



# Language Education for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Cyprus: Provision and Governance

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## Executive Summary

This research report focuses on the policies and practices that are aimed towards developing the language capacities of migrants and refugees in Cyprus. It provides a detailed assessment of educational initiatives and language training approaches by the state and third sector as they apply to adult asylum seekers and refugees. The report focuses specifically on the main language training programmes implemented in recent years, and discusses how these have been shaped by Cyprus' general migration policy. An analysis is provided around the implementation of the language training programmes including strengths and weaknesses, and lessons learned.



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## Introduction

The importance of language training in integration was highlighted in the 2015 European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. The agenda was the EU's clearest intervention on the issue of integration (Zanfrini 2019). It recommends that Member States provide language courses that cater to migrants' diverse needs<sup>1</sup>. With regards to funding, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union provided recourses on language training for migrants via a 2014 regulation<sup>2</sup> which included specific provisions for national programmes<sup>3</sup>.

This report presents and discusses the results of research focusing on language training for adult asylum seekers and refugees in Cyprus. The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, within the framework of the European project entitled Governance and the Local Integration of Migrants and Europe's Refugees, conducted this research in Cyprus. The aim of the project is to generate research that will help European cities and regions facilitate the long-term inclusion of displaced people in a way that remakes local spaces. The GLIMER consortium consists of partners from Italy and Cyprus (two landing points for many refugees as they enter the EU), as well as from the UK and Sweden (two countries seen as final destinations for recent arrivals), and the cases focus on new arrivals in the areas in and around the cities of Cosenza, Nicosia, Glasgow and Malmo respectively.

## Method

Our research followed qualitative methods, utilising two focus groups and five in depth interviews with stakeholders from public authorities, municipalities, and NGOs that implement, fund or coordinate language training for asylum seekers and refugees in Cyprus. Semi-structured questionnaires were used in the context of focus groups and interviews. The research also used literature and other empirical resources, such as language textbooks, project leaflets and websites.

Regarding personal data protection, as per our strict adherence to the ethics protocol, we made no reference to participant names or institutions. Participants are quoted using pseudonyms and references that might make any person identifiable have been omitted.

## 1. Setting the Scene

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) gained its independence from British colonial rule in 1960. The majority of the population at the time consisted of Greek Cypriots (77%), Turkish Cypriots (18%) and small minorities of Maronites, Armenians and Latins (5%). Soon after the formation of the Republic of Cyprus, began conflicts between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. In 1974 there was a Turkish invasion of the island that led to the division of the country. Cyprus is now the only divided country in the EU, with a buffer zone, controlled by the UN, also known as the Green Line. The northern part of the island is occupied by Turkey and has declared itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which is only recognised by Turkey. In 2004, the Republic of Cyprus joined the European Union (EU), with the *acquis communautaire* applying only to the Republic in the south, where the majority of the population is Greek Cypriot. The Republic of Cyprus has three official languages: Greek, English, and Turkish. Greek

<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Common Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union, COM (2005) 389 final.

<sup>2</sup> Article 13 of Regulation (EU) No 514/2014

<sup>3</sup> Ibid article 19



Cypriots simultaneously employ Modern Greek (the official language taught in schools) and the Cypriot dialect, that is widely used by the native population, albeit predominantly orally.

The Republic of Cyprus has seen a huge increase in the number of first-time asylum applicants. 2014 saw 1,480 applications; the four years that followed saw the number of applicants rise to four times higher, reaching 4,475 (Eurostat, 2018). The number of first-time applicants continues to grow: in the first ten months of 2018, Cyprus received 6,064 applications (AIDA 2019). According to Eurostat's records, Cyprus had the highest number of first-time asylum applicants in Europe (relative to population) in the second quarter of 2018.

While the number of applicants continues to grow, Cyprus remains without a comprehensive migration policy, causing asylum seekers and refugees to experience serious difficulties regarding many key aspects of their lives, including education, housing and employment. Migrant workers were only allowed in Cyprus after 1990. Cyprus opened its borders mainly due to the manual labour shortage after the 'economic miracle' (Christodoulou 1992) that took place in the '80s, which had caused the local economy to rapidly develop and expand. Since then, migration in Cyprus has kept the 'guest worker' model, with work permits linked to specific employers and granted on an annual basis and for a maximum period of five years. Over the years, the guest worker model extended by default to asylum seekers, something that is evident by the specific fields in which they are legally allowed to work, as the table below shows.

