

# Refugee Contribution to Europe

A feasibility study on the establishment of a  
*Fund for Refugee Employment and Education (FREE)*  
in the European Union

**Greece**

November 2002



The FREE project received funding from the European Refugee Fund

The Greek country report is produced by the:

**Social Work Foundation  
(Refugee Integration Centre)**

11 Victoria Square  
104-34 Athens, Greece  
Tel: (003010) 8210917  
Fax :( 003010) 8226945  
Email: [refike@otenet.gr](mailto:refike@otenet.gr)



<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>PART I: ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION OF REFUGEES’ QUALIFICATIONS IN GREECE .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. GENERAL CONDITIONS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 REFUGEE POPULATION .....	5
1.2 LABOUR MARKET AND THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION OF REFUGEES .....	5
1.3 SELF-EMPLOYMENT .....	6
1.4 EDUCATION .....	7
<b>2. NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR VALIDATION OF QUALIFICATIONS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 NATIONAL BODIES.....	8
2.2 STATISTICS .....	8
<b>3. VALIDATION PROCEDURES AND METHODS .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 DE JURE PROCEDURES AND METHODS .....	9
3.2 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING .....	9
3.2.1 <i>Academic recognition</i> .....	10
Admission .....	10
Credit transfer .....	10
Recognition of certificates .....	10
3.3.1 <i>Academic studies</i> .....	11
Admission .....	11
Credit transfer .....	12
Recognition of degrees and diplomas .....	12
<b>4. BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY REFUGEES .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>PART II: FREE FUND PROGRAMME: FEASIBILITY STUDY .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4. GREEK SITUATION.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5. ORGANISATIONS/BUSINESSES INTERVIEWED .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>6. BENEFITS.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>7. CONDITIONS AND ACTIVITIES.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>8. STRUCTURE.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>9. CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1: REFUGEE-ASSISTING ORGANISATIONS .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2: INSTITUTES/ORGANISATIONS CONTACTED.....</b>	<b>25</b>

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report is divided into two parts. The first part is comprised of a review of policies that involve the assessment and validation of refugees' qualifications at a national level. The second part of the report consists of a feasibility study on the establishment of a Fund for Refugee Employment and Education (FREE) in Greece as part of a European-wide fund. Due to the complexities involved during the validation phase of refugees' foreign earned credentials in Greece, and the parameters that hinder their integration in the host community, we stress the necessity of the creation and implementation of FREE in order to assist refugees gain further education and access to legal employment that would promote their integration and guarantee security, dignity and self-worth in the community.

## **PART I: ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION OF REFUGEES' QUALIFICATIONS IN GREECE**

### **1. GENERAL CONDITIONS**

#### **1.1 Refugee population**

Since 1980, Greece has granted political asylum to more than 6300 people, the vast majority of whom are from Iraq, Turkey and Afghanistan. Of all asylum claims examined in 2001, more than 12% were approved. Convention refugees are issued 5-year residence and work permits, which can be renewed. They are also entitled to apply for reunification with their spouses, underage children, dependent elderly and children with special needs. In 1999, Greece revised its asylum procedure. The revised presidential decree, enacted in June 1999, introduced special provisions for unaccompanied minors, children and women while it also extended the time for a rejected asylum applicant to lodge an appeal to 30 days from the day the rejection was granted. From the date of the lodge of the appeal until the answer from the Ministry of Public Order, all measures taken by the Ministry to expel the applicant are suspended, thus granting him/her the right to reside legally in Greece pending the answer to the appeal. Another important aspect of the new decree is that it allows rejected asylum seekers to appeal to the Ministry of Public Order for residence on humanitarian grounds (due to civil war or natural disaster). During 2000, approximately 400 people were granted temporary residence on such grounds (UNHCR, 2002: 1).

In 1998, the government introduced a regularisation process (amnesty) which granted legal status to many irregular migrants. As a result, 370,000 irregular migrants received residence permits. A second regularisation took place in 2001 which enabled almost the same number of irregular migrants to receive legal status, thus guaranteeing them legal and social rights. In these regularisations many asylum seekers or people with humanitarian status registered, discarding their refugee status and acquiring an immigrant status.

#### **1.2 Labour market and the employment situation of refugees**

Refugees are given asylum by the Greek state when they are considered to fall under the provisions of the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol. They can get work permits from the Ministry of Labour, which enable them to seek legal employment. The permit is tied to a job with a particular employer. Apart from convention refugees, asylum seekers are also able to obtain a work permit and access to employment. However, the labour market structure of Greece is characterised by considerable flexibility in the form of the informal economy and foreigners have a direct link with non-reported jobs in the agricultural sector as seasonal workers in the construction and tourist industries (Rhodes 1997). In addition, there are high levels of unemployment among the native population for those with secondary education and the relative levels of unemployment for those with tertiary education are also

high in Greece. This puts the refugee and migrant population in a more vulnerable state, especially those who have secondary and tertiary levels of education. (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Unemployment and participation rates in Greece, by gender and educational level, 1998**

Rate (%) of:	Male			Female		
	< u.s.	= u.s.	Tertiary	< u.s.	= u.s.	Tertiary
Unemployment	5.5	6.6	5.3	13.7	17.3	10.3
Participation	81.6	89.4	90.8	41.1	56.9	83.2

SOURCE: OECD (2001: Table D, Statistical Annex)

Notes:

<u.s. = less than upper secondary education

=u.s. = completed upper secondary education

Looking at the situation of migrants and refugees, there tends to be a concentration in certain sectors for the work permits granted during the 1998 regularisation. Table 2 provides a clear picture of this.

**Table 2: Foreign employment in Greece by economic activity 1998-9**

Economic activity	Rate (%)
Agriculture and fishing	3.5
Mining and manufacturing	19.3
Construction	26.6
Retail and wholesale	19.0
Health, Education, Social services	5.9
Households	19.9
Public administration	0.8
Other services	5.0

SOURCE: OECD (2001a: Table 5.4)

From the table above we can see that there is high employment of housekeepers and a concentration of immigrant as well as refugee employment in construction and industrial manufacturing. Furthermore, the proportion of immigrant and refugee participation in white collar jobs is 10% as opposed to 40% in Greece (Baldwin-Edwards 2001: 14).

