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Migrants' integration in Greece and the role of social and solidarity economy

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the 2015 refugee "crisis", the integration of asylum seekers and refugees began to feature in the public debate. The traditional picture of Greece, as a reception and transit but not destination country, has shifted to a fragmented integration framework since the 1990s. This paper critically assesses contemporary integration policies in Greece. On one hand, it argues these integration policies are ones of assimilation. On the other hand, it explores the alternative, inclusive framework being introduced by social and solidarity economy practices. Based on qualitative desk and field research conducted in Greece between 2020 and 2021, it discusses how integration has been intertwined with assimilationist perspectives, analyzes the profile of integration policies, and explores the contributions of alternative practices set out by social and solidarity economy initiatives.

Introduction

The 2015 refugee “crisis” mobilized EU member-states, civil society organizations and individuals in support of migrants¹ coming mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Eritrea². However, attention quickly shifted to the governance of mobility, with the European Agenda on Migration among the first attempts to address this issue³. Despite the burden-sharing mechanisms suggested through the relocation and resettlement processes, EU policies have been focused on preventing migrants from entering the EU and not on their integration into the new environments they have to confront. Xenophobic voices in many European countries have rendered more harsh the national policies devised to deal with migrants’ arrivals, while the “Promotion of our European way of life”, as one of the EU Commission’s top six priorities, suggested an assimilationist view for those “lucky” ones who succeed in entering. The EU perspective closely mirrors Greece’s own approach to migrants’ integration.

1 Although documented, undocumented and forced migrants, asylum seekers and refugees reflect different administrative categories, we refer to migrants in order to highlight the broader processes of migration and integration, while we distinguish between them where and when appropriate. See also Crawley and Skleparis, 2017.

2 https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annula_Risk_Analysis_2016.pdf

3 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1485255362454&uri=CELEX:52015DC0240>

With Greece in the fifth year of an economic crisis, the 2015 refugee "crisis" found the Greek government negotiating with its creditors regarding a third austerity programme. This, subsequently, led to a national referendum and a new electoral round in September 2015. As such, migration was then sidelined both with regard to the governmental agenda and the public sphere, as domestic politics came to the fore. This was not the case with the grassroots, since the Greek islands witnessed the arrival of countless volunteers and solidarity groups engaged in rescue operations, providing healthcare, food and clothing, and assisting migrants' onward journey towards the northern borders and the Balkan corridor (Oikonomakis, 2018). Once the economic and political issues had stabilized somewhat, governmental attention shifted to migration. Although the Syriza-led government adopted a progressive rhetoric in welcoming and offering hospitality to asylum seekers⁴, its migration-related policies were mostly characterized by the criminalization of solidarity through the identification of rescuer-volunteers with people traffickers⁵ and the approval of the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016. Given that migrants could no longer continue their journey to Northern European countries due to the closure of the Balkan corridor in March 2016, the need for integration policies became urgent.

The international resonance of the refugee "crisis", together with Greece's inability to respond, prompted a number of humanitarian organizations and NGOs to take over the institutional reception of new arrivals. At the grassroots level, solidarity groups mobilized in support of newcomers' rights, while new squats were opened up to facilitate their accommodation (Kotronaki, Serdedakis and Alexandridis, 2022). Nevertheless, the coming to power of the right-wing New Democracy party in 2019 led to still harsher policies relating to migration being applied. A stricter asylum application process⁶ was introduced, new border fences⁷ and prison-like camps⁸ were constructed, and the new government was also accused of implementing illegal pushbacks⁹.

A coherent and proactive approach to integration, meaning a set of institutional processes that assist migrants' smooth economic, social, political, and cultural participation, has never been a priority for the Greek state (Tramountanis, 2022). The largescale integration strategies devised in 2013 and 2019 suggested conflicting approaches and were subject to governmental changes, while the short-term integration programmes that were activated in the aftermath of the refugee "crisis" were accompanied by difficulties in their bureaucratic implementation. In this respect, the rise of numerous social and solidarity economy (SSE) initiatives, which supported vulnerable populations during the 2010 economic and the 2015 refugee "crisis", seem to suggest a more inclusive approach. Based on desk research, the analysis of documents and qualitative interviews between 2020 and 2021 conducted in the context of SSE initiatives in

4 <https://www.cnn.gr/politiki/story/60671/tsipras-apodeixame-oti-exoyme-pleonasma-ithikis-kai-agapis>

5 https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiosyni/319170_sto-skamni-i-allileggyi-sti-lesbo

6 <http://www.forintegration.eu/pl/the-new-law-on-asylum-in-greece>

7 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/30/greece-plans-to-build-sea-barrier-off-lesbos-to-deter-migrants>

8 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/22/prisons-in-paradise>

9 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/28/revealed-eu-border-agency-involved-in-hundreds-of-refugee-pushbacks>

Athens regarding their role in the economic and refugee “crisis”, the paper analyzes the way integration has been perceived in Greece and explores how SSE provides alternative visions. As such, this paper first discusses how integration is intertwined with assimilationist perspectives, then goes on to analyze the perspective on integration in Greece, explores the alternative practices promoted by SSE initiatives, and finally concludes with suggestions for future research.