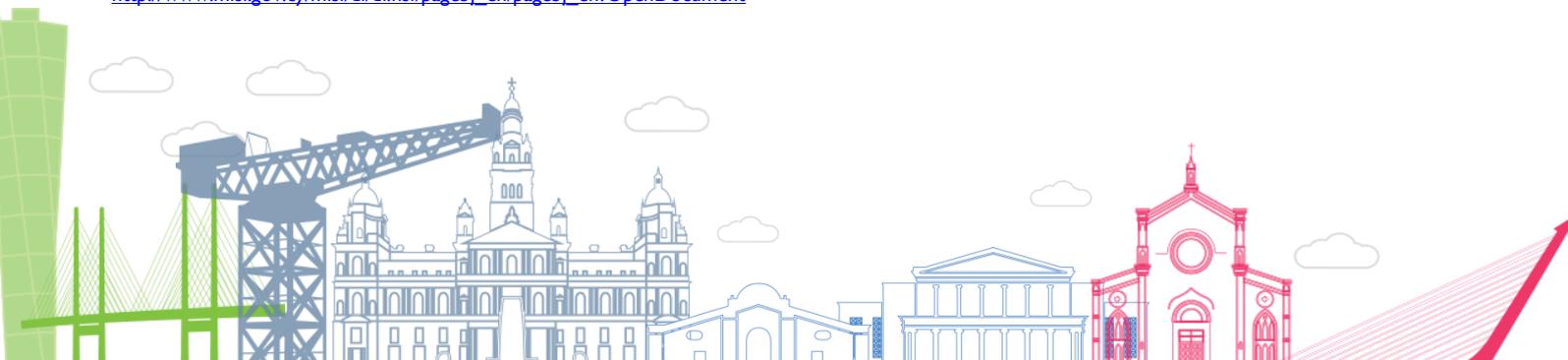
S/N	Industry fields	Occupation
1	Agriculture Animal Husbandry Fishery	~Agriculture Laborers ~Animal Husbandry Laborers ~Fishery Laborers
2	Manufacture	~Forage Production Laborers
3	Waste Management	~Drainage and Waste Processing Laborers ~Garbage and Trash Collection & Processing Laborers ~Recycling Laborers ~Offal Processing Laborers
4	Wholesale Trade-Repairs	~Gas Station and Car Wash Laborers ~Freight Handlers of Wholesale Trade
5	Other Fields	~Building and Outdoors Cleaners ~Distributors of Advertising and Informative Material  ~Food Delivery

Table I. Sectors of economic activity in which asylum seekers are allowed to participate<sup>4</sup>

The fact that the Republic of Cyprus sees asylum seekers and refugees as guest workers, i.e. people who are not here to stay, affects both the design and the implementation of language training in Cyprus. Being limited to menial tasks that do not require high levels of literacy can lead to asylum seekers and refugees being professionally isolated, meaning little interaction with native language speakers.

With regards to adult education, language training for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants falls under the integration services provided either by the public or third sector in Cyprus. Integration policy was first introduced in Cyprus by the Ministry of Interior in 2010, specifically (Trimikliniotis & Demetriou 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Source: Department of Labour, a part of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance of the Republic of Cyprus  
[http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/page5j\\_en/page5j\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/page5j_en/page5j_en?OpenDocument)



## 2. Contextualising language training in Cyprus

Adult language training for asylum seekers and refugees has historically been offered as part of public services as well as a service offered by the third sector. It should be noted that language courses do not tend to target asylum seekers and refugees specifically. This sector of the population is catered to by general adult language classes designed for non-native speakers. Adolescents who enter the Cyprus educational system can attend transitional classes for non-Greek speakers designed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC)<sup>5</sup>. Adolescents over 15 years of age can additionally attend Adult Education Centres that also provide language training courses.

### 2.1 Public language training services

In terms of Greek language courses that are publically available, the funding is provided either by the state or the EU. Asylum seekers and refugees in Cyprus who wish to develop Greek language competences can join general Greek language programmes aimed at non-native speakers. There are three public institutions that provide this type of training: **Adult Education Centres (AECs)**, **State Institutes for Further Education (SIFEs)**, and the **University of Cyprus (UCY)**.

