

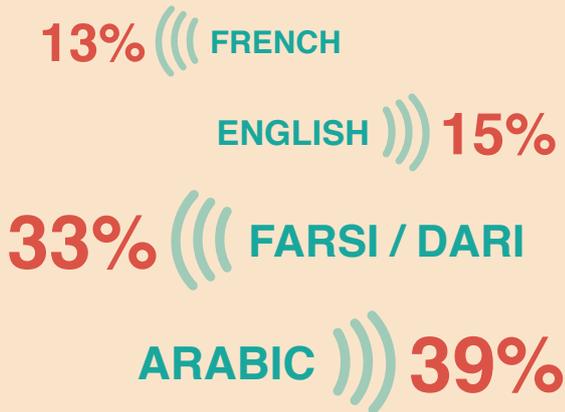
REFUGEE VOICES ON

INTEGRATION

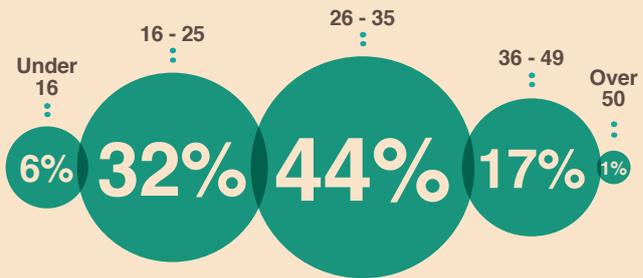
This week Internews presents a four-page special issue of *In The Loop* featuring the voices of refugees and migrants in Greece and FYROM on the complex topic of integration. Since March 2016, when the borders closed, thousands of refugees have ended up in Greece and bordering countries, unable to move on. Many are applying for relocation or family reunification to other European countries, others for asylum in Greece. For

those choosing to stay in Greece, they try to move on with their lives and start the process of integration. This special issue highlights which factors might help or hinder the process of integration by giving space for refugee and migrants to express themselves. Their opinions and experiences can also provide some ideas for the humanitarian and development community to foster integration activities and programming.

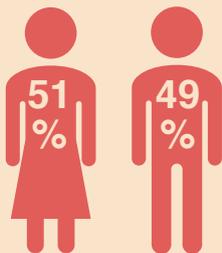
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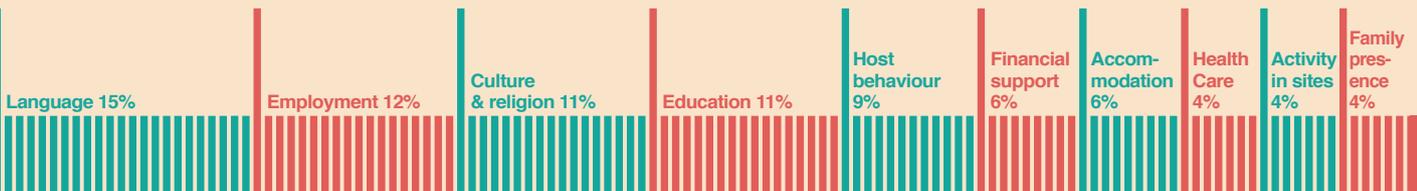


METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH:

Internews opted for a qualitative research methodology to enable a wide range of refugees and migrants to freely express their views on the topic of integration. The target group at the centre of this special edition of *In The Loop* (ITL) are asylum seekers, most of whom are still waiting for a decision on their application process (asylum, reunification or relocation). We collected the voices of different communities of interest including women, young single males, minorities in sites, families, refugees living in accommodation, both at informal and formal camps. We also gathered the views of other connected groups, like humanitarian workers (in

both Greece and Balkan countries) and the host communities. We consulted a total of 72 people by conducting seven Focus Group Discussions and key informant interviews in 4 languages, Arabic, Farsi, French and English, in nine locations across Greece and FYROM. Participants and interviewees were consulted on this topic through open-ended guiding questions such as: *What does integration mean to you? What are the main barriers or enablers for the integration process in the host country? What do you expect from integration? How might your integration be enhanced?*

Most popular topics*:



LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION: THE FIRST STEP IN SETTLING SOMEWHERE



When discussing integration with respondents, learning the language of the host country is often the first topic to come to mind. They refer to language skills as a key enabler to do all the other things necessary to start a life, like attending schools, looking for a job or interacting with host communities. They wish they had more support to learn Greek in a consistent and professional way. Parents mentioned how worried they are about their children's education opportunities because of the language barrier.

