Challenge 3: Resilience in migration flow: Fast track inclusion of asylum seekers and their families

Resilience Innovation Camp

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The Thessaloniki Innovation Camp on Resilience 2017 aimed to develop grassroots ideas and projects on how to improve resilience and systematically address risks to the safety and well-being of citizens. To this purpose, 4 parallel working sessions were organised around corresponding challenges: Resilience of energy critical infrastructures for European defence (Challenge 1); Resilience in a financially volatile environment (Challenge 2); Resilience in migration flows (Challenge 3); and Resilience in regional innovation ecosystems (Challenge 4).

As depicted in the methodology Guide for innovation camps Innovation Camps, a tool for EU regions to identify and tackle societal challenges locally (Rissola et al., 2016)), each challenge had an owner and a facilitation process. The disposition to innovate and to collaborate with multiple stakeholders (even with local competitors/rivals) catalyses the power of collective/distributed intelligence for local development, strengthening cities and regions position in Europe and a globalised world. The key driving forces in the Innovation camps are determined by a perspective of change as work-in-progress, learning-by-doing, and are experimental in nature (see the Guide above mentioned). This short report is on Challenge 3 (Migration Flows). The development of discussions followed the method established and matured through the experience of previous camps. The promotion and proactive participation in Innovation camps of the Committee of the Regions has been key.

The process fluidly put forward ideas and opportunities. Understanding the challenge from diverse perspectives was prior to the proposals presented at the plenary session. A high degree of freedom was left to participants, who decided to tackle the challenged as originally set, whilst the identification of ‘problems-behind-the-problems’ emerged since the very beginning. A strong and unanimous self-warning was made not to reinvent the wheel. Indeed, the issue of integration of refugee population has been dealt with in numerous fora in the past 2 years in the EU, since the recent migration crisis started. For instance, in-depth discussions took place in the framework of the Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees of the
Urban Agenda for the EU. The main aim of the challenge was therefore refined as to provide concrete ideas to feed the Thessaloniki municipality for their Resilience Strategy.

The main objective of the challenge concerned the need for fast track integration of asylum seekers, refugees and their families with efficient and effective ways into the local and regional labour markets and the social life of their host community. Other objectives included: looking for inter-systemic, holistic solutions that enhance resilience to migration flows by embracing non-traditional collaborations, and working with the public and private sector; describing effective means for mapping skills and needs, matching supply and demand, and providing, where needed, proper training or reorientation; and managing the integration needs of migrants and refugees who do not regard the country and the city of residence as their final destination, but as a stopover on the migratory route.

Contextual notes

Large scale human migration represents a major urban challenge for now and the future. Independent of the causes for their migration, the majority of migrants remains concentrated in urban areas and will have an impact on their evolution. Cities not only need to develop mitigation strategies to deal with the effects of climate change and ageing infrastructures, but also need to adapt to migration waves and the stresses that they generate on the limited resource nexus and the social cohesion of the receiving community. In addition, the creation of opportunities for migrants needs to deal with a background of factors such as:

- Rigid labour markets and legal restrictions
- An increasing demand for the creation of ‘good’ jobs
- The improvement of employment of specific groups (e.g. young, aged, female, low-skilled workers), and
- The mitigation of economic inequalities in the host community
- Outward migration flows: brain drain from Thessaloniki young graduates who cannot encounter job opportunities locally

These issues underscore the need for cities to develop better practices to successfully integrate newcomers, and build the resilience that makes cities better for all residents. The challenge owner is a municipality that seeks solutions beyond short-term reaction policies to foster long-term opportunities that minimize disruptions in the city’s interdependent systems and services, embracing migration as a permanent feature of the future urban landscape.

Concrete questions for the challenge were on how to incorporate migration considerations into the design of key services and infrastructures; how to create opportunities for migrants to generate income, improve their access to financial services and promote business/entrepreneurial attitudes; and on how to address migrants fundamental needs while promoting initiatives that reduce real or perceived competition among newcomers and native residents.
In the case of migration in Greece, resilience is seen linked to preparedness to deal with new flows. Along the history, cities like Thessaloniki have witnessed migration flows and therefore a learning process has happened and is still taking place nowadays. Such a preparedness consists of resilience strategies and technological solutions existing, being implemented or to be conceived. In 1922, Thessaloniki city doubled in size due to the arrival of 130,000 refugees fleeing conflict in Asia Minor. This had knock-on effects for residential development. During the Second World War, the city lost nearly its entire Jewish population, around 20% of the total population in 1940, as 50,000 Greek Jews were sent to concentration camps.