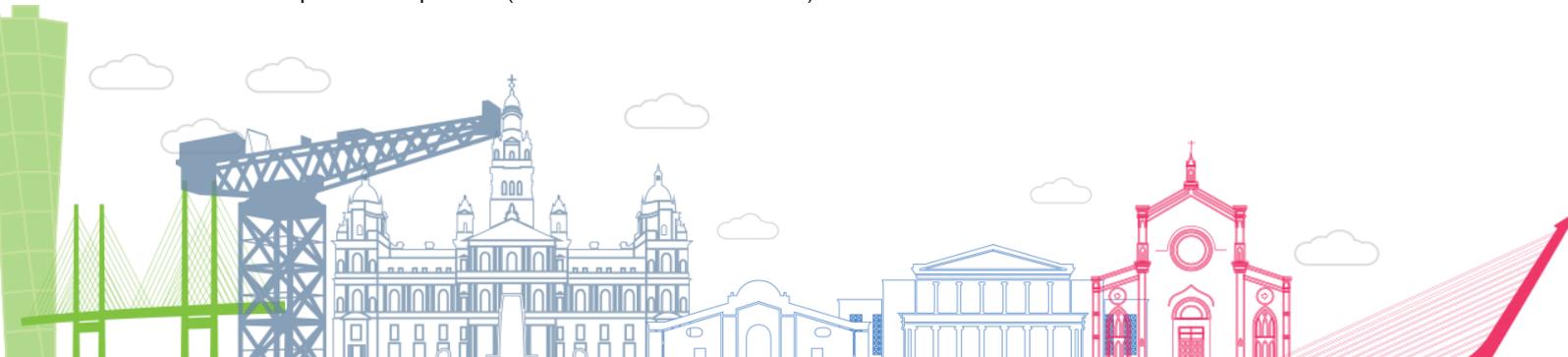
AECs provide general adult education in Cyprus as part of the public framework for continuing education, including classes on Greek language for non-native speakers. While they are not specifically targeted to asylum seekers and refugees, they do not exclude the group either, as they carry no eligibility criteria. Legal status does not need to be disclosed on the application form and there is a relatively low annual fee of €55. The classes take place in primary schools around Cyprus allowing for wide geographical scope, encompassing both rural and urban areas. AECs provide three levels of Greek language classes, allowing participants to choose their level. The classes start in early November and finish at the end of May each year, totalling 24 90-minute classes each year. The teachers, who are freelancers employed by the MoEC, do not follow a specific curriculum, allowing for flexible teaching that can be adjusted to the needs of each class. AEC classes are, on the one hand, easily accessible and low cost, but on the other, they tend not to be academically vigorous, which results in a weak impact on students' actual language skills. According to one NGO worker:

[AEC classes] do provide an introduction to the Greek language, but the classes are only offered once a week. This is not enough, especially for adult students. It is not easy for them to remember what they have learned a week ago and build on that knowledge. You have to be very motivated to attend these classes and if you are, you will probably not go there. Anyway, [AEC classes] are still one option for asylum seekers and refugees.

Mike, NGO worker

SIFEs also offer Greek classes for non-native speakers. Migrants can attend these classes at no cost and in the past, asylum seekers could also attend for free, however, according to an interviewee, following a ministerial decision, the classes became available only to those living permanently in Cyprus, thus excluding asylum seekers. This is especially regrettable as, according to our interviewees, SIFEs provide better language training, using tailored curricula that can prepare students for accredited language literacy exams. Afternoon classes are provided twice a

<sup>5</sup> In the first 3 years of secondary education (gymnasium), 18 hours of Greek per week is provided. In the final 3 years of secondary education (lyceum), 4 extra hours of Greek per week are provided. (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis 2017).



week in locations across Cyprus. Although both AECs and SIFEs offer classes targeted to adults, students over the age of 15 may also attend (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis 2017).

Finally, we come to the School of Modern Greek at the UCY. The School offers beginner classes in Greek to non-native speakers, as well as intermediate classes. Greek culture classes are also offered to all students from a beginner level on, addressing Greek society and culture. The School of Modern Greek provides up to three scholarships for asylum seekers and refugees per class. Asylum seekers and refugees tend to make up about 15-20% of those attending (10-15 in classes of about 70 students). Classes are offered at UCY's old campus in Nicosia, featuring both intensive courses (Monday to Thursday three hours per day, over four months) and non-intensive courses (twice a week over eight months). The varied curricula are based on the European Framework of Reference for the Languages of the Council of Europe ([CEFR](#)), and prepare students to take language exams. According to one NGO worker who works with asylum seekers and refugees, adults who participated in this language training reported positive feedback. That said, the main drawback of the UCY courses is that they are provided solely on campus in Nicosia.

The MoEC used to provide language classes at both the detention centre in Menoyia and at the reception centre in Kofinou, along with art classes. According to Ministry representatives, the classes were discontinued due to high drop-out rates. As we discover in the next chapter, however, this phenomenon was actually a result of unsatisfactory course design and implementation, as opposed to a lack of interest from participants.