### **1.3 Self-employment**

Self-employment is considered to be high in Greece. It is actually three times more than the EU average. In the year 2000 the percentage of self-employment in Greece was 44% in comparison to the EU average which was 14.8% (Commission of the European Communities, 2001a: 110). Convention refugees are entitled to start up a business in Greece. To start up a business, the three key reference points are the municipality (to obtain a series of permits and licences in particular for those whose activity implies the use of premises), the Chamber of Commerce (for everything that relates to the total enterprise, in particular the registration of the VAT number), and health institutions for the inspection of the premises and possible licences in the particular activities.

The proportion of immigrants/refugees occurring in self-employment is 8%. However, these figures cover a small fraction of the immigrants and refugees in Greece (Baldwin-Edwards 2001: 14-15). Overall there are no official data on refugee or migrant business. Although the municipalities provide some data on the number of applications for licences to open business from foreigners, there is no

breakdown on their characteristics. The Social Work Foundation aims through its “*Self-sufficiency programme*” to support the positive contribution of refugees in Greece in establishing a small enterprise. The programme began its implementation in 1995; it was initially funded by UNHCR and since then it has supported the private initiatives of 30 refugees that led to self-employment.

It is viewed that self-employment is an avenue to overcome labour market disadvantages for refugees. These disadvantages stem from lack of Greek language proficiency and the obstacles experienced in their validation of their academic qualifications by the Greek state. Given the fact that migrants and refugees are also involved in non-registered jobs, or face great difficulties in finding permanent work, they may contemplate self-employment (EU CARE, 2000: 8).

## **1.4 Education**

- **Refugee status and access to education**

Convention refugees and asylum seekers have access to primary and secondary education. Convention refugees, however, also have access to tertiary education, as well as access to government-run training programmes implemented by the Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED). Convention refugees can also have access to Institutes of Vocational Training. Tables 3 and 4 provide data on convention refugees, migrants and repatriated Greeks who completed training courses run by OAED and implemented at various Institutes of Vocational Training.

**Table 3: Operational Programme: Combat of Exclusion from the Labour Market, 1999-2001**

<b>Target Group</b>	<b>New Positions Of Employment</b>	<b>New Business Ventures</b>	<b>New Positions of Employment &amp; New Business Ventures</b>
Migrants	190	139	329
Repatriates	123	234	1464
Refugees	30	37	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>1450</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>1860</b>

**Table 4: Community Initiative “Employment”, 1999-2000**

<b>Target Group</b>	<b>New Positions Of Employment</b>	<b>New Business Ventures</b>	<b>New Positions of Employment &amp; New Business Ventures</b>
Migrants	2	2	4
Repatriates	65	34	99
Refugees	52	3	55
<b>Total</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>158</b>

Source: Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED) 2002.

## **2. NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR VALIDATION OF QUALIFICATIONS**

Here, we review the bodies responsible for conducting the formal procedures of validation of academic and professional qualifications to whom convention refugees are eligible to apply.

### **2.1 National Bodies**

Higher Education: Two national bodies are responsible in this field:

The Inter-University Centre for the Recognition of Foreign Academic Titles (DIKATSA) which deals with University qualifications. DIKATSA is a national centre operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The members of the Administrative Council are university professors nominated by their institutions and appointed by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The responsible agency which deals with the validation of academic qualifications obtained from Technological Educational Institutes is ITE (Institute of Technological Education Validation Agency) and operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Within their respective fields, these bodies:

- evaluate foreign credentials: DIKATSA and ITE are competent for the academic recognition of qualifications which “includes” professional recognition;
- inform applicants about the correct procedures.

As DIKATSA and ITE are exclusively in charge of the recognition of foreign credentials as well as of their equivalence to Greek ones, their decisions are compulsory to third parties including tertiary education institutions. The difference between DIKATSA and ITE is that ITE validates degrees and diplomas granted by Technological Institutions whereas DIKATSA validates degrees or diplomas granted by universities. Both bodies have published a list containing universities and institutes of technology and their departments whose titles have been recognised as equivalent to Greek ones.

Vocational education and training: The competent body is the Organisation for Vocational Education & Training (OEEK). The work of this body includes:

- a) development and provision of vocational training;
- b) the formal certification of vocational training;
- c) the harmonisation of vocational training with the educational system;
- d) the implementation of various national or EU vocational education and training programmes.

Trade unions, employers’ organisations and professional associations play an important role because of their representatives’ participation in the OEEK’s Administrative Council and in assessment and examination committees. The OEEK, supervised by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, is the responsible body for the organisation, development and supply of vocational training in Greece.

### **2.2 Statistics**

Higher education qualifications: 4400 recognition cases are processed per year by DIKATSA and 1000 by ITE. There are no available data on the number of these concerning refugees/immigrants, but the vast majority concerns people of Greek origin or European citizens.

Vocational qualifications: Around 2000 applications for recognition of vocational qualifications are submitted to OEEK per year. Of those, 30% are submitted by individuals coming from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. However, very few recognition cases concern people coming from countries known to produce refugees.

### **3. VALIDATION PROCEDURES AND METHODS**

#### **3.1 De jure procedures and methods**

Regulated professions are basically related to tertiary education. There are few regulated occupations related to post-secondary/secondary education and training. The bodies which are authorised to supply professional licensing in regulated occupations to Greeks and EU citizens are similarly authorised to supply it to individuals who have been awarded their qualifications in institutions outside the EU. These bodies could be scientific associations (doctors lawyers, pharmacists etc.) chambers (technical, economic, geological etc.), competent directorates of the prefectures (engineer) and vocational associations (physiotherapists etc.).