I want to learn Greek and English so that I can find a job but I don't know where to leave my little children who don't go to school yet.
- Somali female, 26-35, Eleonas

At the hospitals they don't see us as humans. The doctors only speak Greek and English and many of us only speak Arabic. This lack of communication hinders proper treatment and full understanding.
- Syrian Kurd male, 36-49, Ritsona

The main problem is the language. They should help our children to be accepted in the Greek public schools by helping them with learning Greek.
- Syrian female, 18-25, squat Athens

We don't have access to any services here. The nearest hospital is very far and we can't just see a doctor like the Greek people can. To go to the hospital, we need money to travel. Like today is an example, we all got fined in the metro just to get here, even though they know we don't have any money to buy tickets.
- Afghan male, 18-25, Oinofyta



ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES: BUILDING THE STATE-CITIZEN RELATIONSHIP

Asylum seekers told ITL they would need additional support to access services such as housing, healthcare and schooling at the beginning of their integration process, as they don't have the same facilities as locals do. Stability is key for them to start thinking about moving ahead with their lives. They need stability during and after the asylum procedure, with access to decent accommodation so that they can then look for a job or start studying the local language. They mentioned the lack of access to schools or hospitals because of the distances involved and the lack of transportation as a real difficulty. They see fair access to state services as a first step in building a state-citizen relationship and generating trust in government and other institutions.

I am happy I have been provided with accommodation but in a month they made me move 4 times, with 2 hours' notice to pack or they would come with the police to evict me. I swear some nights I wake up and forget which house I am in. It is very stressful and I can't look into the future in those conditions.
- Iranian female, 26-35, accommodation Athens

I got the refugee status, and I want to settle in Greece. But I can't leave Moria, because I have nowhere to go. No job, no money, no help for accommodation... asylum in Greece means only papers. I don't know where to start, what should I do?
- Cameroun male, 18-25, Moria

Integration "is all about proper behaviour, dignity and acceptance".

RELATIONSHIP WITH HOST COMMUNITIES: CULTURE, RELIGION, DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICES



For asylum seekers living in formal and informal sites across Greece, their first encounter with host communities is very often with staff at public institutions such as hospitals, teachers in schools or civil servants at the Greek Asylum Service. Migrants often have a general sense of being treated disrespectfully and unfairly because of discriminatory attitudes based on their conditions or religion or perceptions of their country of origin. They mentioned as well their own desire to learn and exchange experiences about culture and tradition as key steps to starting the integration process. Many respondents highlighted that integration in a country "is all about proper behaviour, dignity and acceptance".

Unfortunately, no opportunity was given to us to learn the culture of the Greeks. And so now we do not know about them, their tradition and culture. I'd love to be able to tell them about my culture and learn about theirs, maybe it would help to coexist in a peaceful way and for them to understand what we've been through.
- Afghan male, 26-35, Elliniko

My children go to the Greek school along with the Greek students. I am so happy about it, because they are being properly treated and respected by everyone. This is the only positive thing that I faced since we arrived in Greece. Sometimes the school arranges outside activities and you cannot imagine my kids' excitement.
- Syrian female, 36-49, accommodation Athens

I feel they stare at me all the time because of my hijab. I thought of taking it off in order to be able to make friends.
- Syrian female, 18-25, accommodation Athens

We left Afghanistan for our own safety. When I am in a safe country where I can have an education, I will bring my family there, that's the most important thing to me.

- Afghan male, 18-25, Oinofyta

If the country can't protect us, why do they want us to stay here? Many times we were attacked by fascist groups or some fights erupted between the refugee communities. No one is doing anything about that. This was always the case in Samos and in other sites all over Greece as I heard. We don't feel either safe or stable... They should let us go elsewhere.

- Syrian Kurd male, 36-49, Ritsona

For me to feel integrated, I need my children to have education and to live in a place with law and order. But we have as well to respect the laws of the country we are in.

