



Greek language training for immigrants



Studying the Greek language opens up other opportunities for immigrants

Project name

Greek language for immigrants

Project duration

January 2001 - December 2003

ESF priority area

Social Inclusion

Country

Greece

ESF funding

€21,915,236

Total funding

€28,127,835

ESF funding type

Objective 1

Target group

Immigrants/Asylum seekers

Name of coordinating organisation

Ministry of Employment & Social Protection, ESF Actions Implementation Authority¹
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There has been a large and rapid influx of immigrants into Greece since the early 1990s. Ensuring their access to the official labour market and social integration has become an important political priority. A language training initiative has helped almost 7,000 immigrants to learn Greek, increasing their chances of finding permanent and secure employment.

Greece's immigrants, almost all of whom have arrived in the last 15 years, now account for approximately 7% of the country's population. In 2001, an official census registered almost 800,000 resident foreigners, more than half of Albanian origin. Furthermore, the number of asylum seekers is steadily growing, with approximately 9,000 applications for asylum received in 2003.

Poor language skills limit opportunities

Most immigrants are absorbed into the informal economy, for example in the construction industry or in household services. Their jobs tend to be temporary, low paid and poorly regulated. Without adequate training and language skills, many immigrants find it difficult to enter the official labour market and as a result many remain on the margins of society long after they have moved to the country.

The ESF-funded initiative 'Greek language for immigrants', is part of a wider policy to encourage the social and economic integration of the immigrant community. Phase 1 of the project took place in 2003 and involved almost 7,000 immigrants. A second phase began in 2004 targeting 7,600 immigrants. In both phases, approximately 60% of participants were women.

"Helping immigrants to learn the Greek language is one of the most important first steps towards finding work and combating social exclusion," says Dimitris Psallidas, project coordinator within the Ministry of Employment & Social Protection. "This initiative is vital if immigrants are to settle and integrate into Greek society."

Further support is available

The Operational Programme on employment and vocational training, under which this initiative is funded, also supports several complementary measures targeting the immigrant community. For example, on completing a language course immigrants may apply for a traineeship, other lifelong learning opportunities, or for assistance in finding employment or setting up in business.