



**Fourth International Conference on Learning Cities**  
**Inclusion – A Principle for Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Cities**  
1 to 3 October 2019, Medellín, Colombia

**Parallel Thematic Forum 3**

**Theme 2: Refugees and migrants**

**Key questions**

- 1. How are cities creating inclusive learning environments (formal and, in particular, non-formal and informal) that support quality lifelong learning opportunities for migrants? What kind of knowledge and skills do they support?**

Heraklion, from the depths of its history, is characterized as a hospitable city for people who have found themselves under the circumstance of having to build a new life. The support of vulnerable social groups, the fellow citizen in need, have been and always are a continuing priority in our city, both for the citizens and the Mayor of Heraklion.

The strategic aims to become a cohesive, smart, learning city and a meeting place of diverse cultures is reflected in The Local Strategic Plan for Lifelong Learning” 2017-2020.

The main aims of the plan are:

- to enhance the effective structures of social support and to extend the solidarity networks
- to build a sustainable city that supports a high-quality everyday life
- to present a powerful cultural and touristic identity
- to contribute to the strengthening of the local economy and entrepreneurship.

All municipality departments and structures contribute for succeeding the above. Today, I will refer mostly to the **Department of Education and Lifelong Learning** and the **Department of Social policy**.

**The Department of Education and Lifelong Learning with The Lifelong Learning Center** offers programs of General Adult Education for unemployed and working people regardless of gender, educational level, country of origin, religion, place of residence, young people, students, vulnerable social groups. It aims to promote a positive attitude to learning.

Until today, about 3000 citizens have benefited from the municipality's lifelong learning programs and we expect the adoption of the new programs with even greater participation.

We already have 87 enrollments for Greek lessons to foreigners.

The **Department of Social Policy** implements programs to tackle & eradicate poverty and social exclusion as well as programs and actions for the integration of immigrants & refugees into the socio-economic and cultural life of the local community.

A “**Community Centre**” and a “**Migrant Integration Centre**” provide one - stop services to support all citizens, including refugees and migrants, addressing their basic needs (residence, health, feeding etc ).

The **Migrant Integration Centre (MIC)** provides information and assistance services, as well as advisory support for migrant integration and networking. More specifically, the MIC is responsible for:

- Informing and providing socio-psychological support to immigrants and beneficiaries of international protection and in particular for vulnerable groups (for example: women, children, etc.)
- Developing learning support for migrant children / beneficiaries of international protection at the preschool and school age and information on adult language training activities implemented in our region.
- Raising awareness of the local community to combat xenophobia, racism, human trafficking, etc.
- Promoting volunteering.
- Supporting the participation of migrants / beneficiaries of international protection in groups, associations, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue organizations, etc.
- Networking with other Refugee Integration Centre’s and authorities and organizations related to the inclusion of immigrants and beneficiaries of international protection.
- Cooperation with the “**Migrant Integration Council**”, which aims to record and investigate the needs of the members of immigrant groups residing permanently in the municipality area, to submit proposals and develop actions to meet those needs, as well as improving the living conditions and inclusion of immigrants. Members of the council are bodies and associations directly involved with refugees and migrants.

**Since the initiation of the Migrant Integration Center there have been 1,951 beneficiaries.**

- Until today, the “**Migrant Integration Center**” has developed a wide network of partners implementing actions in collaboration with school community (Parents Associations) to raise awareness of students' acceptance of diversity.
- In addition, the Municipality of Heraklion cooperates with the Directorates of Education for the implementation of inclusion programs for migrant children and refugees in the frame of formal education and encourages their participation in these programs.

Over 3,000 students have visited the municipal library, archaeological museum and municipality’s info point as part of out-of-school extracurricular programs involving immigrant children.

- In the context of formal education in Greek schools there are special students classes for refugees and migrants' children, who attend Greek language courses, along with the rest courses of the school.
- The Municipality of Heraklion facilitates the associations of foreigners and, in general the communities of foreigners residing on the territory of our municipality:
  - Grants municipal spaces free of charge in order to organize cultural events and classes of teaching their mother tongue. (INFORMAL LEARNING)
  - The spaces provided are mainly school classrooms, which are used during the off-hours of the Greek educational program.
  - The subjects taught are language, history of the country of origin.
  - More specifically, the following schools operate in Heraklion: Serbian school, Polish school, Russian school.
- Free **Foreign Language Learning Programs** are provided for refugees in collaboration with Technological Educational Institute – Career Office, to learn Greek language through an electronic platform of the European program "ERASMUS PLUS OLS".  
The program was aimed only at refugees, with 25 participants, of whom 10 completed the program.
- Also, a volunteer Syrian teacher taught Greek language to women refugees.
- Also important is the presence of the Social Policy Volunteers Group, which, through its social actions, contributes to the smooth coexistence between indigenous and refugees and migrants.

**In any case, we believe that the design and operation of fixed education programs in the Greek language is crucial for the inclusion of refugees into the local community.**

- The Municipality of Heraklion participated in the implementation of the Program "Social Inclusion of Refugees through Sport in the Municipality of Heraklion" FIT FOR ALL ".

The program has been applied by the Municipality of Heraklion City through the Social Department, European programs Department in collaboration with Municipal Sport Organization, local sport clubs, local authorities and non-government organizations.

This action is based on the belief that sport can play a leading role by creating particularly favorable conditions for the further integration of refugees into society.

In particular, engaging refugees with sport and joining sports programs offers an opportunity to entertain, maintain or improve their health, improve their athletic skills, and experience successes and achievements. Through the program, refugees participate in all the sports activities of the city, in the same areas and programs that local use and physically are integrated in the city life and actions. The participants are educated to a wide range of issues, such as local culture, tradition and traditional dances, Olympic and Paralympic Sports, physical Activity, health and nutrition, the values of Olympism, such as Excellence, Friendship, Respect and Peace.