## 2.2 The third sector

Adult language training offered by the Cypriot third sector for migrants and asylum seekers is mostly undertaken by **EU-funded projects** under the **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)**. As language has been considered key to the integration of migrants into Cypriot society, over recent years relevant training has been provided via partnerships between organisations from the public, third and private sectors. The AMIF funded [I learn Greek](#) project, for example, was implemented by KES College (a private tertiary education institute), in collaboration with CARDET (an NGO), three municipalities, and a consultancy firm called Innovade. The project offered free Greek Language courses for migrants, including recognised refugees and asylum seekers. The project ultimately benefited 700 individuals. The project ended in December 2018. After a two-month period of inactivity, AMIF funded a new project for adult language training, this time via a partnership between the Cyprus Labour Institute (INEK-PEO) and the University of Cyprus. The current project is set to continue until the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2020. The total budget of this project was increased from €285.929,12 (that was dedicated to the *I learn Greek* project) to €350.000,00.

The Municipal Multipurpose Centre, an NGO founded by the Nicosia municipality, also offers a variety of social services, including language courses. Courses were initially supported by public funds from the Cypriot state, but the support in recent years has been increasingly coming from the EU. The classes at the centre, which are currently taking place in the framework of [Mingle](#), an EU project, take place mostly in the afternoon. Mingle is an integration project that provides language training along with intercultural communication, social and civil skills.

Our interviews with employees from across these institutions revealed a number of challenges in teaching Greek to migrants and refugees. For one, Cyprus is a bidialectal country where the Modern Greek language and the



Cypriot dialect co-exist even in schools (Yiakoumetti and Mina 2013). Foreigners new to the country are faced with the situation of hearing the Cypriot dialect used in everyday interactions, while formal curricula are strictly in the Modern Greek language. One Greek language teacher explains:

Sometimes foreigners get a little bit confused... I tell them a word in Greek they say, 'Oh this is not how we have learned that word in the Cypriot dialect'. This is not necessarily a bad thing because they learn two different versions of the same language.

Anna, language teacher

The Greek language curriculum at times fails to capture Cypriot reality, which goes beyond the fact that it disregards the (oral) local dialect. The textbooks often come from Greece, which can create confusion for asylum seekers and refugees looking to become familiar with Cyprus culture and society. Nicos, an NGO worker, explains:

We interviewed Greek teachers, and many would have very much liked to have the flexibility to add parts of the Cypriot dialect to their teaching. They have noticed that there is a huge gap between what's taught in class and everyday interactions.

Nicos, NGO worker

We took the opportunity to examine two textbooks, which for a variety of reasons were both ultimately deemed unsuitable to meet the needs of migrant and refugee students. Firstly, both textbooks deployed a monolingual approach, i.e. they were written in the Modern Greek. One textbook was in fact authored and published in Greece, meaning the information within centred around the cultural heritage, history and geography of Greece. The other, which was in fact produced within the framework of an EU-funded project, centred around Cyprus, however, it also presented challenges to the teachers in terms of usability, with some teachers choosing to forego the book altogether and use their own material.

Another challenge that was identified by most interviewees is the fact that language training policy in Cyprus tends to ignore the diversity within migrant communities. While the target audience of language training courses varied greatly in terms of educational background, gender, age and nationality. the relevant policy that was being implemented failed to address this diversity.

Our research has indicated that the policies around language training for asylum seekers are geared towards social integration, and not necessarily to help promote mobility in the labour market. As the law states, six months following the date of submission of their asylum application, asylum seekers can seek paid employment, but only in specific sectors such as agriculture, fishery, waste management, cleaning and food delivery. With these sectors being undemanding of advanced language skills, policies have instead focused on providing language classes to improve social cohesion, according to Valeria, an interviewee working in the third sector:

Language is more of an integration tool in society. It is not so much about finding a job, because the sectors asylum seekers are allowed to work in require only a basic knowledge of the Greek language. What we have been told by asylum seekers is that they want to learn Greek to be able to integrate socially.

Valeria – third sector employee

Most interviewees said the high drop-out rate is a major challenge in language teaching. Some public sector



interviewees said that asylum seekers are not interested in acquiring Greek language competences as they are not here to stay.

[Asylum seekers] are not interested in anything that to do with Cyprus. Cyprus is just a stop in their journey. They want to end up in Germany and take it from there... That is why they are mostly interested in hanging around rather than sitting in a class learning Greek.

Tassos, public servant

Note that Tassos was the only one to say that refugees and asylum seekers simply lacked interest in attending language courses. The rest of the interviewees felt that asylum seekers and refugees do want to learn the language, as it's a clear barrier to integration affecting both recent arrivals, as well as those who have been in Cyprus for a while (Spaneas et al. 2018). Basic language skills are a huge advantage to be able to communicate at the reception or detention centres, in the health care system, and in everyday interactions.

