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PRESS RELEASE

“LION “LOcal Alliance for INtegration” project

Over the last 4 years, Greece, has become one of the main European entry points for third country nationals (i.e. asylum seekers, refugees and migrants) seeking security and a better life for themselves and their families. Between 2015 and 2016 only, over 1 million of land and sea arrivals were registered in Greece. In 2017 and 2018, respectively 36 670 and 50 508 more arrivals were registered.¹ The influx turned the attention of many local and regional authorities, stakeholders, and humanitarian organisations as Greece was called to cope with the refugee crisis at the level of emergency. Four years later, the country is seeking to build strong mechanisms under which these new populations can integrate better to local societies. As of 28 February 2019, UNHCR estimates that 74 350 refugees and migrants arrived and remained in Greece since the 2015 – 2016 flow.²

As stated in the EU Agenda for integration as well as in Greek National Strategy for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) (2013, 2018), integration takes place locally, as part of everyday life where everyone has his/her role.³ In line with EU regulations and directives, the country - previously unprepared to host these populations - is making a strong effort at local level to sensitise the public with regards to the needs of the newcomers and design an integration plan at national level.

On the eve of these changes, the LION project, which is funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (2014-2020), with a duration of 24 months, implements its activities in the city of Thessaloniki. The programme aims at promoting the

¹ UNHCR (n/d), *Situation Mediterranean Situation, Operational Portal*.

Retrieved from <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>

² See UNHCR Greece Factsheet February 2019 retrieved from

<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/68627>

³ see A European Agenda on Migration, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf; See also, “Strategy for the Integration of Third-Country Citizens”, Ministry of Interior/General Secretariat for Population and Social Cohesion, Athens, 2013. Available at: http://www.ypes.gr/UserFiles/f0ff9297-f516-40ff-a70e-eca84e2ec9b9/ethniki_stratigiki.pdf



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active participation of TCNs in important aspects of community and societal life and enhancing the capacities of local authorities, in order to effectively address factors that lead to marginalisation and socio-economic exclusion of TCNs.

The project is geared towards creating a platform, where consultations and info days in five key domains (i.e. formal education, healthcare, social care, employment, and intercultural coexistence) between actors from local society and TCNs take place. This platform will enable both groups to exchange opinions, and share experiences and practices. In doing so, it will on the one hand establish strong relationships and strengthen common activities, and on the other hand, they will become the voice into the “Immigrant Integration Councils” which operate since 2010 in Greece.

Necessary capacity building activities also take place, such as trainings and workshops for police officers, hospital staff, frontline practitioners and teachers and “ Get to know my City” and “Get to know the people of my city” activities, so as to prepare the ground for a fruitful cooperation between TCNs and local stakeholders, reaching a common goal; namely, integration.

The project is disseminating information on its activities and results on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [its web site](#). All these activities and actions were prepared and designed in line with the findings of a thorough research on best practices at EU and National level conducted during the first phase of the project.

The LION project brings together six partners from two EU countries (Greece and Belgium): The National School of Public Health (Greece) which coordinates the programme, the University of Gent (Belgium), PRAKSIS NGO, the European Public Law Organization (EPLO), the Consulting Company CMT- Prooptiki and Syn-Eirmos NGO.



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