



# CITIES NETWORK

for integration



## THE CITIES NETWORK EXPANDS & SHARES STORIES OF PARTICIPATION

The Cities Network for Integration (CNI), with its 2nd newsletter, welcomes a period of change and creative challenges, now numbering 17 members, following the accession of four new municipalities. Despite the prolonged uncertainty caused by the pandemic, and the changes, particularly with regard to the refugee issue, respect for human rights, coexistence and social cohesion remain a priority for the Network members. After all, the power and importance of Togetherness has become today more apparent than ever.

Guided by these values, the country's municipalities hosting refugee populations continue to develop and support social integration initiatives, creating the conditions for the next day. We are delighted to host the **Mayors of the four new CNI members** stating the reasons why they are endorsing this common endeavour. In addition, you will have the opportunity to learn about the joint actions of the Network members as well as the initiatives led by each Municipality, all of which unite to create a promising mosaic.

\* The Cities Network for Integration (CNI) is an intermunicipal network led by municipalities across Greece that jointly design and exchange good practices in the field of integration of migrants and refugees. CNI aims to strengthen social cohesion through coordinated actions and interventions at local and national level. Since April 2020, the UNHCR and IOM have been jointly supporting the work of the CNI. **CNI members:** Athens, Chania, Delta, Agios Dimitrios, Heraklion, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Kalamaria, Karditsa, Larissa, Livadia, Neapoli - Sykees, Nea Filadelfeia - Chalkidona, Piraeus, Telos, Trikala and Tripoli.

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## INTRODUCING THE NEW CNI MEMBERS

The Mayors of Chania, Delta, Kalamaria and Neapoli – Sykees explain why they participate in this joint effort.

### MUNICIPALITY OF KALAMARIA

The City Network for Integration is an important initiative of the Local Authorities envisioned with altruism and solidarity, and successfully implemented.

We continue with the same fervor to do the obvious. We have our eyes and focus on all those in need.

**Giannis Dardamanelis**  
Mayor of Kalamaria



### MUNICIPALITY OF CHANIA

It was a great pleasure to accept the proposal for the participation of the Municipality of Chania in the Cities Network, which we hope will contribute to the exchange of know-how, the empowerment of the staff, and the development of broader integration policies.

In recent years, Greece has faced a large influx of refugees, something that has created a new social reality, sensitized and mobilized a large portion of the population.

The Municipality of Chania has long been an attractive destination for migrants. The real challenge, however, is their integration and the creation of equal living conditions for them in our country.

Local communities significantly contribute to the formation of a welcoming framework based on respect for and equality of human rights. It is our duty to promote the positive values of diversity and mitigate polarization and segregation.

When we talk about the idea of interculturalism, we are not just talking about the simple coexistence of different cultures. The idea of interculturalism is wider: it weakens the tendency of blending into an inclusive society and practically enhances acceptance, active participation, and respect for all.

We hope to adopt successful migration policies, which will ensure that migrants are welcomed in the host society and that the services and policies of the host society are adapted to the needs of different nationals.

**Panagiotis Simandirakis**  
Mayor of Chania



## MUNICIPALITY OF NEAPOLI – SYKEES

The rapid increase in refugee and migration flows that our country has been called upon to manage in recent years is undoubtedly one of the most important challenges for the whole of Europe. The movement of refugees and migrants seeking a better future has shaped a new reality that most Greek municipalities have to face.

In the last 20 years, the municipality of Neapolis - Sykees seeks, through its social services, comprehensive support of migrants in order to strengthen their social inclusion. In this context, finding a job through job counseling, facilitating access to social programs and benefits, the inclusion of children in kindergartens and Centers of Creative Activities for Children, and provision of psychosocial support are supported.

In 2009, we established the only Greek-language School at a municipal level, recognizing thus the acquisition of the Greek language, history, and culture as a fundamental condition for smooth integration. The Greek Language School provides hundreds of students with free language and preparation courses for the Greek language exams and has a theatrical team.

Responding to the recent refugee crisis, since 2016, we have been participating in the implementation of the REACT (Emergency Support to Integration Accommodation - ESTIA) program, in partnership with other municipalities and NGOs, to ensure decent living conditions for refugees, beneficiaries of international protection. Today we have secured accommodation in 44 apartments providing psychosocial and legal support, as well as access to all municipal health and education structures.