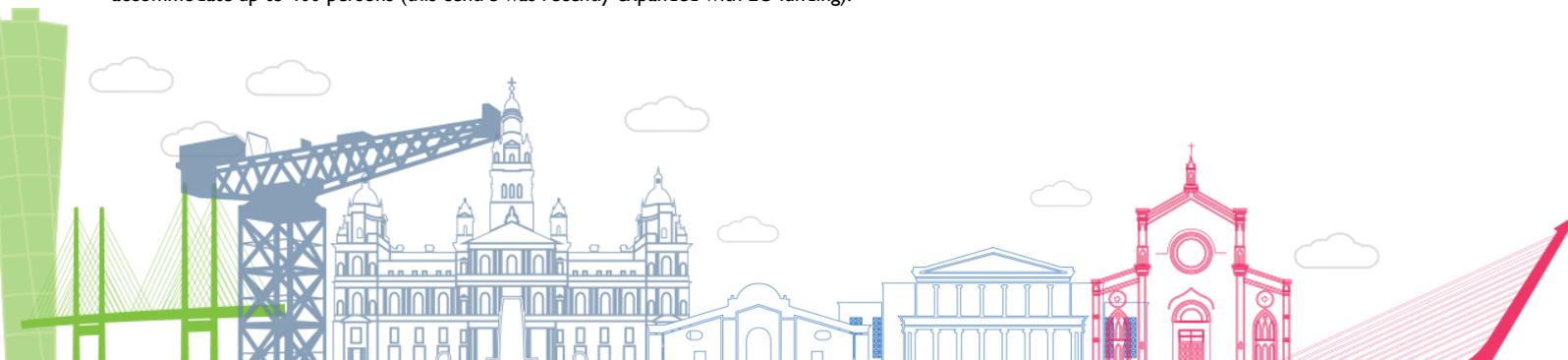
What was highlighted by the majority of interviewees was the need for teaching methods that are adjusted to the needs of adults, especially within the specific population segment. The interviewees confirmed that a more flexible way of teaching, learning excursions and needs-based learning produced better results. Also, classes need to be designed in a way that takes into account the different realities of asylum seekers and refugees and especially those who live in reception centres. As NGO worker Mike explains:

At the reception centre, schedules work differently. You have to find a way, to take this into account when you design language training. For example, you should not schedule classes very early in the morning. Reception centres are somewhat chaotic, you cannot expect them to be 'good students', waiting outside the classroom punctually, looking forward to attending class. This is not possible for people who are 35, 40, or 50 years old. This is something that does not usually happen in real life. But here I have in my notes that the language training in Kofinou<sup>6</sup> had at once time around 50 participants. There was a time where there was a need to split the group into two classes.

Mike, NGO representative

Another issue that arose in the course of our research was that integration policy with regards to language favoured a monolingual approach. Their institutions supporting adult asylum seeker and refugee language competences focus on the Greek language. Such an approach, which is dominant in Cyprus, can end up discouraging migrant populations from preserving their own languages and passing them on to future generations (Cummins 2001a, 2001b; Shin 2013). The Nicosia Municipal Multipurpose Foundation is the exception as it promotes a multilingual approach by combining two EU-funded projects on integration. The aforementioned Mingle project provides Greek language training for adults and the ['New Channels for the Integration of Third Country Nationals \(TCNs\) in the local community'](#) project provides courses in the native language of children of Arabic or Chinese origin. The foundation schedules the classes in a way that facilitates families: adults attend Greek classes while children attend language classes in their native language.

<sup>6</sup> The Reception and Accommodation Centre for Applicants for International Protection in Kofinou area has operated since 2004, and has the capacity to accommodate up to 400 persons (this centre was recently expanded with EU funding).



### 3. Language training politics

Asylum seekers in Cyprus can apply at any legal entry point, such as airports, seaports or at the Immigration Police Office of their district of residence. Legal entry points as well as the immigration office provide free interpreter services and relevant documents in several languages. Greek language competence is not a precondition to apply for short-term residence in Cyprus<sup>7</sup>. However, according to article 18 of the Aliens and Immigration Law, Greek language competence is among the criteria for applying for long term residence. The article requires applicants to have: ‘Adequate knowledge of the Greek language (at level A2, as prescribed in the Common European Framework of Reference for the Languages of the Council of Europe), and of basic data and information about the contemporary political and social reality of Cyprus’.

Other supporting documentation for long-term residence includes an official language certificate that can be obtained through an oral examination, meeting the level of language requirement or an equivalent certificate recognised by the MoEC. Participation in the test is through application to the Service Examinations of the Ministry of Education and Culture and paying a €25 fee. According to the 2017 report drafted by the Cyprus Refugee Council for the Asylum Information Database ([AIDA](#)), the language certification is one of the main obstacles in securing long term residence in Cyprus. The inflexibility regarding other language certificates is seen as an issue. To further compound the matter, while only a basic A2 level knowledge is required, two persons who took the examination failed it even though they have passed higher level of language examination from other acknowledged language institutions (Drousioutou & Mathioudakis, Cyprus Refugee Council 2017). It seems like language competence is used to make it more difficult for third country nationals to attain long-term residence. This is illustrated by the low rate of applications filled by asylum seekers to attempt to secure long-term residence (Drousioutou & Mathioudakis, Cyprus Refugee Council 2017).