Those of the EU Directives that have been implemented by Greek legislation are applied to applicants coming from EU countries. All other applicants need to get academic recognition through the following procedure:

- a) academic recognition of the qualifications by DIKATSA, ITE or OEEK;
- b) submission of the equivalence title to the competent body for professional licensing;
- c) registration on the list of people entitled to exercise the occupation in question.

Professional licensing requires a certain amount of previous service or working under supervision in the occupational area. For example, insurance agents must have worked 2–4 years depending on the nature of their position.

In order to obtain professional licensing for technical occupations, one should submit to relevant directorates of the Prefectures the leaving certificate of Technical Vocational Lyceum or Technical School or Apprenticeship School. In some cases, besides the formal qualifications, the applicant should additionally pass examinations to get professional licensing.

Fees: To get professional licensing, the only fee required is the payment of the stamp that is approximately €4.

Methods and criteria: In the process of supplying equivalence of studies, the competent bodies examine and evaluate the level and programmes of studies, including the subjects. It is then necessary to get tax licensing and registration for the compulsory social security (e.g. with the Tradesmen Security Institution), which are based on the applicant's degree and professional licensing. In some cases, principally in the technical professions, prior experience is needed to get professional licensing. To prove any prior experience, the applicant is obliged to submit a certification of prior service. In some cases the applicant is required to take written examinations.

Non-regulated professions: The need for tax licensing and registration in social security also applies to the exercise of non-regulated professions. Since the occupation is non-regulated, professional licensing is not requested by the public bodies. However, whether the applicant wishes to be occupied as self-employed or employee, it is necessary to apply to DIKATSA/ITE (or OEEK) for recognition of qualifications since it is required by the Tax Office and the respective social security institution (because the taxes and security contributions are rated according to occupation).

Nationality requirements: Posts reserved for Greek nationals or EU citizens: The Public sector posts as executive positions that require service.

#### **3.2 Vocational education and training**

Vocational Training Institutes (IEKs) operate in Greece and are not included in the various levels of the formal educational system. These institutes supplement the educational system and help young people enter the labour market. The aim of the IEKs is to provide any type of vocational training – either initial or complementary – that may facilitate young people's vocational integration in society

and ensure their adaptation to the changing requirements of production. Holders of the Secondary Education Certificate are eligible for admission to these institutes. Both public and private IEKs are administered by OEEK ( Organisation for Vocational Education and Training (OEEK) (2002a).

OEEK is instrumental at national and local levels in assisting Vocational Training Institute graduates integrate into the labour market. To support this effort, the organisation has established the operation of career and employment centres. Simultaneously, pursuant to OEEK's structure and the responsibilities assumed by its departments, the Educational Materials Unit of the Training Department, in collaboration with the Operation and EDP Department, as well as other agencies of the public and private sector, develops and maintains a system to supervise, for a 5-year period, the professional establishment of those who have obtained a Certificate of Vocational Training. Convention refugees are eligible to attend courses at IEK provided that they have completed their secondary education (Organisation for Vocational Education and Training (OEEK) (2002b).

### **3.2.1 Academic recognition**

#### **Admission**

Competent body: On evaluation of the qualification, OEEK issues a certificate that may be used by the applicant in case she/he wishes to be enrolled at a technical school. The regulations, which are in force for EU citizens, are similarly implemented to refugees and immigrants who have been granted a residence permit.

Preparatory courses and language tuition: The Ministry of Education offers Greek language courses to students who are repatriated Greeks or of Greek origin, before their matriculation to the compulsory or technical vocational education. These language courses are offered at beginners, intermediate and advanced levels. A certificate of proficiency in the Greek language is awarded after passing a written examination. This certificate is also required by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs especially when foreigners have submitted their applications for acceptance by the tertiary institutions.

Duration of course and fees: The duration of the course is 4 months for per level, and the maximum fee is €500. However, convention refugees and asylum seekers are exempted from paying the fees. Courses in the Greek language are also offered to refugees and immigrants by local administrations, private bodies, NGOs and the Greek Orthodox Church (see Appendix 1).

#### **Credit transfer**

Competent body: The Organisation of Vocational Education & Training (OEEK).

Document requirements: Official certificates proving the successful participation in examinations and the completion of a period of studies (e.g. the applicant has passed A class and is promoted to B class).

#### **Recognition of certificates**

Competent body: The Organisation of Vocational Education & Training (OEEK).

The document requirements of the OEEK are:

- a) certified copy of the certification of studies;
- b) curricula of studies;
- c) certification concerning the level and duration of studies and the accession of professional rights associated with this title in the country of origin;
- d) written statement that the documents are real;
- e) residence permit.

Processing time: The processing time for an ordinary academic recognition case at OEEK is 1 month if the certificate has been awarded by a foreign school that is already known in the service.

Fees: The fees charged at OEEK amount to €10. (For repatriated Greeks there is no fee.) It is not possible to estimate the fees charged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the translation of documents; however, they do not exceed €50, and the amount depends on the number of documents submitted.

Methods and criteria: The duration of studies and the subjects attended are taken into consideration. Many recognition cases have been filed in OEEK's archives, thus facilitating the procedure when the applicant is not able to submit all of the documents.

### **3.3.1 Academic studies**

#### **Admission**

Competent body: The central service of the Ministry of Education.

Following procedures determined by the Ministry of Education, those refugees who have been granted a residence permit can be enrolled in tertiary education universities and Technological Education Institutions (TEI). There are regulations concerning the selection criteria (mainly the final mark received in the degree) and their distribution per country of origin. The distribution is made following decisions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, according to the attitudes of the government towards the country of origin of each applicant. The category of "foreigner" is applied to applicants of whom neither the father nor the mother is of Greek origin or nationality. Those who wish to attend studies at a Greek tertiary education institution should submit an application to the Entrance Examinations Department of the Ministry of Education between the 1st and 10th August of each year.