The city now plays host to a new wave of refugees from Syria and the Middle East. An estimated 15% of Greece’s total refugee and immigrant population reside in metropolitan Thessaloniki, and while many are in transit to other destinations in Europe, a significant number are expected to remain in the city (Resilient Thessaloniki - A Strategy for 2030). Compounding these challenges, Greece’s recent economic and social difficulties have led to an increase in the population at risk of poverty across all ages and social groups.

On the positive side, these circumstances have also inspired an increase in citizen-led initiatives, solidarity networks, new skills and resource sharing systems, and demand for more active participation in the everyday life and decision-making processes of the city (Resilient Thessaloniki - A Strategy for 2030). From the Data Hub in the Knowledge Centre for migration and demography (JRC-EC), for Greece overall, there were 174K arrivals in 2016 (873K in 2015), 49K first-time asylum applications in 2016 (up from 11K in 2015) of which 2.7K positive decisions to grant asylum in 2016 with a recognition rate (positives over all decisions) of 24%.

Finally, as noted in the European Agenda on Migration, migration is both an opportunity and a challenge for the EU. Its better management, in turn, enhance EU resilience. Operational authorities, policymakers and the scientific community, including the JRC, are joining forces to achieve this ambitious EU objective. The agenda's pillar are the prevention of irregular migration; the saving of lives and securing the external borders; the strengthening of the common asylum policy; in view of the future demographic challenges facing the EU, the development of a new policy on legal migration attracting workers that the EU economy needs, with a particular focus on the recognition of qualifications and entry facilitation, this being a major policy pillar for which the objectives of the present camp are relevant.

Participants, arranged into two groups, came up with the two proposals described below.
Outcome of the sessions

Proposal 1: **Transposable model for the creation of a socio-economic co-op**

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**Proposed Actions**

The goal of the proposed prototype is creating employment in the agricultural sector in Thessaloniki areas, specifically in the Central Macedonia regions surrounding the city, for refugee families as a mean to achieve socio-cultural inclusion. The model proposes the following sequence of actions:

- The formulation of a well-educated planning team is seen necessary as a first step
- Co-operatives like-minded approach in the regions of Thessaloniki and nearby
- The preparation, execution and monitoring of market opportunity analysis at local, regional and national level
- A collection and mapping of refugees’ data. In this respect, Thessaloniki municipality monitoring services can find synergies with the AORI, the Athens Observatory for Refugees and Migrants
- Legal support and info guidance can be provided by NGO’s, state authorities and municipalities
- Skills matching with the needs of the co-operatives and companies are crucial and devoted databases are to be set up
- Training sessions with the affiliated local communities in the direction of keeping traditional production and agricultural methods
- Utilization of the refugees’ production know-how and knowledge, as well as linking with the existing structure of the firms
- Exploitation of the already initial interaction among the interested parties (NGO’s-co-operatives-refugees) in Central Macedonia

Schematically, the following graph summarizes these necessary steps:
What will this achieve? What is the societal impact?

- A further inclusion of the refugees-immigrants into the Greek-local society in Thessaloniki and the surroundings
- An increased activation of the local agricultural and agro-food community
- Jobs and businesses creation for refugees
- A working progression opportunities and evolution for the refugees
- A stable labour force for the co-ops and firms
- The establishment of a platform for jobs and skills matchmaking between co-ops/companies and refugees
- The enhancement of the local communities by the absorption of EU funds or private donors
- The organic growth of skills/knowledge sharing
- The cultivation and enhancement of export-oriented awareness within the primary sector
- Reinforcement of the intercultural viewpoint and habit exchanges, leading to an increased tolerance and mutual acceptance between refugees and locals
- Increased involvement from NGO’s in the decision-making process
- Monitoring and strengthening and proper management efficiency on a central-based level
- More competitive Greek companies in a global context leading to economies of scale

Who is Responsible?

- The planning team. The municipality of Thessaloniki is to facilitate and coordinate all related activities

Who will be involved?

- The planning team, including a refugees’ associations
- Agricultural Co-Operatives in the regions of: Central Macedonia with Thessaloniki as a base city
- Local municipalities and economic councils and developmental agencies
- Humanitarian NGO’s and local population commitment
- Legal authorities and supporting services
- Academic community and Universities and student internships
- Private sector (active involvement)

**Description of the best ideas**

- Competency building by putting the spotlight on the refugees
- Creation of a platform-network where the profiles of the refugees entitled to work will be at the discretion of companies and co-operatives who aim to hire people for such workload
- Showcase the first steps as the backbone for the long term establishment of the interconnection between refugees and the local labor market via the contribution of NGO’s and local communities
- Through education and constant learning, the refugees can get equipped to become valuable employees for the companies, gain new skills, and maintain their working status in the long run