### 4. Policy and regulations

As with general migration policy, language training lacks both a coordinated approach, as well as a long-term strategy in Cyprus. The fact that migration policy follows the guest worker model affects the quality of language training. Most of the language training courses rely on EU funding, therefore, language training is provided by and restricted to the specific projects that are implemented. Our research findings suggest that there is little collaboration among the stakeholders that implement projects, other than the short-term partnerships that occur within the framework of projects that ultimately have an end date. This is clearly problematic, burdening the system with overlapping actions, a lack of both continuity and sustainability, as well as hindering long-term evaluation. An interviewee who works with this funding identified the disadvantages of the current language training model and said that a more holistic approach should be applied going forward, making reference to a strategic plan for integration which is currently in the process of being drafted. This strategic plan would use the available integration funds in a more strategic way.

The findings of this research also confirms the need for a strategic plan that includes long-term objectives, as well

<sup>7</sup> Source: Asylum service of the Ministry of Interior  
[http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/asylum/asylumservice.nsf/asylumservice10\\_en/asylumservice10\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/asylum/asylumservice.nsf/asylumservice10_en/asylumservice10_en?OpenDocument)



as an action plan that carries an adequate budget. Language training projects are, as we mentioned, currently being implemented on a project basis and mainly funded by the European Funds Unit of the Ministry of Interior and other EU projects. The duration of these projects is limited to one or two years, which causes a lot of problems according to interviewees. One we touched upon above is the lack of sustainability. One organisation continued offering language classes despite the fact that project funding had been exhausted. Areti, the project coordinator mentioned:

There was a period of time after the EU project had ended, there was no available national funding and we decided to sustain that project using our own limited resources. We could not interrupt the project as people kept coming and asking for classes.

Areti, NGO representative

Other than sustainability, project-based programmes also make long-term evaluation impossible, as confirmed by four of our interviewees. Simon, an NGO worker said:

We don't know what happened to the thousands of people we trained in Greek, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, leadership and teamwork. We don't know if the training sessions were in any way useful to them. The project ends, and we move on to the next one without being able to evaluate the long-term impact.

Simon, NGO representative

Interviewees confirmed that projects are evaluated only within their own framework via pre- and post-project questionnaires, participant exam results (if available), and in terms of project spending, but crucially, no evaluation tends to take place on the quality of the trainings. The long term evaluation of language training projects could have a positive long-term impact on, for example, the design of future projects. Third sector organisations vie for funding in order to sustain their organisations in an increasingly competitive environment. While most interviewees confirmed that civil society organisations try to maximise the quality of their training to make the widest impact on the target population, two interviewees confirmed the statement saying that the way EU funding is allocated encourages entities who are not invested in the cause but are instead incentivised by the possibility of economic gain. An interviewee said, "It is like a business for some people". Simon also supported this argument by saying:

Each organisation has its own values and philosophy. We believe that migrants benefit our society; we are here to support them. This is accepted across the board here; we need to help these people. I know others [however], who never imagined themselves working with migrants but since there is funding, there is money, salaries and an open market, they go for it.

Simon, NGO representative

## 5. Implementation

### 5.1 Teacher training

With regards to language teachers, both in the public sector and the third sector, there appears to be a lack of training on issues like cultural differences, diversity, gender sensitivity, etc. The interviewees noted little or no teacher training in the framework of past projects and comprehensive training is not foreseen in upcoming projects. Three interviewees (two from the third sector and one from the public sector) said that teachers received a two-



day training on cultural diversity and the curriculum itself. The maximum duration of teacher training as indicated by available material on language training courses is similar (three days). The fact that there was/is little or no teacher training is problematic in itself. It is even more problematic if we take into account the fact that the needs of the different groups of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants are left out in the language training design. Teachers work with very diverse groups so they need to deal with different needs at once. As Mike said:

The training teachers receive is not comprehensive. It is more like... a crash course. It would have been very useful to receive more training to understand the population they will serve. There are various issues that they need to deal with when teaching such a diverse class in terms of language, gender, literacy level etc. There are no interpreters in the class, the population is so diverse and they have to teach using a 'one size fits all' approach. Teachers need to receive comprehensive training on cultural diversity.