In order to enhance knowledge and the Common European effort to formulate effective social support and integration policies for migrants and refugees, we also participate in a number of international networks and European programs.



For us, the main goal of integration is to ensure substantial equality of rights and opportunities and to form a society without discrimination or exclusion.

Our participation in the Cities Network for Integration underlines the important role of Local Authorities in the effort of integration and social cohesion and the need for cooperation of Greek municipalities with each other in order to exchange know-how and jointly undertake new initiatives for the design and implementation of similar policies. Our contribution is crucial since it is important to do the best we can for our local communities.

**Simos Daniilidis**  
**Mayor of Neapoli - Sykees**  
**Vice President of the Regional Union of Municipalities of Central Macedonia Board of Directors**  
**President of the Central Union of Municipalities of Greece Social Policy Committee**

## MUNICIPALITY OF DELTA

Delta Municipality is one of the municipalities in the country that, together with others, bears the additional burden of hosting temporary refugee reception facilities within its borders. We believe that our participation will mutually enrich Cities Network for Integration and our own knowledge and efforts to respond in the best way possible to the needs, fears, and prejudice of the local community, utilizing the best practices of other municipalities.

In the special conditions of the pandemic, when assistance was requested, we responded by reinforcing the existing facility, offering thus services beyond the ones provided on a daily basis.

We hope that our participation in the CNI will help to connect and exchange successful effective practices, taking advantage of the existing experiences of the municipalities that participate in the CMI and have developed structures and practices that help local communities to better understand the issue.

Strengthening the municipalities that bear the burden of hosting refugee facilities, as a matter of priority, with special financial tools, is a necessary condition for the success of the objectives of the Network.

We consider it necessary for the Government to proceed with the appointment of a special advisor for migrant-refugee issues to assist the municipalities that host such facilities.

We aim to proceed with targeted interventions in order to tackle all the different issues linked to the future of those who go through or complete the legal processes required, seeking to find a better life in our country.

More specifically, we aim to make use of the Inter-Municipal Agency NEFELI that focuses on adult education and operates under the auspices and management of Delta Municipality, always in the spirit of equal inter-municipal cooperation.

In the current phase, adult education for skills development, counseling, and liaison with the labor market and employers can become the focal point of our actions with regard to refugees.

I hope that 2021 will be the year when the most ambitious expectations of the Network and its members will be fulfilled.



**Giannis Ioannidis**  
Mayor of Delta

# JOINTLY

## Joint initiatives that strengthen

The members of the CNI launched a series of joint actions, based on the priorities identified in the latest needs assessment (June 2020). These initiatives focus on training seminars to employees in services and programs of the municipalities, the exchange of know-how in the field of awareness and information as well as the promotion of institutional changes.

### Consultation with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum

On 16 December, at the initiative of the Cities Network for Integration, a teleconference was held between its member municipalities and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, opening an additional communication and cooperation channel. The meeting was attended by 14 Municipalities, Ministry representatives as well as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The aim of the consultation was to identify challenges and proposals for the purpose of a more effective interface at the local level between the HELIOS Integration Program managed by the IOM, and the ESTIA asylum-seekers reception program, the implementation of which has recently passed entirely from the UNHCR to the Ministry.

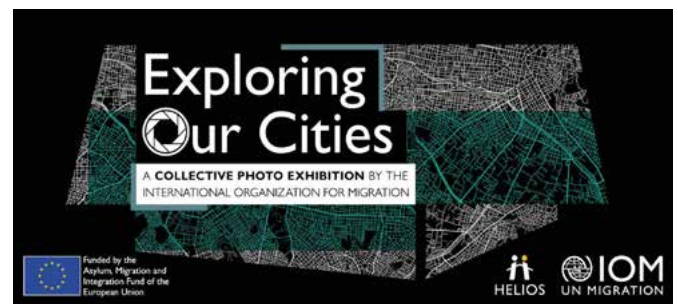
During the teleconference, with the contribution of participating municipalities (Athens, Heraklion, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Kalamaria, Karditsa, Larissa, Livadia, Nea Filadelfia - Nea Chalkidona, Piraeus, Tilos, Trikala, Tripoli and Chania) important data were recorded and proposals were formulated to be sent to the competent directorate.