Document requirements:

- 1) Secondary education certificate/graduation certificate documenting the general average marks issued either by the Ministry of Education of the country of origin or by the embassy of this country in Greece.
- 2) A report certificate of the general average marks issued either by the Department of Education or by the competent educational service of the country of origin or by the embassy of this country in Greece. The average of the general marks should be based on a point scale ranging from 0 to 20.
- 3) Certification provided by a competent service about the nationality and place of origin of the applicant and his/her parents.
- 4) A written statement having been issued by the competent authority of the candidate's country confirming that his/her graduation certificate entitles him/her to be enrolled at a higher education institute at home.
- 5) A declaration that the candidate does not hold any degree awarded by the Greek tertiary education institution.

All documents issued by a foreign agency must be ratified for the authenticity of the signature, either by the Greek diplomatic authority abroad or by the diplomatic authority of this foreign country in Greece. If they are not they will not be accepted by the Competent Committee, and the application for the admission will be rejected. Furthermore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Greece must ratify the documents. Documents must be translated into Greek either by the Greek diplomatic authority abroad or by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Greece.

Preparatory courses and language tuition: When selected to matriculate to Greek tertiary education institutions, foreigners (as well as Greeks abroad) should submit a certificate of Greek language proficiency. The necessary certificate of Greek language proficiency is awarded after attending the

course and sitting an examination at the University of Athens or the University of Thessalonica. The attendance of these courses requires the fee of €500. However, convention refugees and asylum seekers are exempted from paying this fee. Introductory courses are offered to foreign-language prospective students by private agencies including agencies operating under the Greek Orthodox Church and by non-government organisations. These courses are focused on the learning of Greek language and on elements of Greek history and culture.

### **Credit transfer**

Competent bodies: DIKATSA and ITE.

Document requirements: Diploma and other credentials, translated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and residence permit.

### **Recognition of degrees and diplomas**

Competent bodies: DIKATSA and ITE.

Document requirements: Diploma and other credentials, translated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and residence permit.

Processing time: If the diploma/degree has been awarded by a foreign institution that is already known in the agency, the processing time for an ordinary academic recognition case at ITE is 3 months, and at DIKATSA approximately 6 months to a year.

### Fees:

University qualifications: The fees charged at DIKATSA are €120 which may be reduced following a decision of DIKATSA's Administrative Council. (For immigrants of Greek origin there is no fee.)

Non-university qualifications: No fees are charged for academic recognition at ITE. The translation fee does not exceed €60.

Methods and criteria: The competent bodies examine whether the issuing institution is of the same level as a corresponding Greek one. This being the case they proceed to the examination of the studies (duration, subjects, etc). If the qualification meets the criteria the title is given correspondence to the Greek qualification of the same or similar speciality.

#### **4. BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY REFUGEES**

##### **Higher education**

###### **Barriers**

Asylum seekers do not have access to tertiary education. Furthermore there is no legislation which permits adult refugees to gain a Secondary School Certificate.

There is a limited number of recognised refugees in Greece and yet a very small percentage is submitted to the tertiary education system.

Formal documents such as the Secondary School Certificate and the official transcript of results must be submitted in order to apply to academic institutions. Even though these documents may be obtained at the embassies or the Ministry of Education in the applicants' country, refugees are afraid to contact these institutions, as it is necessary to keep the country of asylum secret from the authorities of their country of origin.

The absence of sufficient financial support for refugees who want to study at a higher level.

###### **Needs**

More financial means to facilitate the access to higher education.

Create alternative assessment techniques which prove the background knowledge of the field of study in which the person wishes to undertake.

More scholarships and loans by public and private educational institutions.

##### **Problems with validation of qualifications for employment**

###### **Barriers**

The applicant has to obtain academic recognition from DIKATSA (Inter-University Centre for the Recognition of Foreign Academic Titles) and subsequently their professional recognition from OEEK (Organisation of Vocational Education and Training). Both procedures of validation take many months to complete.

Process of validation of academic qualifications takes many months and diplomas and degrees will not be recognised unless additional exams are undertaken.

Difficult or impossible to find time and money necessary to continue studies given that there is no financial assistance for refugees.

In some cases, principally in the technical professions, prior experience is needed to get professional licensing. To prove any prior experience the applicant is obliged to submit a certification of prior service.

###### **Needs**

A simplified institutional framework on the validation process.

Speed up the process of academic and professional recognition.

## **Access to vocational training**

### **Barriers**

The applicants have to be registered at the Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED) before they apply for government-run programmes.

Most vocational training programmes demand a certain level of language acquisition and many programmes do not meet the expectations of the refugees and the demands of the labour market.

### **Needs**

Expand possibilities of vocational training.

Develop vocational training programmes that reflect career aspirations of applicants and demands of the labour market.

## **Refugee entrepreneurship**

### **Barriers**

Many refugees experience lack of access to business capital.

Greek banks require security based on property.

Refugees are not able to get personal loans since this requires 3 years of tax declarations and a statement from the employer.

High expenditures required for the insurance fund for the self-employed (TEBE).

Those who work as small-scale traders have difficulty to invest €3000 to obtain licenses for the street markets.

### **Needs**

Provide guidelines for the setting up of business and the necessary legal and tax terminology.

Assist refugees to obtain street licenses by negotiating with the local authorities to allow a limited number of street licenses for refugees at a reduced cost.

Involve the private sector to provide loans for the start up of a business (eg. Banks, companies etc.).

## **Changing of careers and transferring of skills**

### **Barriers**

The Greek labour market is characterised by the high informal economy and there is a direct link between migrants/refugees in non-registered employment.

High demands required by employers of professional posts.

Lack of career guidance and advice on professional orientation.

### **Needs**

A centralised authority that can conduct further research on skills transfer and introduce changes that would facilitate the process of developing a career or transferring of skills.

## **PART II: FREE FUND PROGRAMME: FEASIBILITY STUDY**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This feasibility study was treated as a campaign in Greece and represents an effort to overview corporate social responsibility practices among Greek companies and organisations and promote issues surrounding refugees by familiarising institutions with the problems encountered by the target group in their quest for social and economic integration. In addition, it presents best practices of NGOs, which promote rights and equal participation in the fields of education and employment.