- Afghan female, 26-35, Elefsina

SAFETY AND PEACE: RULE OF LAW, TENSIONS BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND LACK OF SECURITY PROVISION



Given the often traumatic experiences of refugees, safety, peace and security were mentioned as the main reason for flight and a prerequisite for the destination country. Their experience of being stranded in camps gives them a bad opinion of the security conditions in Greece. They feel that the rule of law doesn't apply to them and they have nowhere to report abuses, fights and other forms of violence. They reported a lot of tensions between communities in camps and squats and a general lack of security provisions, making them feel unsafe and abandoned. They blame the humanitarian response for increasing tensions and resentment between communities because of perceived differences in treatment between nationalities.



WORK: JOB ACCESS AND ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES

Refugees and migrants told ITL that being able to provide for family and relatives, either here or elsewhere, is one of their first objectives. They wish they had more support to secure economic independence. Most of the respondents we talked to are not able to work because of legal or qualification barriers. They said they were willing to work for the community, contributing to camp activities, and not stay idle all day. They wish they had more activities like sports, language learning and training as the routine becomes depressingly monotonous after months, triggering psychosocial problems.

I was a nurse in my country, I wish I could do the same here but I am ready as well to do other jobs that don't require me to speak Greek perfectly, like hairdresser or beautician. In the meantime, I am learning Greek and participating in different types of women's group activities. It keeps me busy and it is good. Doing nothing in my room makes me think about my past and makes me sad and depressed.

- Congolese female, 26-35, accommodation, Athens

Syrians are used to work. And not to depend on others. They should know this. But we just need a push in the beginning until we are able to be independent.

- Syrian Kurd male, 36-49, Ritsona

They told us even Greeks can't find a job so there is no chance for us. If there were work here, we would stay. Greece reminds me in so many ways of my country. Work is the most important thing for a person's life. How will you feel integrated if you don't have a job?

- Syrian female, 18-25, accommodation Athens

"I need my children to have education and to live in a place with law and order."

Afghans need to back one another up; this would make a big difference. Like other communities do, they support each other and this makes them feel less alone.

- Afghan male, 18-25, Oinofyta

I want to go to Germany because I have my siblings there. I want to be with them and not stuck here in my own loneliness.

- Afghan female, 16-25, Melissa network

We are in Greece now and I want to be reunified with my son in Germany. But my daughter who is 20 years old has not been accepted because she is over 18. This is awful, and we can't leave her alone. I had to refuse family reunification with my son to stay here but I don't want to live here. They should stop splitting families like this, it is inhumane.

- Syrian female, 26-35, Ritsona



SOCIAL BONDS AND CONNECTIONS: THE PRESENCE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Asylum seekers mentioned the presence of their family or relatives as indispensable when it comes to settling in Greece or anywhere else. Family reunification is often their first priority. Some said that waiting for this kind of major decision is preventing them look to the future. They mentioned that the presence of social bonds was helpful for smooth integration. Social bonds and connections are particularly difficult for refugees and migrants who are physically isolated from cities and other hubs of human activity.

SUMMARY AND HOW CWC CAN HELP:

Overall, people reported that a sense of uncertainty is preventing them from moving ahead with their lives. The duration of the application process and the lack of communication and information on the next steps of their procedure is frustrating. Humanitarian workers in different countries reported that the prospects for integration of many asylum seekers seem low in reception countries, and cite the lack of long term planning by government authorities on this issue so far. However, ideas for better integration need to involve ref-

ugees and migrants themselves so they feel a sense of ownership. Listed here are ideas provided by the refugees and migrants to help them towards better integration. Some of the issues highlighted here are from perceived problems made worse by the lack of information, including the practical or administrative issues preventing NGO's from doing more. In these circumstances an approach involving all parties using Communicating with Communities (CwC) techniques could help breach this information gap. It would

give an awareness and acceptance of the difficulties involved and allow authorities, agencies and organisations to work with the refugees in developing solutions, rather than them being mere recipients.