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### A COLLECTIVE PHOTO EXHIBITION with the participation of the Cities Network for Integration

#### Exploring our cities

Greeks, refugees and migrants, with their mobile phone camera in hand and their city as a source of inspiration, captured in images experiences, feelings and thoughts, opening new paths of dialogue. Six cities of the NCNI took part in the initiative organized by the **IOM Greece in the framework of the HELIOS program: Athens, Piraeus, Livadia, Heraklion, Ioannina and Thessaloniki** while **Katerini** also participated. Explore 7 Greek cities through the eyes of 38 amateur photographers, Greek and refugees: [www.exploringourcities.com](http://www.exploringourcities.com)



# JOINTLY

## Online meeting for a more positive communication on the refugee issue

In what ways can the Municipalities, as the institution closest to the citizen, promote more positive messages regarding the refugee and migrant population? How can we combat myths, stereotypes and misinformation? These are some of the questions raised in the **online discussion** held on 21 October 2020 at the initiative of the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee issues (**AC-CMR**), the Cities Network for Integration (**CNI**) and **ActionAid Hellas** in the framework of the **European CIAK MigrAction program**.

Nine municipalities of the CNI (Athens, Heraklion, Ioannina, Karditsa, Larissa, Livadia, Nea Filadelfia - Chalkidona, Tilos and Trikala) and journalists had the opportunity to exchange good practices and highlight the challenges of promoting and communicating the refugee issue. The discussion was prefaced by Melina Daskalakis, Executive Advisor for Migrants and Refugees, Municipality of Athens, and Gerassimos Kouvaras, General Director, ActionAid Hellas.



The event was covered by the Athens - Macedonian News Agency. [Read the article.](#)

## ECCAR Conference - CommunicAction: Together to protect human rights at local level

The CNI participated at the international conference of the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (**ECCAR**) – an **UNESCO - led Network**. The title of this year's conference was **CommunicAction: Together to protect human rights at local level**. The CNI with its participation in the workshop "Speaking UP! Youth, media voices, and narratives to communicate new cities", had the opportunity to be introduced to and communicate with municipalities and organizations from all over Europe!

**Key conference conclusions:** [www.eccar.info/en/news/recommendations-working-groups-9th-eccar-general-conference-bologna-2020](http://www.eccar.info/en/news/recommendations-working-groups-9th-eccar-general-conference-bologna-2020)

Can small – scale local initiatives reframe narratives?

