



Policy Paper



THE MIGRATION ISSUE IN EUROPE by the youth perception

Outcome of RESTART project



Funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union



Reinventing Solidarity Raising Tolerance RESTART Project

ATHENS | BRUSSELS | NICOSIA | TIRANA



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Executive Summary

RESTART Project was developed by a Consortium of partners who felt they should take active and responsible role on the migration issue in Europe, combining non-formal and innovative educational techniques, Structured Dialogue and engagement of several stakeholders, the Official authorities, the European youth and migrants. This is how the Project idea was envisioned, since the main Project's goal was to inform and raise awareness in key countries regarding the refugee crisis, mainly in Greece, Albania, Cyprus as the main entrance routes for the heart of Europe, Belgium.

In this situation the project seeks to:

- Assist young people understand the complexity of the EU decision making process and the importance of active participation
- Inform refugees about their rights and obligations as asylum seekers in the EU
- Promote voluntarism in order to reinforce European and active citizenship
- Counter the stigmatization of the refugees by informing and engaging public to a debate about it

The Europe for Citizens is a programme established by the European Union for the period 2014-2020 and aims to contribute to citizens' understanding of the EU, its history and diversity, raise awareness of remembrance, and to encourage democratic participation of citizens at EU level.





Introduction

The rising numbers of people traveling across the Mediterranean Sea or overland through Southeast Europe from Syria with European countries as a final destination in 2015 were a result of the armed conflicts taking place in Syria. During these conflicts, 190,000 people have been killed and 10.8 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria. In addition, more than 10 million Syrians (or 45%) of the country's population has been displaced. Out of those, 6.5 million are displaced within Syria and approximately 4 million have sought refuge in other countries. Most of the refugees that left their home land have sought a safe future inside the European borders¹.

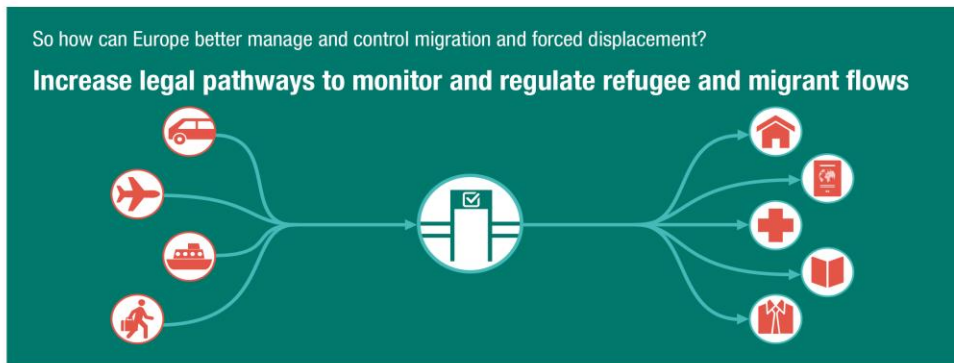
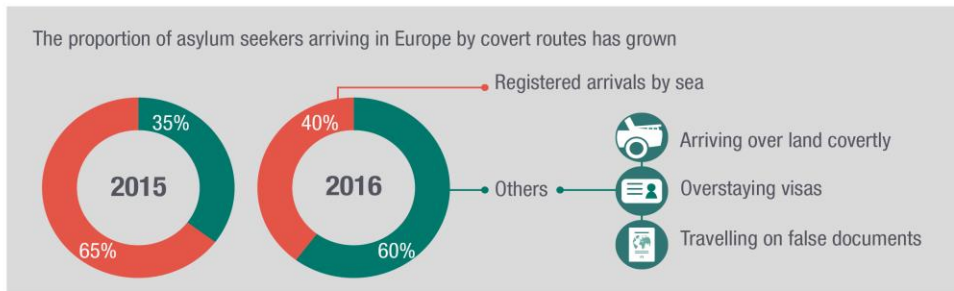
Thousands of people that began their journey never made it to their final destination as they were killed during the long and unsafe trip they had to make. The huge number of lost lives in the Mediterranean Sea, along with the political, safety, economic, and humanitarian issues that occurred in the European Union due to the arrival of the refugee flows was the cause of creation of the "Reinventing European Solidarity Raising Tolerance-RESTART" Project. The partner organizations from Greece, Albania, Cyprus and Belgium, through this Project aim to raise awareness on the refugee crisis, let youth's voice be heard and suggest measures on this huge but dramatic chapter of the world migration history.