**1<sup>st</sup> Steps: What must happen in the next 6 weeks?**

- Formulation of the executive team (municipalities+ NGO’s)
- Language learning sessions (municipalities+ NGO’s)
- Detailed refugee mapping and profiling (municipalities+ NGO’s)
- Contact and receive the refugees’ feedback (municipalities+ NGO’s)
- Create a skills survey for the refugees-candidates (planning team + NGO’s)
- Basic research on the local co-operatives and market analysis (planning team)
- Analysis of the legal framework (planning team)
- Identification of sources for EU funding or other donors’ sources (planning team)

**Prototyping: What must happen in the next 6 months?**

- Development and implementation of a prototype model and evaluation after 6 years(planning team)
- Approach co-operatives and presentation of the ideas and suggestions (planning team)
- Market analysis and daily-weekly monitoring (planning team)
- Interpretation and analysis of the results (planning team)
- Analysis of logistics and beginning of finding the proper physical capital (stockbreeding-cultivating firms, accommodation facilities, transportation, etc.) (municipalities+ NGO’s)
- Final selection of the co-ops and firms that will get involved into the model (municipalities+ NGO’s)
- Legal framework and guidance for the whole stakeholders of the program (municipalities+ NGO’s)
- Establishment of the training sessions that will support the long term vision (municipalities+ NGO’s)
- Monetization support by absorbing EU funds (planning team, municipalities+ NGO’s)

### Impact in 6 Years

- Job creation and decrease of the unemployment of refugees
- Urban and sub-urban embracement of refugees and immigrants
- Long-term oriented labor force in major industries
- Creation of added value products
- Local economy boost and sustainable competitive advantages
- Facilitation and modernization of documenting process for refugees
- Through the cooperation of stakeholders and the creative process, social cohesion, inclusion and economic growth will occur
- Promotion of civic competence for active citizenship

### Suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the Camp

- Participation of refugees
- More thorough information on the stakeholders of this Camp and the resources-activities in Thessaloniki and central Macedonia
- More available time for working groups
- Visitation of refugee camps, municipality authorities and owners
Proposal 2

**SPECTRUM - Strategy for Prevention of Exclusion / Tailored Responses for Integrating Migrants**

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**Description of Proposed Actions**

The proposed action plan is directly linked with the Resilience Strategy for Thessaloniki. Labour market needs can be identified in the action plan for resilience, which opens new markets for the city (e.g. sustainable transportation, green blue infrastructure, etc.). The action plan is inclusive both for local citizens as well as for migrants, in order to avoid conflicts and misperceptions. A market analysis will identify the needs for employment and entrepreneurship. Short tailor-made trainings will be designed according to needs, in partnership with competent educational and vocational training institutions. These will provide a fast track to required skills to match the market needs, thus creating employable citizens. A job portal to be created can provide immediate access to job openings. Migrants will be facilitated in the process of acquiring all necessary documentation through a one-stop info and service point in order to proceed to job search or engage in entrepreneurship, including also access to financing.

Activities to enable access to labour market for migrants, as well as for locals include the following:

- Identification and Mapping: (i) existing MoTh resources that can be mobilised to define the needs for capacity building; (ii) perceptions of locals and migrants in order to create a new narrative, that migrants are not competitors but can be active members of the society and can contribute to its welfare; (iii) migrant skills
- Elaborate on a market analysis to define labour market gaps & needs
- Connecting grassroots stakeholders and administration through novel consultation processes to define and develop new tools for integration
- Establish a Think Tank - permanent committee: Municipality- Private Sector- CSOs- NGOs-Migrant representatives to monitor the labour access process, evaluate and revisit according to needs and current trends.
- Establish partnerships with competent VET/Education/Training institutions and/or facilities for customised short trainings
- Establish partnerships with financing institutions (banks, etc.) to set up easy-to-reach entrepreneurs' funding programmes.
- Establish a one-stop info and service point to inform and guide migrants on how to access the job market
• Job portal matching job & entrepreneurial opportunities with migrants skills
• Labour market oriented short training courses, with valid certificates, to allow immediate employment
• A network of mid-size cities which face similar challenges to exchange best practices and lessons learned

What will this achieve? What is the societal impact?

• A narrative that highlights the benefits of social integration for migrants, including also in the labour market, will alleviate societal conflicts, especially in Thessaloniki or similar cities with high unemployment rates.
• Inclusion of both locals and migrants in the labour access programme, will also contribute to the social acceptance of migrants as an integral part of the society and alleviation of conflicts.
• Connecting the action plan for access to labour markets with the planned actions to implement the resilience strategy in the city

Who is Responsible?

• The Municipality of Thessaloniki to facilitate and coordinate all related activities

Who will be involved?