Mike, NGO representative

In the absence of adequate training, most institutions that provide language training rely on the expertise of their teachers. When it comes to recruiting teachers they consider previous experience with migrants or relevant academic qualifications. For example, John, a public servant who coordinates language training courses for non-native speakers said:

We rely a lot on the professionalism and expertise of our language teachers. They are all well educated people with cultural sensitivity. They have such insight into [this segment of] the population, that they often suggest adjustments to the curriculum we provide.

John, public servant

Almost all interviewees said that teacher recruitment criteria include prior experience and relevant academic qualifications. However, the need for specific training came through in the interviews as interviewees shared stories about the challenges teachers face in class. Teachers often ask for support and advice from project coordinators and other professionals.

Yes, it is true that teachers face a lot of challenges in class. We as project coordinators stand by their side, support them and guide them especially when they face difficulties that arise from the cultural differences within the group.

Kate, NGO representative

Although most interviewees believed in the skills and the abilities of teachers to tackle any type of classroom some like Mike, an NGO representative highlighted the need for specialised teacher training. He said that teachers in Cyprus are rarely offered such training, something which should have been foreseen within the framework of the language training projects. He also suggested ongoing training:

There is only one course at a private institution in Cyprus on foreign language teaching. This course costs €7,300. There are no shorter trainings in Cyprus and this is definitely a disadvantage. I think that there should have been agreements between the universities and the language training institutions to make these courses available and for free for teachers who work with asylum seekers and migrants.



## 5.2 Language and training (in)equality

Our research has indicated that the institutions that provide language training in Cyprus tend to view asylum seekers as homogeneous. Services and policies have not been tailored to make language training accessible and suitable for different groups of asylum seekers and refugees (e.g. with regards to gender, age, educational background, or county of origin). Different types of inequality have thus emerged and impact this segment of the population. These inequalities are based on gender, educational background, residence permit status, and geographical location (i.e. those who live in urban vs rural areas).

### a) Gender based inequality

With regards to gender, most language training programmes available in Cyprus are gender-blind. The specific needs and realities of women are not taken into account and this leads to unequal opportunities to access language training. Also, as Blake's research (2003) suggests, the provision of training for refugee women is underpinned by ideologies that actually pose a barrier to learning. For example, a public servant who was asked about the lower rate of participation of women in language courses provided by his institution, said:

Husbands do not let their wives attend the classes, because they are possessive and afraid of other men looking at their wives. Muslim culture, you know...

John, public servant

The reality, at least according to research conducted by the Cyprus Refugee Council, is a little different: practical, rather than cultural issues tend to stand in the way of women's participation in language training. To back up the claim, we note that language training in Cyprus broadly overlooks migrant women's double role as family providers and caregivers, and the impact this role has on their availability to attend language training courses. Based on the results of this research the main barrier for women is the fact that the classes take place mostly in the afternoons, which clashes with their children's school timetables. As the primary caregivers, women are busy taking care of their children in the afternoons after school. The research has in fact indicated that women want to learn the language to help their children with their schoolwork. Mike was one interviewee who confirmed that the women's needs are not being met:

We need to design projects that cater to the needs of women. We need to take into account the fact that women are mothers and the main caregivers in their families.

Mike, NGO representative

From all the interviewees, only one had taken into account this reality for women and designed a language training programme that could address the issue. As he explained:

It is easier for women to attend morning classes. Unfortunately, too many women are out of the labour market. Especially refugee women. In order to encourage the participation of women, we have incorporated



morning classes in our future language training courses. The bulk of the courses will still be in the afternoons though.

Nicos, NGO representative

Gender blind policies on language training have an impact on women's everyday lives but also on their access to justice. According to a 2018 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) report, migrant, asylum seeking, and refugee women face language barriers when claiming their rights.

## b) Inequality based on educational background

Lack of consideration of educational background is another element that creates inequality among people who receive language training. The specific needs of the students are not taken into account, as there is no prior evaluation or segmentation of students according to competence. Classes can include university graduates and illiterate people. This makes students feel that the classes are either too basic or too advanced, depending on their educational background. It also puts extra pressure on the teachers to be flexible and come up with different pedagogical tools to address the various needs in their class. For example, as Kate describes:

There was a class with a woman who could not even hold a pencil. The teacher had to spend more time with her. It was of course very rewarding to see her a couple of months after she attended the classes to be able to write her name in Greek when she had not been able to write it in her own language.

Kate, NGO representative

Although there are cases where teachers put in extra effort to teach those with little or no education, the fact that this group is not targeted in the course design undermines the principle of equal access to such training. Most classes use set textbooks, and take place in a classroom, so for those who are not print literate, their initial exposure to a new language will be limited to what they can listen to (Haznedar, Peyton & Martha Young-Scholten 2018). Another issue is access to information around available language training programmes. Certain organisations who provide frontline services to asylum seekers and refugees, such as the Asylum Service and the Cyprus Refugee Council, can easily communicate language training opportunities to this group. What the research has revealed is an issue that occurs past this point. Most language training providers use primarily online channels to publicise and disseminate the availability of language programmes, which is problematic to many asylum seekers and refugees who lack digital literacy or access to computers or smartphones.