¹Amnesty International Official Website, "*Facts & Figures: Syria refugee crisis & international resettlement*", Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/12/facts-figures-syria-refugee-crisis-international-resettlement/> [Retrieved on 15/12/2017]



Europe's refugees and migrants

Hidden flows, tightened borders and spiralling costs



² Overseas Development Institute (ODI), "Europe spends over €17 billion to curb migration", September 2016, Available at: <https://www.odi.org/opinion/10374-infographics-europe-spends-17-billion-curb-migration> [Retrieved on 22 January 2018]





ODI

Refugees and migrants share **similar reasons** for attempting dangerous journeys to Europe: safety, livelihoods and aspirations

According to statistics, Europe has spent at least 17 billion Euro from 2014 to 2016, in order to reduce refugees and migrants' flows. Out of this money, at least 1.7 billion has been spent on the border

controls inside Europe, while 15.3 billion have been spent outside the European territory, in order to implement actions that discourage migration.³

Furthermore, between the years 2015-2016 there was a significant decrease of the people that arrived in Europe by the sea. In fact, 1.1 million people crossed Europe in 2015, whereas in 2016 the

ODI

Tightening borders doesn't stop migration – people will simply take more **dangerous routes**

number was decreased in 330,000 people. Despite the reduction of the arrivals in the Union, the number of people that applied for asylum in 2016 was up to 890.000. The numbers reveal that the proportion of asylum seekers arriving in Europe by covert routed has grown, which leads to the result that the best way for

³ Overseas Development Institute (ODI), "Europe spends over €17 billion to curb migration", September 2016, Available at: <https://www.odi.org/opinion/10374-infographics-europe-spends-17-billion-curb-migration> [Retrieved on 22 January 2018]



the EU to manage and control migration flows is the increase of the legal pathways.⁴

The Project activities were held in 4 countries, namely Greece, Cyprus, Belgium and Albania, with more than 250 young Europeans, Trainers, Academics, Members of the European Parliament, representatives of NGOs, Volunteers, Teachers, as well as Youth Workers, getting involved in the 6 different phases of the Project (Kick-Off Event, Workshops, Structured Dialogue, Trainings, Pilot Activity and Simulation Game).

Through the different activities of each phase, the participants managed to expand their knowledge on the refugee crisis, point out the reasons of its outbreak, the challenges that both the refugees and the welcoming countries tackled, the consequences and, finally, suggested measures that should be taken into consideration by the policy makers in a regional, national and European level.

✓ **Foster European citizenship and improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at EU level**

Through the Project activities, participants engaged to the debate on the refugee crisis and the EU as an entity, its structures and policies. They were granted the opportunity to express themselves their concerns and exchange ideas with policy makers and civil society organizations, while most of them followed all the activities of RESTART Programme and contributed to the society.

⁴ Available at: Overseas Development Institute (ODI), “*Why people move: understanding the drivers and trends of migration to Europe - infographic*”, December 2015, Available at: <https://www.odi.org/opinion/10218-people-move-understanding-drivers-trends-migration-europe-infographic> [Retrieved on 22 January 2018]





- ✓ **Union policy making process and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at Union level**

Through the Simulation Game the 50 participating young Europeans had the chance to become MEPs for two days, representing a Member State and a European political party, while multicultural dimension to the role play game was given, with emphasis on human rights, dignity, equal opportunities and freedom of movement as the fundamental human rights.

- ✓ **Combatting stigmatization of "immigrants" and building counter narratives to foster intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding**

Every activity implemented was based on participatory approach, meaning active approaches that encourage people to think and actively contribute to teaching and learning.



Background

A lot has been said or written in the latest years concerning the migration issue in Europe, but a common concern is that Europe is facing one of its greatest challenges since its existence; the huge migration flows which are threatening its fundamental values and its identity. Only in 2015 1,294,000 people have applied for asylum in the EU countries. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that more than 1,011,700 migrants arrived in Europe by sea in 2015 and almost 34,900 by land.

The EU's external border force, FRONTEX, is responsible for the reporting of the numbers of refugees arriving at Europe's borders. According to the reports, only in 2015, the number of refugees arriving in Europe overruns the 1,800,000. Most of those heading to Greece take the relatively short way from Turkey to the islands and then through the Western Balkans to the rest of EU.

In this situation, the European response has been numb. Although in September, the EU ministers voted by a majority to relocate 160,000 refugees EU-wide, so far only 600 have been relocated. At the same time the situation is putting pressure in the Balkan region with FYROM closing its borders and even EU countries, such as Austria and Hungary, adopting strict entrance rules.