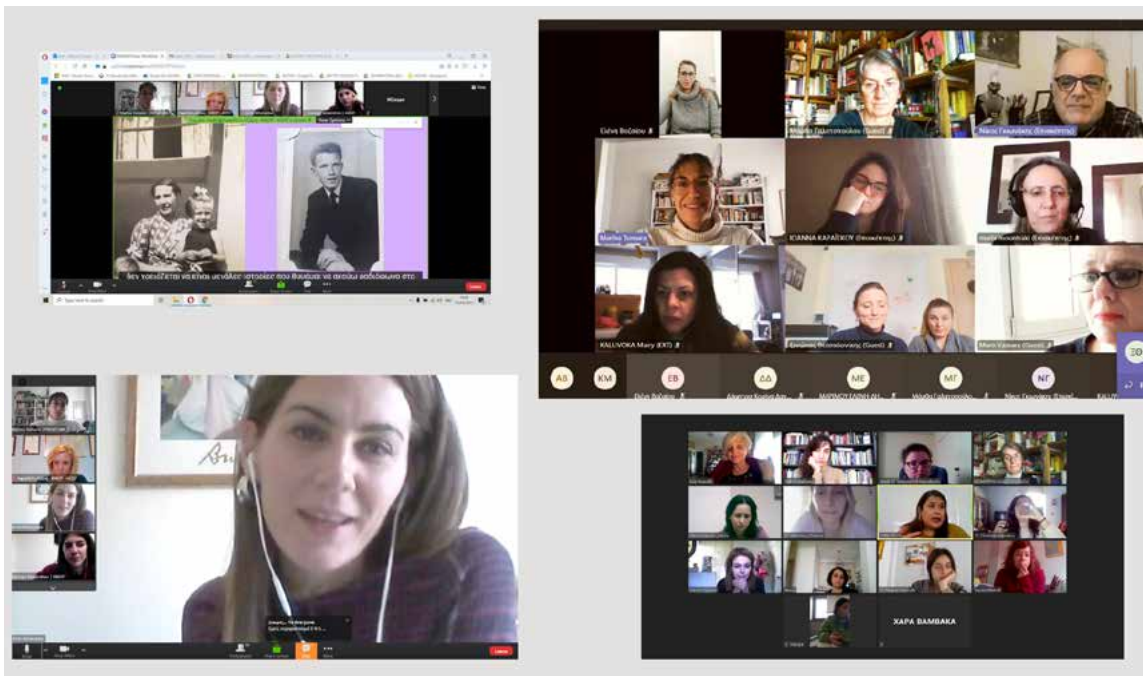


# JOINTLY

## Training seminars aimed at empowering human resources

The interface between different stakeholders is a valuable source of knowledge exchange, empowerment and cooperation! The CNI, making use of the network of associates and members of the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR) launches a series of empowerment actions aimed at employees of municipal structures and programs.

**Social Action and Innovation Center – KMOP** was the first to provide a series of seminars in the fields of training of cultural mediators on sexual/gender-based violence against refugees and migrants, promoting interculturalism through music for employees and mentoring and mediation issues. The **Babel Day Centre** offers a series of trainings on the psychosocial impact of the refugee crisis.



JOINTLY

## KMOP

### KMOP - Social Action and Innovation Centre

Smooth integration of refugees and immigrants into our society will be a challenge in 2021 as well. KMOP - Center for Social Action and Innovation, as an organization with 43 years of experience in supporting vulnerable social groups, implements a variety of actions and initiatives aimed at the successful integration of refugees and migrants into society. Through educational programs, with more than 20,000 beneficiaries, and information events, we seek to contribute to strengthening social cohesion and combating racism and xenophobia.

Joining our forces with the Cities Network for Integration, we look forward to working closely with local authorities and other actors to achieve substantial and long-term benefits for both host societies and the refugee and migrant population.

This cooperation will give us the opportunity to reach a larger portion of beneficiaries and to train professionals working in municipalities so that they can themselves contribute to a smoother integration of refugees and migrants into social life, education, labor market, and social care. We believe that coordinated actions and interventions are the only way to the success of this process of mutual understanding and eventual integration. That is why the operation of the Cities Network for Integration is of paramount importance, as a key connecting link of cooperation.

**Antonia Torrens**  
General Director of KMOP





# BABEL

## BABEL DAY CENTER – Mental Health Unit for Migrants

Recognizing the need for continuing education for people working with refugees is crucial. Refugees are a population group with very special and heterogeneous characteristics: every person has both needs and personal growth potential, skills, and dreams. At the same time, the environment in which they try to integrate is also characterized by significant challenges, the addressing of which requires appropriate handling and skills, ability to understand and train as well as implement integrated intervention plans.

Babel Day Center ([www.babeldc.gr](http://www.babeldc.gr)) focuses mainly on supporting those working in the refugee sector, from reception to integration. In 2021, Babel, by working together with the Cities Network for Integration, aspires to offer the opportunity to those working in the field to enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes on issues related to the psychosocial dimensions of the refugee crisis in order to continue to provide proper integration services.



Education is a form of support and care. We are well aware that in order to be able to take care of others, someone has to take care of us!

**Nikos Gionakis**  
**Psychologist**  
**Scientific Associate of Babel Day Center**

JOIN

# CITIES IN ACTION

## Together in the Pandemic: CNI members share equal participation stories

During this difficult time, refugees share the same concerns with local communities, contribute to the protection of public health, while at the same time are at increased risk. By embracing awareness-raising and empowerment activities, ensuring that no one feels alone during Christmas holidays, taking initiatives to integrate refugees into the labor market and city life, and promoting more active institutional involvement, the CNI's municipalities send a message in favor of substantial coexistence and against stereotypes.