This part of the report consists of the results of the feasibility study conducted in 2002 in order to examine the parameters and the criteria needed to set up the Fund for Refugee Employment and Education. Firstly, it will review the concept of corporate social responsibility, and how it has been implemented at a national level. Secondly, the results of the feasibility study will be presented which include the preferred structure of the fund, the conditions proposed and finally emphasis on the importance of the creation and implementation of FREE.

The concept of corporate social responsibility is currently being promoted by European companies as a response to a variety of social, environmental and economic pressures. This response of the companies endeavours to raise the standards of social development, environmental protection and respect towards human rights (Commission of the European Communities, 2001b). In the past few years, Europe has been facing social issues that required the immediate response of the state. However, one method of intervention in these issues is the involvement of the private sector with the aim to address and if possible alleviate some of the serious problems through their social responsibility programmes. One of the aims of this feasibility study conducted in the 14 member-states of the European Union was to explore corporate social responsibility practices at a European and state level and to introduce refugees as part of companies' social responsibility programmes.

The issue of refugees is currently being dealt with in the EU agenda due to the continuous arrival of asylum seekers, especially since late 2001. In the meantime it is also obliged to cater for the current convention refugee population and its quest for economic and social integration.

Of the 6300 people that were granted asylum in Greece since 1980, many had acquired several academic and professional skills in their countries of origin but are currently not able to fully utilise their skills in Greece. This, as mentioned in the first part of the report, is due to the labour market shortages in professional occupations and the difficulties in the validation of credentials earned abroad. As a result, most foreigners including refugees and asylum seekers are economically located in the informal sector mainly in the agriculture and tourism industries with massive under-reporting of employment.

Considering the above situation, the project's aims is threefold: firstly, to make various organisations, institutions and especially businesses aware of the refugee presence in Greece and the barriers which obstruct the target group's economic and social integration; secondly, to explore the prospects of participation of all institutions in FREE; thirdly, to finalise a model for FREE that would be generally acceptable, in order to secure participation.

### **2. METHODOLOGY**

Before approaching the various institutions, research was required in order to become familiar with the concept of corporate social responsibility at European and national levels. This was achieved through various readings like the European Commission's paper: "*Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility*" and the overview of the various research papers and conferences

held at European level. The contact with the *Hellenic Business Network for Corporate Social Responsibility* enabled the approach of businesses that were members of the Network. These businesses had already applied social responsibility programmes to their practices and were able to give an insight on the structure and benefits of FREE. Overall, 15 businesses, 2 business networks, 5 governmental organisations, 2 educational institutes and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Athens were approached (See Appendix 2).

Apart from businesses, it was important to receive the opinions and views of the state organisations as they reflect a wide experience in European programmes and their input so far in the project has proved useful. A qualitative approach was used by conducting semi-structured interviews. This means that a discussion was held about the general situation of refugees residing in Greece and the obstacles encountered which hinder their economic and social integration. Good practices by the Social Work Foundation were presented, emphasising the need to invest in FREE, this being the Self-sufficiency programme implemented by SWF and funded by UNHCR, and demonstrated its success rate. At the end of the interview a questionnaire was distributed and was sent to the Social Work Foundation.

### **3. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Corporate social responsibility can be defined in many ways as it is implemented on a voluntary basis by multinational companies as well as public organisations and small business enterprises. However, generally, corporate social responsibility implies that a company conducts its business in a socially acceptable way that is accountable for its effects on all relevant stakeholders. Thus corporate social responsibility raises the question of the total impact of an activity on the lives of individuals both within and external to the company.

- Internally: recruitment and employee retention, wages and benefits, investment in training, working environment, health, safety, labour rights etc.
- Externally: human rights, fair trading, impact on human health and quality of life, acceptable ratio between advantages and disadvantages for those most affected (European Commission 2001a: 1). In this feasibility study, we focus on the external dimension focusing on human rights and the right to quality of life.

### **4. GREEK SITUATION**

Corporate social responsibility is being recognised in Greece as a significant political attitude. Until recently, responsibilities were primarily requested towards the state. However, its role as the exclusive regulator is not recognised anymore, since bureaucracy, immobility and partisanship have shaken the public's trust in it. The contribution of the state in the resolution of societal problems is still considered to be crucial, especially by individual citizens, yet it has to seek cooperation with other social parties as well as the private sector (Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility (2000: 4). The European Commissioner for Greece, Anna Diamantopoulou, stated at the conference held by the Confederation of Greek Industry in Athens in 2001 the importance of social responsibility and whether companies large or small are particularly successful when they include elements of social responsibility into their activities (Diamantopoulou 2001).

Corporate social responsibility in Greece was measured in a study conducted by Venieris (1992:1). This study presented the results of empirical research establishing a linear relationship between corporate social responsibility and corporate financial performance. Original data concerning corporate social responsibility were collected via a questionnaire which asked corporations to assess their own corporate social responsibility. The study measured corporate social responsibility practices between the period 1987 to 1992. From the 150 companies approached, 53 completed the questionnaire and showed that their corporate social responsibility practices involved the purchase of

special equipment to control pollution and the improvement of companies' attitudes towards packaging safety. However, recently more corporate social responsibility practices in companies were noted and they endeavoured to tackle issues of unemployment and combat social exclusion of vulnerable groups.

On a state level, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security is responsible for coordinating the efforts on corporate social responsibility across the Greek economy. Although the government believes that it is important to implement corporate social responsibility practices, legislation is not considered the way to move forward. In recognition of their role in social cohesion, employees (blue and white collar workers) as well as large, small and medium enterprises agreed with the government to set up an "Account for Employment and Vocational Training" (LAEK) in 1996. The Account was formed by the Federation of Greek Industries and the General Confederation of Hellenic Commerce. The purpose of LAEK is to support corporate social responsibility practices which provide meaningful work for employees and a better quality of life in the workplace and complement strategies to fight unemployment with interventions concerning special measures to promote quality in work and corporate social responsibility practices from the companies (European Commission 2001b:2).