According to the European Agenda on Migration, the European Commission identifies the following short term to long term priorities to follow:

- *“Reducing the incentives for irregular migration:* essential is the recording of the causes behind irregular migration in non-EU countries, tackling smuggling and human trafficking networks, as well as formulate active policies in order to successfully implement the repatriation of the refugees.
- *Saving lives and securing the external borders:* having in mind the main principle of the European Union, solidarity between its Member States, cooperation between the European and national authorities, especially in securing the countries that are located in the external borders of the EU, as well as better monitoring of the border crossing should be implemented
- *Strengthening the common asylum policy:* as the flows of asylum seekers are increased, the EU policy on asylum should be common in order to address on those needing international protection, while having solidarity as a key driver
- *Developing a new policy on legal migration:* considering the current economic crisis, as well as the future demographic challenges that the EU is facing, EU needs to formulate a new policy that allows reporting the qualifications of the refugees and attracting new workers that the EU economy needs.”⁵

⁵ European Commission, “European Agenda on Migration”, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration_en [Retrieved on 23 January 2018]



Concerns

Migrants or Refugees?

In the beginning of every activity, the clarification of the different definitions between the words “refugee” and “migrant” was considered necessary both from the participants and the guest speakers that monitored the activity, in order to proceed with the analysis of the different aspects of the refugee crisis.

The term *migrant* can be understood as “any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born and has acquired some significant social ties to this country. The term ‘migrant’ should be understood as covering all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned, for reasons of ‘personal convenience’ and without intervention of an external compelling factor.” This definition indicates that migrant does not refer to refugees, displaced or others forced or compelled to leave their homes. Migrants are people who make choices about when to leave and where to go, even though these choices are sometimes extremely constrained. Indeed, some scholars make a distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration⁶.

A *refugee* is considered as a person who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes

⁶ United Nations Education, Scientific & Cultural Organization-UNESCO Official Website, “*Migrant/Migration*”, Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/migrant/> [Retrieved on 15/12/2017]





of refugees fleeing their countries. More than half of all refugees worldwide come from just three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan.⁷

Challenges

In 2015, after the outburst of the war in Syria between the ISIS and the government, thousands of people left their homes and crossed half the Asian continent and the Aegean in order to seek for a safer land where they could settle and begin a new life. Taking into consideration the political instability, the hostile intentions of neighboring countries, the terrorist attacks, the human trafficking, the unsafe means of travel, and the lack of food and water, not everyone that began the longest trip was lucky enough to arrive at their final destination.

The refugees that successfully managed to cross the Mediterranean Sea and arrive in Greece, Italy and then travel to other European countries had to face more challenges. Racist actions from the welcoming countries, cultural and religion gaps, problems in communication, lack of the State's organization, of proper accommodation, of medical care, etc. in combination with the bad physical and/or psychological condition they were under, due to the travel and/or the loss of their beloved ones were some of the daily challenges that the refugees had to face during their trip.

⁷ USA for UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency Official Website, "What is a Refugee?", Available at: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/> [Retrieved on 15/12/2017]



Recommendations

Taking into account all the problems and the challenges the situation demands for immediate, effective and decisive action to be taken.

European level

Participants of the RESTART Project activities focused extensively to the European level of action that ought to be taken and decisions to be made by Officials for the better management of the migration issue in Europe.

Among these are the below mentioned:

- Empowerment of the European Parliament in order to take actions in integrating refugees into the European community, tackle xenophobia, islamophobia etc.
- Force EU Member States through the Institutional channels of the European Union to act more decisively in the support of the Member States, more affected by the refugee flows and more tolerance, with solidarity as their main principle
- Amendment of the Regulation of Dublin II into an EU-level Agreement on the residence of the refugees at countries with higher level of living standards
- Design of joint guidelines for school programs (Commission with representatives of each community) in the education sector in order to promote the integration of the refugees. In this spectrum, the promotion of usage of OLS for Refugees language courses programme under ERASMUS+





Programme or similar initiatives to this, the promotion of non-formal education, creation of common training and educative activities etc.

- Promote volunteerism among young Europeans over refugee support
- Broaden the funding policy of the European Commission for the creation of employment opportunities to refugees in EU Member States in accordance with the asylum application procedures, fund enterprises and organizations to take part to the integration procedure or even organize specialized events, trainings or activities to this direction
- The Design of a Common European Immigration Policy that will be strictly followed by all EU Member States under the main principle of solidarity and tolerance, is deemed essential by the participants
- It is obvious that measures to tackle the consequences of the refugee flows that arrive in Greece and Europe, in order to ease and contribute in getting back to normal their everyday lives both of the arrivals and the welcoming people are needed. But cutting off the heads of the Hydra will never solve the problem completely; killing Hydra, in our case stop the refugee flows, is the answer. Diplomatic means in order to terminate the war in Syria so as people will not have to leave their homeland in the first place is crucial in order to stop the humanitarian crisis that is affecting not only the Syria's neighbor countries, but the European continent as well.