• Private sector to provide data for the employment needs and required skills as well as employment opportunities offers
• Competent VET/Education/Training institutions and/or facilities to develop and deliver short tailor made trainings to respond to market needs.
• Civil society and migrant organisations to raise awareness on the importance of integration of migrants using the narrative described
• Banks to create a financing mechanism for entrepreneurship (e.g. subsidies, low interest loans, etc.).
• Internationals financing institutions to finance needed facilities to enable labour access, e.g. one-stop info & service point, job portal, etc.
• Competent other organisations and networks, who can offer their expertise on current and future labour markets trends, linked also with the Resilience Strategy and Urban Development needs. These can also facilitate the exchange between other cities facing similar challenges (e.g. 100 Resilient Cities, Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean)
### Description of the best ideas

Opportunities for employment linked with the resilience strategy include among others:

- Recycling/Upcycling
- Sustainable mobility, e.g. bicycle service stations & rental; Thermaikos ferry services
- Green/blue infrastructure, e.g. Green walls/roofs
- Culinary business, etc.

### 1st Steps: What must happen in the next 6 weeks?

**Who should do what?**

- Municipality of Thessaloniki: (i) map internal resources; (ii) define the needs for staff capacity building; (iii) appoint a focal point and set up a task force/team; (iv) connect with key partners and stakeholders to initiate the consultation process; (v) exchange with cities with similar challenges on best practices and lessons learned; (vi) explore with financing institutions appropriate financing tools (loans, subsidies, grants) for entrepreneurship
- Set up the Think Tank/Permanent Committee (Municipality of Thessaloniki, Private sector, CSOs, Migrant organisations, Educational institutions).

### Prototyping: What must happen in the next 6 months?

**Who should do what?**

- Municipality of Thessaloniki with competent partners: (i) elaborate on migrant skills mapping; (ii) elaborate on market analysis in partnership with the private sector, NGOs, IGOs, also linked with the Resilience Strategy; (iii) set up the One-stop info and service point on access to labour market; (iv) develop a job portal with the support of tech companies
- Think Tank prioritises labour needs (define the market niche) and decide on appropriate training schemes (VET, etc) in partnership with Educational/VET/Training facilities.
- Educational/VET/Training facilities set up curricula for short training courses responding to current market needs
- In partnership with the private sector and current financing mechanisms (eg. ERDF, EU funds, bilateral donors aid, etc) incentives are established for private sector to hire migrants
- Banks establish a financing mechanism to facilitate entrepreneurship
- 50 migrants turn 18 and start a new job
## Impact in 6 Years

- Mechanism to allow easy access to labour market and entrepreneurship, to facilitate migrant integration is established and regularly revisited to remain up-to-date and respond to current and future needs
- A model on how to integrate migrants into labour markets, scalable and replicable in other cities worldwide is established
- 500 migrants turn 18 and have easy access to higher education and/or labour market

## Annex

### Background documents

**Global Migration: Resilient Cities at the Forefront.** Strategic actions to adapt and transform our cities in an age of migration. 100 Resilient cities network.

**The challenge of resilience in a globalised world.** Report by the JRC on resilience as a fundamental prerequisite for Europe as the largest integrated economic area in the world. Resilience requires the active cooperation of all stakeholders; citizens, the private sector, governments and NGOs included. This report discusses the concept of resilience from different perspectives and the role of science.

**Hiring refugees - What are the opportunities and challenges for employers?** OECD Migration Policy Debates series.


**Digital Humanitarianism: How Tech Entrepreneurs Are Supporting Refugee Integration,** a report by Meghan Benton and Alex Glennie (Migration Policy Institute) about the response of the tech industry to the challenges of refugee integration.

**Resilient Thessaloniki: A Strategy for 2030.** The strategy aims at shaping a thriving, sustainable, co-creating, and inclusive city; building a dynamic urban economy and responsive city; and re-discovering Thessalonki’s relationship with the sea.

**Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography.** The Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography is a European Commission initiative that focuses on better knowledge management for sound EU policy making on migration and related issues.
Innovation Camps, a tool for EU regions to identify and tackle societal challenges locally

Migrant integration 2017 edition. EUROSTAT. Migrant integration is measured in terms of employment, education, social inclusion and active citizenship in the host country. The analysis is based on 2015 statistics from the Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) and Eurostat’s migration statistics.

Glossary terms (from Migrant integration 2017 edition):

**Refugee**: Person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside his or her country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country.

**Asylum**: Form of protection given by a state on its territory based on the principle of ‘non-refoulement’ (no repulsing/sending back) and internationally or nationally recognised refugee rights. It is granted to a person who is unable to seek protection in his/her country of citizenship and/or residence, in particular for fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

**Asylum seeker**: Asylum applicant awaiting a decision on an application for international protection, granting or refusing a refugee status or another form of international protection.