### MUNICIPALITY OF KARDITSA

#### A drawing about the love our world needs

## Awareness and Participation

Little Izlam, a 12-year-old girl from Syria, who lives in Karditsa in the context of the ESTIA program, **excelled in the [global art contest "Young People for Refugees"](#)** in which participated more than 2,000 people from 100 countries. The drawing, which depicts a girl embracing the globe thus keeping the virus away, highlights the importance of love in this endeavor.

The UNHCR contest was launched in April 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, inviting young people aged 12-25 to reflect creatively on the topic: "everyone counts in the fight against the virus, including refugees". One in four participants was a refugee or asylum-seeker.

"With this drawing I want to share the message that everyone counts, including refugees, in the fight against the virus." - Izlam, 12, Syria

A message that was put into action in September 2020, when **the city's refugee population made an effort [side by side with the residents of Karditsa](#) to repair the severe damages caused by the the floods**, responding to the call of the Karditsa Development Agency (the Agency responsible for the management of the refugee accommodation program "ESTIA").

"Aziz and Mustafa are neighbors and now friends. They immediately ran to our help and removed the mud from our business. Feride made us food. People who have lost everything understand. We thank them!" - Resident of Karditsa

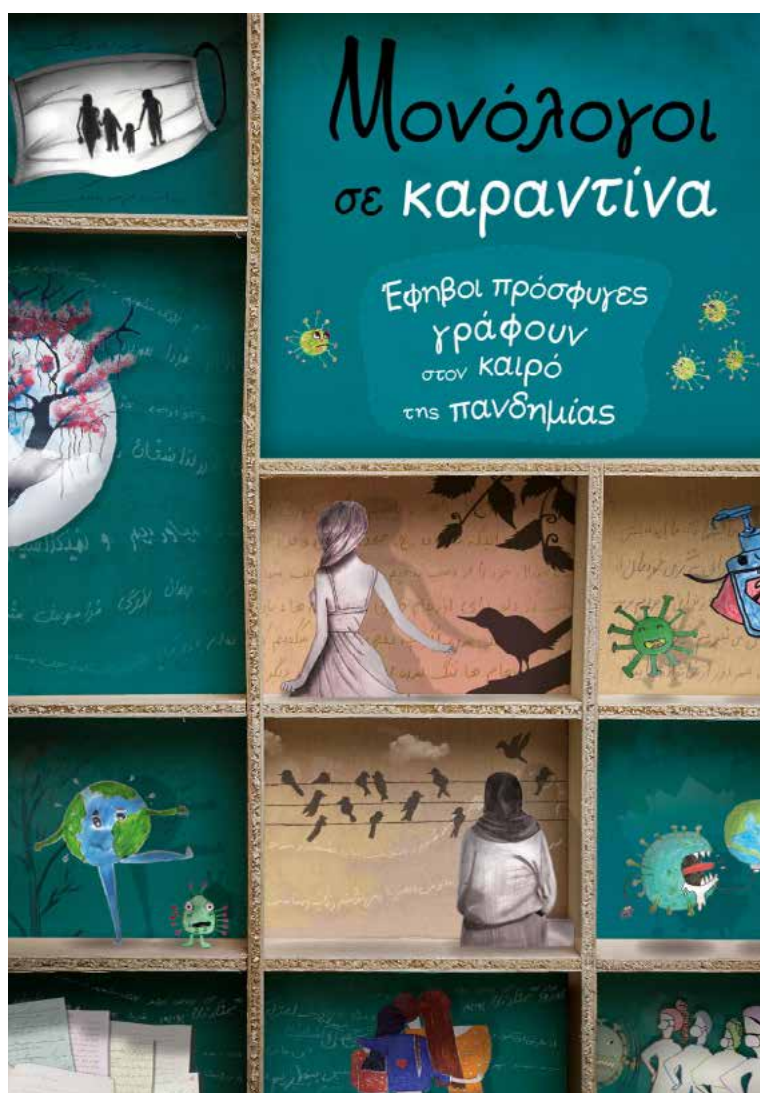


## Awareness and Participation

**Faten**, aged 13, who is accommodated by the “ESTIA” program in Tripoli, participated in the publication **“Quarantine Monologues”** writing about her own version of how she experienced the first quarantine. As soon as the employees of the Parnonas Development Agency, which implements the “ESTIA” program in the region, approached her, she expressed her interest full of joy!