National level

Among the main challenges a Member State faces when dealing with refugee flows or the integration of the migrants that granted asylum in their ground are concerned the culture and religious diversity, rise of populism and nationalist voices which create a difficult situation for every government. The Young Europeans who participated at RESTART activities identified as key challenges for a Member State the ghetto establishments when refugees are located in a specific place as a group/category of citizens, the facilities of their hospitality along with the conditions of their accommodation and living.

Moreover, the challenge of integrating refugees into a non-friendly European society, highly influenced negatively by Media or the impact of the terrorist attacks into the European soil, remains high and difficult to be addressed. Several proposals were made by the participants, focusing on the relocation of the refugees that stay in the refugee camps, to which they deem it necessary to increase security measures for their safety and invest in developing measures of building trust and raise awareness. In addition, providing opportunities to young refugees who have postponed their studies due to their fleeing from war to continue their studies in European Member States was a proposal repeated during most of the events.





Local level

As far as the local policy is concerned, the main issue that should be firstly tackled is the accommodation of the refugees. Instead of leaving in containers in the camps, the local governments should follow the example that was set by the Mayor of Livadia, Viotia, Greece. The local governance claimed funds from the European Union that they used it with no interventions, in order to renovate abandoned houses and rent old apartments so as to create proper accommodation for the refugees. By moving refugee families in an apartment, they found it easier to integrate in the local society, as well as feel safe again so as make a new beginning.

The local societies that have to deal with the problem of xenophobia and social exclusion, as well as take action for the best integration of the refugees in first hand, are the main actors that could implement immediate activities and integration plans whose contribution will be proven valuable, as they will be affecting directly the refugees. The participants of the Project proposed that local communities should organize common activities, city walks, festivals, etc that include both the refugees and the local citizens, in order for the two different cultures to be introduced to each other and fight the discrimination and xenophobia towards the newcomers.

In addition, economic assistance in the form of donating clothes, shoes, books etc, or funding small social markets will make a difference in the everyday life of the refugees. Furthermore, the youth interpret a significant role in the integration procedure. Given the fact that young people are educated, more open minded, and most likely they speak several languages, they are the main factors that could bridge the gap between the local society and the refugees, by gathering in community or youth centers, providing internet access to the newcomers and introduce them to their culture. Last, but certainly, not least, the local cultural



and administrative assistance could highly contribute by providing language courses so as to bridge the communication gap that exists between the two civilizations that are asked to coexist.





The Participants of RESTART Project:

- ✚ **Encourage** the creation of a platform that will include all European languages and paneuropean criteria for the recognition of educational levels and skills in order for the refugees to be able to learn the language of the host country or the country of relocation;
- ✚ **Promote** the creation of a basic educational program for adults so as to boost their working skills in the context of the New Skills agenda for the EU;
- ✚ **Endorse** the training of teachers, educational and specialized staff by European services in cooperation with NGOs and social workers so that they raise awareness and focus the attention on elimination of exclusion and marginalization;
- ✚ **Request** the minimization of the waiting period for the refugees to access the labor market and further recommends their involvement in vocational training or seasonal work during this period;
- ✚ **Call** for the establishment of a new efficient agreement between EU with the departure countries (Turkey, North Africa), as well as endorses the establishment of a monitoring Agency with executive personnel on them;
- ✚ **Urge** the fair distribution of refugees in the places they reside in the member-states so as to avoid marginalization;



- ✚ **Call** for the prioritization of, but not limited to, the integration of the most vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, women, members of the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities or severe health issues;
- ✚ **Endorse** the establishment of a European monitoring agency of the status of the refugees' human rights.
- ✚ **Request** for the organization of events that will promote intercultural exchange among refugees and local citizens, so that the latter would be aware of the refugees' status and able to directly communicate with them, countering in this way the discrimination stereotypes and xenophobia acts, as well as facilitating the integration procedure





Getting in touch with RESTART Project



ONLINE

Information about the Project is easily accessible on the official website of the Project www.europe-restart.eu



IN PERSON

You can always consult either the Project's Lead organization I.R.T.E.A. in Athens, Greece, or the Partnering organizations in the participating countries



ON THE PHONE OR BY MAIL

RESTART Project Team is always at your disposal for any inquiry at the e-mail of the Project europe.restart@gmail.com or by phone +30 2130250217



READ ABOUT

Dissemination material of the Project is easily accessible on the website www.europe-restart.eu while also much useful information about Europe for Citizens Programme can be also retrieved at the website of the European Commission on <http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/europe-for-citizens-programme/>



RESTART.eu



Consortium



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ΝΕΟΛΑΙΑΣ | GENÇLİK
ΚΥΠΡΟΥ | KONSEYİ
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