## c) Inequality based on geographical location

In line with the study conducted by Spaneas et al. (2018), we also identified an inequality experienced by those in language learning, regarding geographical location, i.e. between those who live in cities and those who live in rural or suburban areas. Due to population density, access to language classes is better in highly urban areas, leaving those in rural or suburban areas at a disadvantage.

In the past, this phenomenon was mitigated to a certain extent by the AECs, that had a wide geographical reach



(they used the premises of primary schools across Cyprus, after school hours). The centres last project, which was funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), was implemented between 2012 and 2015. Within the framework of this project language classes were available at no charge for asylum seekers and refugees and students were given the opportunity to attain a recognised Greek language certificate by passing an exam. As three interviewees confirmed, the certificate served as a great motivator for participants. Once the AMIF project expired, the AECs discontinued their efforts, citing a lack of capacity and human resources. This was especially regrettable, as all other language training courses offered by, e.g. municipalities / NGOs, even those funded by the AMIF, have a limited scope and are only offered in urban areas (Spaneas et al 2018). As Mike confirmed, the best way to offer language training across Cyprus is to use the existing infrastructure of the public education institutions, i.e. AECs and SIFEs. Mike went further to suggest this will could be made possible through a more considered allocation of integration funds.

It is all about what you promote. The salary of a teacher working with 15 people, twice a week, 8 times a month is about €2,500. To provide language training for 150 people, you need €25,000 per year. That is far less money that is spent on airing of that cooking TV show<sup>8</sup>. Those numbers are just to give you an idea, think about it.

Mike, NGO representative

With regards access to tertiary education, asylum seekers can enter either public or private universities, although few, if any, asylum seekers do so, mainly because of the language barrier, as well as the cost, in the case of private universities (Spaneas et al. 2018).

### 5.3 Successful pedagogical approaches

Interviewees stated that teaching outside the framework of a classroom was a language training practice that had proven to be very effective and pleasant for participants. Nelly, an NGO representative explained:

You should have seen how happy they were that the classes sometimes took place out in the world, in a cafeteria, in a grocery shop. Participants found this method pleasant and relevant to their everyday lives. I think this is a good practice and we need to include it in future projects.

Nelly, NGO representative

The use of technology in language teaching also proved to be very effective, according to two interviewees. “You get them hooked”, said Simon an NGO representative. He continued that in one of his language training projects he had allocated a budget for tablets. He said this was beneficial to both the learning process and in giving students an extra motivation to attend.

## Conclusion

<sup>8</sup> He is referring to a cooking show on TV called ‘Getting to know other cultures through gastronomy’. The project is implemented by [Sigma TV](#), a privately owned station, and received 90% EU and 10 state funding.



The analysis of language training for adult asylum seekers and refugees as conducted within the framework of this research indicates that a holistic approach is lacking. National policy on language training or on integration in general has yet to be developed. Language training is provided sporadically and on a project basis. This creates difficulties for asylum seekers and refugees in accessing the training and also for organisations to sustain the provision of relevant services.

Based on our research findings, we can draw the conclusion that language training remains limited to the rationale of the guest worker model that migration policies in Cyprus have maintained over the last three decades. This is especially evident in the application criteria for long-term residence, which include a specific language certification and an oral examination, the procedures of which do not seem to be clear. Language is also an obstacle for accessing higher education and the labour market (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis 2017).

Additionally, language training has a monolingual approach and does not support the native language and cultural heritage of asylum seekers and refugees. Most language training in Cyprus has a 'one size fits all' approach, with asylum seekers and refugees being seen as a homogeneous group. This causes inequality in language training on the basis of gender, residence permit status, educational background, and geographical location.

As one NGO representative concluded:

I have a general feeling that language training is undermined by anti-immigrant discourse, that argues that we have already given them so much, and now we are offering language competences on top of that! The programmes don't seem to connect to reality or the issues that arise from attempting to teach the language, to the way that language relates to the concept of integration and all these things. I think that language programmes have not connected with the concept of integration.

This research indicates that we need to draft and implement a national action plan on integration that would allocate existing European funds in a more targeted way. We also need long-term evaluation of existing and past language projects. It is important to highlight, however, that integration policies cannot work if not supported by radical changes to the refugee law currently in force, which does not permit asylum seekers and refugees into the full spectrum of the labour market, education and society in general.



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