As mentioned in the first part of the report, Greece is characterised by a high rate of self-employment, especially in the area of small-scale business. This means that the Greek economy consists of a large number of small business enterprises and their main priority is to become profitable in order to survive in the market. The SMEs have been expected to find the importance of corporate social responsibility, and following corporate social responsibility practices particularly difficult. During the last years, however, a very dynamic type of SME has developed, the so-called companies of the new economy, which are mostly related to the ICT sector. In an interview conducted with the Director of female and youth entrepreneurship, Ms Vasilakaki of the *Greek Organisation of Small and Medium Size Business and Handicraft*, stated that the organisation is developing an Observatory where it will examine the impact of government policy on small and medium size businesses. As part of its tasks, an examination and a promotion of practices of social responsibility will also be undertaken (17-7-2002).

A recent study conducted by MORI (Marketing Opinion and Research International) in 13 countries of Europe initiated by CSR-Europe states that big businesses and governments should collaborate in order to deal with social problems. In this survey, Greek citizens also expressed their views. They believe that commercial and industrial companies are socially responsible but do not demonstrate this to the extent that they should. Greek citizens rank the importance of corporate social responsibility practices in the following order:

- a) protection of health and safety of employees;
- b) protection of the environment;
- c) combat long-term unemployment;
- d) secure equal treatment of employees and those seeking employment (Hellenic Network for Corporate Social responsibility, 2000: 2).

In June 2000, the Hellenic Business Network for Corporate Social Responsibility was established. It is a business driven network whose mission is to help companies to achieve profitability, sustainable growth and human progress by placing corporate social responsibility in the mainstream of business practice. Over 50 Greek corporations are members of the Network. The practices developed by Greek companies in the field of corporate social responsibility include the protection of the environment. BP Hellas aims to educate the young and adult population in driving safely. The pharmaceutical company *Janssen-Cilag* develops community healthcare programmes with the aim to prevent and meet the mental health needs of children and adolescents in Greece. *Phillip Morris Hellas* has been raising awareness on domestic violence and mobilises the relevant authorities to initiate solutions for the victims. *Shell Hellas* and *Titan Cement Company* have been promoting children's education and vocational training and fighting against long-term unemployment (Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility 2001: 3).

## **5. ORGANISATIONS/BUSINESSES INTERVIEWED**

At this stage of the project 11 potential donors were interviewed. These were:

### Government organisations

- General Secretariat for Gender Issues
- Greek Organisation of Small and Medium size Businesses and Handicraft (EOMMEX)
- Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Research Centre for Gender Issues
- Greek National Manpower organisation

### Businesses

- Chipita Hellas
- AGET: Cement Company
- Intracom

### Educational Institutes

- Eugenides Foundation

### Business networks

- The Hellenic Business Network for Corporate Social Responsibility

### Refugee Associations

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Athens Branch Office).

## **6. BENEFITS**

The general picture shows that private companies are not fully aware of the problems that the refugee population encounters during the adjustment and continual phase of its integration. Therefore, the researcher had to point out the benefits of an investment in FREE. In addition, refugee integration has not been considered a top priority in their social responsibility practices. They see this as a political issue or an issue of public policy rather than a corporate one. Therefore in the beginning of the interview there was an introduction of some examples of cases presented through the work of the Social Work Foundation and the Greek Council of Refugees. For example, The *Self-sufficiency programme* (self-employment programme) implemented since 1995 and its success is proving useful in making companies realise refugees' potential of success once they receive financial support for the creation of small business.

Despite the lack of awareness on refugee issues, the project was received as positive and innovative. However, at this stage, this general interest in FREE was not followed by any commitments. For example the Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED) excluded any involvement as it implements training programmes that provide grants for self-employment to various vulnerable groups including refugees. The *General Secretariat for Equality* mentioned that if FREE were established, it would help refugees to enhance their academic skills and facilitate their integration by gaining employment that would correspond to their qualifications. It was also mentioned that the Secretariat has recently signed an Agreement with *UNHCR* in order to collaborate on the promotion of women refugees and their rights. A question that was raised by the representative of the *Eugenides Foundation* was the additional benefits of FREE to its potential beneficiaries in comparison to benefits gained by refugees from the existing programmes that promote self-employment and education and vocational training. However, given the increasing number of refugees in Greece, FREE would also promote the notion of multiculturalism and equal opportunities between refugee and Greek students. *UNHCR* in Athens has played a major role in providing programmes for the refugee population and its input in the

feasibility study has been beneficial. If it participated in the Fund, the agency would benefit by further promoting its social commitment to the refugee population at both Greek and European levels.

A representative of the multinational company *Chipita Hellas* who participated in the feasibility study mentioned that if the company became a donor, the company would benefit by its social commitment to the community in general, promoting equality of opportunity and promotion in social values participation. However, the representative also stated “*socially responsible programmes for persons with disability would create a better image for the company than those for refugees*” (12-7-2002). The representative of *Research Centre for Gender Issues* stated some benefits concerning FREE in relation to women’s rights to education, vocational training and self-employment. The centre sees it as a benefit to support socially excluded people and promote them in employment. The representative of the Athens Chamber of Commerce had been aware of refugee issues and the organisation would benefit by gaining an image of providing equal opportunities to all members of Greek society. On the contrary, the representative of the *AGET: Cement Company* expressed negative views for the project by stating the following: “*The Company would not be interested in becoming a donor for programmes that would benefit refugees. On the contrary, the company would be more interested in applying social responsibility programmes, which would tackle the issue of unemployment. In fact, unemployment is caused by the refugees living in Greece*”.

## **7. CONDITIONS AND ACTIVITIES**

In order for organisations to consider commitments to FREE, they would require more clarification on the legal framework of the Fund and sufficient evidence of good management of funds either at European or national level. The Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility and the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry mentioned that in order to consider committing themselves to the Fund, they would require information on the maximum capital needed to establish the Fund as well as the maximum number of people who would benefit from the programme. Furthermore, they would consider possible involvement in the decision making process of the Fund.