The full edition, containing Faten’s story “Life will return back to normal”, is the result of a series of creative writing workshops in which 24 teenage refugees took part, boys and girls, during the temporary quarantine from April to May 2020. The teenage boys and girls who participated in the action write about their experience during the coronavirus-induced lockdown in Greece, what impact did the restrictions have on their lives and what were the effects of the lockdown on their expectations and aspirations. Faten participated in all the online meetings and had the opportunity to meet other refugee children from all over Greece.

“I can already tell that we will re-discover hope after the virus and the lockdown. Life will return back to normal, and schools, universities, markets, parks and museums will open their doors again. Children will get to play together in the streets again and people will be able to get together for celebrations.” - Citation from Faten’s story “Life will return back to normal”



\* The action “Quarantine Monologues” is part of the educational program **“It could be me - It could be you”**, implemented since 2015 in Greece by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Hellenic Theatre/Drama and Education Network. The action continues with workshops for students and teachers and initiatives from schools, arts groups and associations that wish to use the material of the publication as a source of inspiration and further creation.

## Integration into city life

The Municipality of Athens **coordinated an information campaign for the refugee and immigrant population of Athens**, continuing to take prevention and protection measures. In this context, the Migrant and Refugee Integration Council (SEMP) convened in the **presence of the Mayor of Athens**. In particular, the Department of Support and Social Integration of Migrants and Refugees prepared information material with recommendations on the safety of beneficiaries and employees, which was disseminated by the SEMP to the communities and Migrant Integration Centers of the country.

As part of the European Curing the Limbo pilot program, the Municipality of Athens through the Development and Tourism Promotion Company (EATA) implements the **co-Athens initiative, joining forces with Athenian citizens and refugees for the benefit of the city**. The

**Foodies team** invites locals and refugees to cook live via zoom famous dishes of Syrian & Middle Eastern cuisine with ingredients it posts to participants (☞: <https://bit.ly/2K779je>). **Sabar Bar** is looking for stories from the neighborhood of Exarcheia and, every Monday evening, invites refugees and residents to online oral history workshops, the **Athens Niroo Community** prepares together with refugees an online community around renewable energy sources. Also within the framework of **Curing the Limbo**, **job counseling actions, vocational training seminars** and **skills workshops** are organized, with the aim of empowering refugees in various professional sectors.



## Awareness and Participation

The City of Athens **Migrant Integration Centre** created two electronic **'boxes' with wishes** for the holidays, with great response. One box included the wishes of the Athenians to the refugees and immigrants living in Athens and the other included the wishes the refugees had sent to the medical and nursing COVID-19 staff.

The box for the refugees was delivered to the children living in the Open Accommodation Facility for asylum seekers of the Municipality of Athens in Eleonas, while the cards of the immigrants and refugees were delivered to the Municipal Clinics of the Municipality of Athens.



The Deputy Mayor of Health and Education of the Municipality of Athens, Mr. Manolis Kalampos, and the Executive Advisor for Migrants and Refugees, Ms. Melina Daskalaki, receive holiday wishes that refugees and migrants living in Athens address to the nursing staff of the Municipal Clinics.



## Awareness & Participation

The refugee children hosted in the Nefeli 1 Facility of Social EKAB, with the support of the Migrant Integration Council, **prepared their home** for Christmas and welcomed 2021 with wishes for a better and more creative year for the whole world!



FINISHION

MUNICIPALITY OF HERAKLION CRETE  
With the power of cooking

## Awareness & Participation



The holidays are a time of year full of love, solidarity and cooking! This year, the conditions did not allow many to gather and celebrate as usual, but this was not an obstacle for the beneficiaries of the ESTIA program in Crete to present **holiday recipes from their countries of origin**.

