. The main goals of the campaign were:

- to inform the Greek society about the problems those youngsters face,
- to fight stereotypes and prejudices that accompany them,
- to challenge the jus sanguinis model of citizenship acquisition,
- to promote diversity and make it visible as vital part of the Greek society

3 NEW VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of major initiatives started only recently, particularly since the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015.

"Melissa" the migrant women network

Melissa is a network of migrant women in Greece, promoting empowerment, communication and active citizenship, where volunteers work with refugee women to help them during their stay in Athens as well as integrate into Greek society. Although the [Melissa Migrant Women's Network](#) was created in 2014, its members have carefully considered the [role they want to play in the recent migration crisis](#). In this context, the Melissa Network has worked to cultivate communication between the small, but active, NGOs in Athens and international charities, such as Save the Children and Afghan community in Athens.

[ALMASAR](#)

This initiative was launched by young people with migrant background with the aim to promote the idea of a new generation of Greeks that share common concerns and dreams. Its main purpose is Intercultural Mediation in all sectors (health, education, public services, etc.) with a particular focus in the health sector. Members and volunteers of ALMASAR are professionals such as nurses, doctors, psychologists, sociologists and social workers but also people of other specialties.

2.2.3. START-UP BOAT INITIATIVE

Entrepreneurs from around the world are contributing to solve Europe's refugee crisis in the [Startup Boat: Migration](#) experiment. The aim is to develop tech and innovative solutions to ease refugees' access to information and their integration in their new host countries.

The initiative has grown out of two mobile Startupboat hackathons, during which innovators travelled to the frontline and assessed the situation and develop solution concepts to make the migration process a more human process. In this context, four projects have been implemented: First Contact, Migration Hub, Translation Kit and the Lesvos Shelter Project. The project is inspired by an idea which already existed in Berlin and other EU cities¹.

[NGO Angalia](#)

Founded in 2009 by local orthodox priest Father Stratis and a few more volunteers, The NGO wants respond to the need for shelter for the unaccompanied minors. The purpose of the organisation is to support the disadvantaged fellow citizens care, irrespective of religion, gender, race and country, covering the immediate needs of clothes, shoes, food, shelter, medicines, toiletries etc. This year, they are supporting the refugees arriving by boats to Lesvos.

¹ <http://www.migrationhub.eu/>
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/amyguttman/2015/09/25/startup-boat-how-entrepreneurs-are-solving-europes-refugee-crisis/>

[Refugee Welcome Ελλάδα!](#)

Refugee Welcome is an initiative that enables refugees coming to Greece to live in shared flats instead of open shelters and other mass accommodation facilities. The initiative is inspired by the [Germany](#).

4 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

Description and comparison of the profile of volunteers active in old versus new initiatives.

The new initiatives involve a large number of volunteers, but the majority of them came from other countries in order to provide help to refugee groups that arrive at the islands of Greece, namely Lesbos, Hios and Leros. Many new volunteers – either Greeks or foreigners – usually arrive at the Greek islands without prior experience in humanitarian help, while others come under their organisations’ umbrella.

Volunteers involved in integration initiatives, namely language classes or health services seem to be equally shared between Greek citizens and migrants. There are cases where initiatives have started from migrants such as the Migrant or Refugees Forum, Generation 2.0, NGO Asante, with Greek supporters following them. There are other initiatives where Greek citizens appear to be more active in setting up the structure, such as the Medical Clinic and the Centre in Chania or the Migrants Sunday Schools in Athens and Pirea.

With regard to new initiatives dealing with the ad hoc assistance of refugees arriving at Greek islands, Greek volunteers seem to be more active and flexible to adjust their activities according to the immediate needs of the momentum. The NGO Angalia in Lesbos and Melissa Network in Athens provide some of these. Other ad hoc initiatives, such as Start-up Boat or Refugees Welcome, are usually inspired by similar initiatives in European countries

5 INNOVATION ASPECT

Description and comparison of innovative or entrepreneurial aspects of the old versus new initiatives.

The entrepreneurial aspects are observed only in relation to the initiative started from Start-up Boat, which is quite new. It is too early to draw any conclusion.

6 IMPACT:

Description and comparison of the impact of old versus new initiatives.

The impact of the old initiatives is valuable as their activities are tailored to have a long term impact in favour of both migrants and the society in the field of social cohesion, language classes and in some cases, provision of health services.

In the context of emergency response, the impact of the new initiatives is very valuable, as it come to fill the state's lack of resources both in human and material terms.

Organisations active on the ground are also coordinating the individual initiatives but as the sustainability of such initiatives lies on the motivation of volunteers, measuring their long-term impact may be difficult.