At this stage, they would support self-employment programmes and support academic studies. In addition, offering work experience in their company is also a possibility. Potential donors at this stage mainly support activities in the self-employment and educational sectors. The *Greek Organisation of Small and Medium Size Businesses* would promote refugee entrepreneurship. *Chipita Hellas* and the Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility would offer work experience and support for academic studies.

## **8. STRUCTURE**

At this stage of the project, there seems to be a mixed response on the preferable structure of the Fund. The *General Secretariat for Equality* is not able to invest or become a donor in the programme but would welcome participating in terms of a European initiative. *Eugenides Foundation* stated a similar opinion. This means that the Fund would be managed at the national level by a NGO and would prove more reliable. It excluded the national structure, especially the one that would be managed by state organisations. As mentioned previously, *Chipita* is not ready to involve itself in programmes that promote integration of refugees within its corporate social responsibility practices. It believes that socially responsible programmes for people with disabilities would create a better image for the company than those for refugees. However, as this was a feasibility study, *Chipita* stated that it would prefer a European structure of the fund. The *Hellenic Network of Corporate Social Responsibility* showed some scepticism concerning the structure of the FREE fund.

The *Greek Organization of Small and Medium Size Businesses and Handicraft* did not choose a structure but showed some skepticism on all suggested structures. Due to the complicated bureaucratic procedures the European structure is not recommended. The national structure could act as a political

exercise for the current and future governments in power. However, some advantages and disadvantages were mentioned regarding the regional level. The Organisation could act as an advocate of the target group and promote their needs. However, this could form a disparate policy. Meaning, the more regional, the more unequal the distribution. Instead of creating a common formula there is a fear of ghettoization. As far as the issue of management is concerned, it would be appropriate for a NGO to participate in the management of the Fund as it would be more sensitive towards the target group and be able to point out their needs and examine factors of refugee involvement in self-employment and education.

At this stage of the project, it is not possible to indicate the most preferable structure. However, all the views mentioned seem to have advantages and disadvantages. Overall, prospective donors need further clarification on the economic indicators of this structure before they commit themselves. They would prefer to invest in a fund based on a regional structure in cooperation with the NGOs and support specific cases referred by the NGOs based on personal and individual choices.

## **9. CONCLUSIONS**

Within the legal framework mentioned in this report it can be argued that the Greek policy context does not allow refugees to approach their situation in the receiving society in a reproductive way. Despite the legal equality concerning access to employment and education in Greece, most refugees with an academic background find work in low paid sectors such as in agriculture, tourism or domestic services. This situation does not develop their skills and most importantly does not enhance their dignity or self-worth. Employment and education act as the most significant factors that contribute to the successful integration both from the point of view of the host society and of the focus group. However, these factors are the most difficult to tackle because of the situation in the labour market of the host society, and the bureaucratic policies that delay or even exclude refugees from enhancing their professional skills. Furthermore, as self-employment is considered a pathway to gaining legal access to employment, many face obstacles due to the insufficient start-up capital and lack the requirements in getting a bank loan to support the initial stage of the business. As mentioned in the first part of the report, only a small number of refugees can gain access to the vocational training programmes offered by the National Manpower Employment Organisation.

In light of the above, the FREE fund would be able to bridge the gap between the inequalities and the opportunities to develop refugees' potential in gaining further education and decent employment. This means that refugees could gain financial assistance to attend training seminars at various private Institutes of Vocational Training. Upon gaining further education, the beneficiaries of the FREE would be more equipped to apply for jobs that would correspond to their educational qualifications. Professional re-qualification and academic validation from the respective bodies can take several months so the fund could be used to support the beneficiaries financially until the completion of the procedure. Finally, as most refugees lack the funds to start their business, the fund could provide loans to start a business venture.

The feasibility study has shown that the creation of FREE would be a challenging process as Greek companies view corporate social responsibility practices towards refugees as a practice that will not yet bring a very good image into their social responsibility practices. A huge effort was required in order to secure an interview and convince companies to include refugees in their corporate social responsibility practises. This, however, should not prevent the researchers from continuing their effort to promote the programme in all sectors of Greek society.

Finally, the presence of refugees in Greece has become an issue that is currently being addressed by the government and all sectors of society. Since October 2001, Greece has been experiencing a massive influx of asylum seekers but it has been simultaneously obliged to cater for the current convention refugee population in order to achieve maximum economic and social integration. On a European level, the political circumstances in Europe, with the rise of nationalist ideas that promote conservative notions of ethnic identities, have created an atmosphere of exclusive rather than inclusive attitudes towards supporting projects of corporate social responsibility that refer to refugee integration. The feasibility study has been beneficial in exploring these attitudes further through the contact made with the relevant institutions, and to some extent, awareness was raised of the obstacles faced by refugees in their initial and continuous phase of their integration in the fields of education and employment. Furthermore, the effort to eliminate the exclusive attitudes of some multinational companies and organisations towards refugees could prove effective through the FREE programme and future projects. These projects would give further opportunities to explore attitudes and practices towards refugees on a European level and member states would be able to exchange methods and practices of service delivery towards the target group.

## REFERENCES

Baldwin-Edwards (2001) *Southern European Labour Markets and Immigration: A Structural and Functional Analysis*. To appear in the Greek Labour Yearbook, Athens: Panteion University Press.

Commission of the European Communities (2001a): *Employment in Europe 2001*, Luxembourg: Commission of the EC

Commission of the European Communities (2001b) “*Green Paper*” (*Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility*), presented by the Commission, Brussels (COM (2001) 416 final)

Diamantopoulou, A (2001) “*The Employment Challenge*” Speech by Commissioner Anna Diamantopoulou at the Conference of the Confederation of Greek Industry (SEV). Athens, 28 February 2001. The European Commission/europa.eu.int

EU CARE (2000) “*Refugee Entrepreneurs in Greece*”. National Contribution to the EU funded programme for the European Commission Directorate General Justice and Home Affairs, under the budget line B3-4113, integration of refugees, Unita/2 “Immigration and Asylum”.

Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), 2002: Data received after written request by the Social Work Foundation.

Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility (2000) *Corporate Social Responsibility in Greece: Issues and Prospects*. Supported by the Phillip Morris Institute.

Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility (2001) *Objectives, Good Practices-Case Studies and Founding Members*.

Organisation for Vocational Education and Training (2002a) *Vocational Education and Training*. [http://www.OEEK-TRAINING\\_files\epaggelmatiki\\_ekpaideusi\\_en.htm](http://www.OEEK-TRAINING_files\epaggelmatiki_ekpaideusi_en.htm)

Organisation for Vocational Education and Training (2002b) *Educational System in Greece*. [http://www.OEEK-EDUCATIONALSISTEM\\_files\ekpaideutikosystema\\_en.htm](http://www.OEEK-EDUCATIONALSISTEM_files\ekpaideutikosystema_en.htm)

Rhodes M (1997), *Globalisation, Labour Markets and Welfare States: A Future of Competitive Corporatism?* In *Globalisation, labour Markets and Welfare States*. Macmillan Press.

The European Commission (2001b): *Employment and Social Affairs: Corporate Social Responsibility in Greece*. [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/soc-dial/csr/country/greece.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-dial/csr/country/greece.htm)

The European Commission: (2001a) *Corporate Social Responsibility: General Information*. [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm./employment\\_social/soc-dial/csr/csr\\_summary.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm./employment_social/soc-dial/csr/csr_summary.pdf)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2002) “Embracing the Uprooted: UN records rise in Greece’s refugee recognition rate”.

<http://www.greece.gr/POLITICS/InternalAffairs/embracingtheuprooted.stm>

Venieris G. (1992) *Corporate Social Responsibility in Greece* <http://www.bham.ac.uk/EAA/ea95/abstracts/406>.

## **APPENDIX 1: REFUGEE-ASSISTING ORGANISATIONS**

### **1) The Social Work Foundation (*The Social Service for Refugees*)**

The Social Service for Refugees was established in 1983 in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The service aims at supporting refugees both practically and psychosocially. It also assists them integrate in the community and informs and sensitises public opinion about issues surrounding refugees.

It provides services to:

- a) Convention refugees
- b) Asylum seekers
- c) Cases with Humanitarian status.

The Social Service for Refugees includes the following sub-programmes:

*Refugee Community Centres*: Two community centres operate in the greater area of Athens and they offer the following services:

- Counselling to individuals and refugee families;
- Cooperation with the local authorities and church communities on material assistance;
- Information and awareness projects for pupils and parents of the area;
- Greek language courses for adults;
- Supportive tutoring, creative activities and multicultural activities for refugee and immigrant children between 6 and 12 years of age.

*Vocational Rehabilitation Programme*

#### Self-Employment

This programme aims at helping refugees become self-sufficient through a form of grant/loan system, given to them for establishing a small business. The beneficiaries are convention refugees and it promotes well-founded proposals that guarantee the viability of the business and economic self-sufficiency of the applicant.

### **2) The Greek Council for Refugees**

The Greek Council for refugees is funded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the European Union and provides legal and social protection to convention refugees, asylum seekers and to persons with humanitarian status.

The Council provides the following programmes:

- Psychosocial support;
- Counselling and guidance;
- Information and awareness of the Greek legislation;
- Financial assistance and material aid;
- Community work.

The Greek Council for Refugees includes the following sub-programme:

Three multicultural centres operate in the greater area of Athens. The centres provide support information, guidance and facilitates the social integration of convention refugees and asylum seekers.

They offer:

- Greek language courses to adults;
- Supportive tutoring to primary and secondary school students;
- Computer classes;
- Educational and recreational activities.

### **3) Hellenic Red Cross (*Multi-dynamic Centre of Social Support and Refugee Integration*)**

The organisation is funded by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. It provides social services to refugees and asylum seekers. It is aimed at encouraging the active participation of refugees in Greek society as well as encouraging their language and cultural maintenance. In addition, it sensitises the public and raises awareness of refugees' positive contribution to the economic and cultural life in Greece. Specific services include:

- Information;
- Counselling;
- Intervention to employers in order to facilitate refugee integration into the Greek labour market;
- Day-care centre for refugee children;
- Greek language lessons for adult refugees and supportive teaching for refugee children;
- Multicultural and entertaining activities;
- Telephone line for support and information to the refugees.

### **4) International Organisation of Migration**

The International Organisation of Migration provides help to foreigners including refugees in the area of resettlement. It facilitates in the legal procedure of resettlement, assists in the medical examinations and often arranges transfer to the country of destination.

### **5) Caritas Hellas**

Caritas Hellas is a Catholic charitable organisation and provides assistance to convention refugees and asylum seekers and to people with humanitarian status. It offers the following services:

- Counselling;
- Food and clothes distribution;
- Educational programme for children and adults;
- Camping for children between 7 and 12 years of age on the island of Syros and Tinos;
- Greek language courses to adults and children.

### **6) Medical Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture (MCRTV)**

The Medical Centre for the rehabilitation of Victims of Torture (MCRTV) provides medical, social, and legal counselling to asylum seekers and refugees who are victims of torture and provides them with relevant documents to support their claim for refugee status.

## **APPENDIX 2: INSTITUTES/ORGANISATIONS CONTACTED**

<b>Potential donor/partner</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Letter</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Tel. call</b>
Business networks	2	2	1	2
Businesses	15	15	3	15
Governmental organisations	5	5	5	5
Educational institutes	2	2	1	2
Trust/ Charitable foundations	0	0	0	0
NGOs/ Refugee organisations	1	1	1	1
Other	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>25</b>

How many of them are interested in participating in FREE?

<b>Interested?</b>	<b>Number</b>
Yes	0
No	1
Possibly	1
Under conditions	6
No answer	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>