Food unites us at one table. And the recipe of a dish “carries” with it, in addition to flavors, cultures and functions as an expression of the cultural identity of a people, of a country. Under these circumstances and since the special conditions of the pandemic did not leave much festive space, the Heraklion Development Agency with the production of a series of short videos hosts... online dinners and presents recipes of the world from beneficiaries of the ESTIA program in Crete. Watch the three 📺: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIgfSpsHAAOBdsGZr7kEr7g>.

## Information & Empowerment

The ESTIA II Asylum Reception program, with the distinctive title REACT (Refugee Assistance Collaboration Thessaloniki)\*, adapted, during the pandemic, its operation to the new conditions, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, protect the general population but also to help people continue their lives in the smoothest possible way.

Special care was given to the continuous information of the beneficiaries on the measures in force each time but also to the support of young students in distance education. Also, [school backpacks and items were distributed](#) to the young beneficiaries of the Program, while a series of educational activities were carried out in open areas whenever feasible. In addition, the parents were informed and got acquainted with the use of ZOOM and Google Classroom while two related information videos were created.

Finally, the beneficiaries of the program [made and offered masks](#) to all the students of the Program but also to various civil society organizations in Thessaloniki.

\* REACT is implemented by a corporate scheme with coordinating partner the Municipality of Thessaloniki and other partners the Municipality of Neapolis-Sykees, the Municipality of Kalamaria, the Development Agency of Eastern Thessaloniki ANATOLIKI SA, ARSIS - Social Support of Youth, PRAKSIS – Social Support and Medical Cooperation Development Programs, the Thessaloniki YMCA and the Major Development Agency Thessaloniki SA.



## Access to employment

A pilot [seminar on entrepreneurship for refugees](#), in the context of their professional and social integration into society, was organized by the Municipality of Neapolis-Sykees at the initiative of the Department of Social Protection, Solidarity, Labour and Equality of the municipality, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration, in the framework of the Admin4all Program. The seminar, which will be repeated in order to reach more beneficiaries, was attended by a group of Arabic-speaking refugees from Syria, hosted through the REACT Program, in the apartments of the Municipality Neapolis-Sykees. These are young people who have already been granted asylum and are expected to stay in our country. In this context, they need to be informed about all the possibilities of professional integration that they may have.

“Our goal is to equip participants for professional and social integration, as professional integration is a important and basic condition for social integration.”

- Maro Vassara, Head of the Department of Social Protection



## Institutional engagement

Ioannina declares in practice its commitment to be an inclusive city from the local to the international level. As part of the ongoing actions to address the impacts of the pandemic, the beneficiaries of the “ESTIA” program hosted in the Facility of Agia Eleni with the support of INTERSOS Hellas and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, made a particularly important gesture of solidarity, **donating 565 fabric masks** to the Municipality of Ioannina to be distributed to vulnerable social groups through the Social Grocery. The delivery of the masks took place at the City Hall with the Mayor and the President of the Organization for Social Protection, Solidarity and Preschool Education.



The Mayor of Ioannina during the delivery of the masks offered by refugees to the Social Grocery of the Municipality

In an effort to foster institutional dialogue on the issue of integration, at the initiative of the Migrant and Refugee Integration Council (SEMP) of the Municipality of Ioannina and in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the framework of the HELIOS integration program and the Greek Forum of Refugees, an **open event** was held under the auspices of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum on: **“Social Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection and Migrants: Challenges and Prospects in Greece”**. The meeting was attended by representatives of the municipality, the Ministry as well as migrant and refugee communities. At the same time, the IOM organized in the framework of HELIOS, in collaboration with the UNHCR and the support of the Municipality of Ioannina, a three-day **film screening festival** on the topic of migration.



Also, in December, the Municipality of Ioannina, in the effort to raise awareness and inform all municipal parties about the migration issue, organized an **online meeting with the participation of both Municipal Councilors - members of the Migrant Integration Council and leaders of the parties not represented in it**.

Active outside the borders as well, the Municipality of Ioannina participates in the **Intergovernmental Working Group on Intercultural Integration** (GT-ADI-INT) set up by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) within the Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI). Also, a **joint declaration of Intercultural Twinning** was signed with the **Municipality of Li-massol**, which lays the foundations for an exchange of practices and the development of new actions in the field of integration of immigrant groups.