“The FYROM Government has no program or even an idea for our integration; we only learned this when we got to the camp. I am deeply disappointed by the FYROM government and the EU”- Iraqi male, 26-35, Tabanovce, FYROM

WHAT RESPONDENTS WOULD LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN:



The quality of the instructor, the frequency and regularity of [language and other] classes are key for long term involvement of refugee students.
- Mytilene resident male, 26-35, Lesvos

It is very hard for us to be understood and it hinders proper communication and treatment in many public services. We desperately need interpreting support.
- Iranian female, 26-35, Athens



We need financial help to help us with transport, accommodation, or basic needs, just to start our lives, not forever. If they help us start, we will soon settle and integrate.
- Afghan female, 26-35, Athens

We have heard that one NGO's health programme failed because it was actually with higher standards than the Greek healthcare system. We need to provide the same standards for refugees and locals to maintain good relations and equal access to health care.
- Humanitarian worker, 26-35, Moria



We should try to mix refugees with host communities in a maximum of the activities we conduct and try to engage more local populations to help with acceptance. It kills prejudices on both sides.
- Mytilene resident male, 26-35, Lesvos

They should not separate our children from the Greeks at the public schools. If our children don't mingle with Greeks they will feel isolated and they will not learn the Greek language and the Greek culture.
- Syrian Kurd, male, 36-49, Ritsona



I wish they (NGOs and INGOs) would stop treating refugee communities differently. They are causing wars amongst refugees.
- Afghan female, 26-35, Elefsina



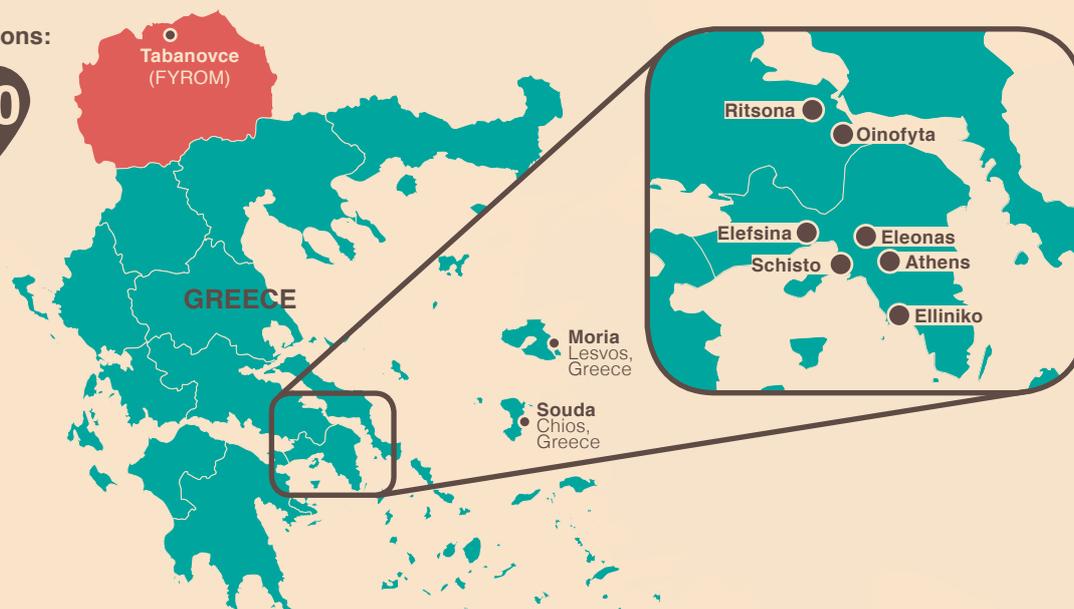
They have to stop separating families in the different asylum procedures. How can you feel well somewhere without your children?
- Syrian female, 36-49, Ritsona



For refugees who can work, NGOs should help them with finding a job. For those who can't work, they should pave the way for them to be able to do something and contribute to the camp life. Not doing anything is killing us slowly.
- Afghan male, 18-25, Schisto

locations:

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In The Loop explores the concerns and perceptions of people affected by the EU refugee crisis. Internews documents online and offline feedback gathered from refugees and migrants on a daily basis. By providing analysis of this feedback, the review aims to strengthen accountability and close the feedback loop by giving voice to affected persons. This issue of *In The Loop* is based on interactions recorded by Internews Refugee Liaison Officers. Interactions are documented in line with a set of common standards, and themes are developed inductively using content analysis techniques. A combination of general and unique themes is presented in order to represent dominant concerns and highlight minority voices. Any opinions and quotes expressed in this publication are those of the respondents and are not necessarily representative of the wider refugee population. Findings cannot be generalised across target group. We would like to thank all those people who agreed to participate in this research and were willing to give some of their time to share sometimes very personal information with us.