**As, Mr. Lambrinos, the Mayor of the Municipality of Heraklion, always points out: “The aim of all those efforts is to ensure that every single citizen in Heraklion has the chance to participate actively in the public life of our city”.**

**2. How can cities collaborate with national authorities or other stakeholders (including employers from the public and private sectors and civil society) to develop inclusive policies that support migrants?**

By the City Council Decision No 925/31-10-2018 a **new expanded Scientific Committee** has been established in order to coordinate the progress of implementation of actions and initiatives planned for our city as a member of the UNESCO GNLC. The aim of the Scientific Committee is scientific and advisory, towards the direction of building a learning city, through the realistic approach, monitoring and evaluating the local educational needs and progress. The participation of all the parties of the Municipal Council, the supreme educational institutions, the educational community of first grade and second grade, the museums, the chambers, as well as other communities and local associations, ensures the effectiveness and the continuance of its cause.

The Municipality of Heraklion ensures and promotes the collaboration with the University of Crete, the Cretan Technological Institution, the University of Nicosia, the administrations of education, various athletic and cultural associations, the Chambers of the city, the Institute Of Technological Education, the Commerce Association, the Medical Association and voluntary groups etc. The collaborations are about the economic support, the hospitality sponsorship, the free concession of municipal spaces, the promotion of actions via the municipal website and via press releases.

Our vision is to mobilize all stakeholders and to ensure equal and open access to a variety of educational-cultural-social-business experiences for people of every age. The evaluation of our actions so far proves that we are moving to the right direction.

Regarding the response to the migration and refugee crisis, the Mayor of Heraklion has agreed that our Municipality will be included in the UNHCR's "**ESTIA - Accommodation of asylum seekers in Crete**". Since 2017, the Municipality of Heraklion has been cooperating with the Heraklion Development Agency to implement the Program, which is funded by the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO).

According to the Heraklion Development Agency, approximately 700 people are accommodated in Heraklion Municipality in rented apartments (895 people in Crete in total), the costs of which are covered by the Program.

The Program includes the sub-project "ESTIA - Housing Asylum Seekers in Crete" with actions:

- ✓ Housing refugee families in fully equipped housing
- ✓ Community intervention actions
- ✓ Psychosocial support for benefiting refugees
- ✓ Integration of children and adolescents into the education system

- ✓ Support for access to all levels of the National Health System

The Program includes the subproject "Pilot Program for Supported Independent Living of Unaccompanied Minors" with actions:

- ✓ Housing unaccompanied adolescents in shelters
- ✓ Counseling support - guidance for developing life skills and autonomy before adulthood
- ✓ Greek language courses
- ✓ Inclusion of adolescents in secondary education or vocational schools
- ✓ Professional Counseling for the purpose of their integration and autonomy
- ✓ Connect with businesses for professional rehabilitation

Also, the Municipality of Heraklion participates actively in networks of national and local level. By the decision of the Municipal Council, Heraklion joined the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Municipalities of Athens and Thessaloniki which lead to create a network of 13 cities which hosts a large number of refugees. The purpose of the network is cooperation for developing social inclusion policies for refugees.

Within the City Network, partnerships were developed between the Municipality of Heraklion, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), The United Nations' Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and UNICEF "Refugee and Migrant Response in Greece".

- ❖ A two-day training seminar (April 2019) on protection and integration of refugees and asylum seekers was held with the UNHCR. The topics of the seminar were: enhancing the knowledge and skills development of staff working with asylum seekers and refugees, familiarity with the asylum procedure and the relevant legal framework, "equipping" staff with appropriate means of identifying cases in need of protection; and the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees in the social services provided and other referral mechanisms.
- ❖ With the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with the framework of the ADMIN4ALL program, a three (3) day training seminar was held, in which involved A '& B' Grade Education teachers, Heraklion Municipality staff as well as employees from other Departments and Agencies of our city. The purpose of the training seminars was to inform - raise awareness of immigrants and refugees, protection and inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers and networking between Authorities and Agencies that are in direct contact with refugees and migrants.

### **3. What are the challenges faced by cities when developing and implementing lifelong learning policies and practices for the inclusion of migrants, and how can they be overcome?**

Although the Municipality of Heraklion has improved access to learning, it has not yet managed to satisfy all the demands of the citizens. The difficulties are related to the legislative framework governing the operation of the Lifelong Learning Centres in the municipalities of the country. However, the establishment and operation of the Lifelong Learning Centre, ensures the continuity of actions in developing a learning city. Another obstacle is the bureaucracy, the funding process and restrictive regulations.

Ensuring that refugees are involved in the actions planned for their inclusion in the local society is a challenge for our municipality. For example, at the beginning of the implementation of the FIT FOR ALL program, the interest of refugees was diminished, as they saw the action as a luxury, having to deal with difficult everyday life and coming from conflict situations. A large promotional campaign followed by all stakeholders involved in the program (local sports clubs, local cultural organizations and municipal representatives etc) with printed material in 6 languages, was crucial for understanding the benefits of the action for both locals and refugees. Finally, the participation of the beneficiaries was increased more than 55%.

In particular, the increase of refugee flows in Europe, requires a common European policy, a unified approach to the issue at European Union level. However, actions on the part of refugee host cities, must and should be coordinated and focused on addressing the issue as best as possible. The Municipality of Heraklion has the political will and shows genuine solidarity with the problem.

In addition, our participation in today's forum is seen as promoting co-operation and the exchange of views and best practices on the current issue of the smooth inclusion of immigrants and refugees into the social fabric of our cities.