Exploring the assimilationist perspective on integration

The two-way model of integration and its limits

Up until the 1960s, integration was a term used in American sociological studies in opposition to ‘the official black and white segregation practised prior to the civil rights movement in many parts of the US’ (Favell, 2001, 8-9). In that context, ethnic groups in the 1960s and 1970s had demanded ‘multicultural programmes and consequently the integration of (forced) migrants into receiving states’ (Vrečer, 2010, 488-490). By the 1980s, the term began to be employed in the context of migration. In the USA, the arrival of Asian and Hispanic migrant groups in the 1980s and 1990s raised questions regarding ‘cultural accommodation and assimilation’ (Favell, 2001, 8-9). In Western Europe, however, integration was used as an umbrella term to describe ‘the various types of policies and practices’ (Favell, 2001, 4) addressing the circumstances in which migrants and minorities lived.

Integration thus reflected a third way between assimilation and multiculturalism. Assimilation has been criticized for suppressing cultural diversity, while multiculturalism is seen as the remedy. In Canada, the first country to introduce multiculturalism as official state policy in the 1970s, it was designed to protect cultural differences and distribute power and privileges across ethnic groups (Wong and Guo, 2015). In contrast with these extremes, integration recognizes the importance of social bonds within ethnic communities in order to create a safe environment for the newcomers. In addition, these social bonds render migrants better able to build bridges with local communities (McPherson, 2010, 551).

Following the political developments of the 1980s and 1990s, integration has come to dominate public discourse and has become synonymous with the successful settlement of migrants. European governments favoured labour migration, with much of Europe’s economic growth being due to the efforts of migrant workers (Trenz and Triandafyllidou, 2016). The popularity of the term resulted in yet more misuse of the concept, since assimilation or multiculturalism were conceived as forms of integration and not as distinct settlement processes (McPherson, 2010, 550). The twenty-first century brought changes in the international arena and shifted the politics of integration towards more restrictive and assimilationist logics (McPherson, 2010). The political environment after the 9/11 terrorist attacks fostered a heightened islamophobia and

identified migration with a threat, this fearful mood characterizing the western political environment until the 2015 refugee “crisis” (Duru, Hanquinet and Cesur, 2017).

Following a minimal definition, integration points to ‘the inclusion [of individual actors] in already existing social systems’ (Esser, 2004 in Penninx, 2019, 3). In their efforts to provide a more comprehensive view, scholars have defined integration as ‘a generations lasting process of inclusion and acceptance of migrants in the core institutions, relations and statuses of the receiving society’ (Heckmann, 2006 in Penninx, 2019, 3). For Penninx, integration reflects ‘the process of settlement of newcomers in a given society, to the interaction of these newcomers with the host society, and to the social change that follows immigration’ (Penninx, 2019, p.5). For Vrečer, integration is a two-way process which includes ‘(forced) migrants in the receiving society in such a way that allows them to practise the culture of their country of origin in public’, contrary to the one-way assimilation models which require migrants to adapt to the dominant culture (Vrečer, 2010, 488-490). Spencer and Charsley note that integration is a two-way process that concerns both newcomers and the receiving communities; it engages a number of actors since it runs across many social institutions and not only public services; it concerns many interlinked domains, such as economic, social, cultural, identity and the sense of belonging; it can be affected by a plethora of different factors, policy interventions and social networks among them; and it ‘takes place, mostly, at the local level’ (Spencer and Charsley, 2016 in Broadhead, 2020, 8).

Recent scholarship criticizes the traditional conception of national integration models (Saharso, 2019; Schiller and Hackett, 2018). Nevertheless, this neo-colonial approach, whereby migrants should adjust to, and be integrated into the western way of life, is rather evident in European states (Schinkel, 2018, 9-14), and is also reflected in the EU approach regarding the protection of the European way of life. In this respect, integration seems to conceive of the host society as a single, one-dimensional entity to which migrants should strive to belong. As Favell emphatically states, ‘when political actors and policy intellectuals talk about “integration”, they are inevitably thinking about integration into one, single, indivisible (national) “state”, and one, simple, unitary (national) “society”’ (Favell, 2001, 3). This tendency to think of host societies and migrant groups as homogenous wholes, frame migrants’ integration as a problem. More importantly, thus phrased the problem of integration concerns in the main the migrants themselves, despite the larger shares of resources and power that domestic institutions have, rendering them much more decisive for the development of integration processes (Penninx, 2019; Saharso, 2019; Vrečer, 2010).

Although integration reflects a two-way process of mutual adaptation, disproportionate attention is paid to migrants’ integration outcomes compared to ‘how the adaptation of host society may be understood’ (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore, 2017, 187-188). Put bluntly, non-migrants do not consider themselves subject to integration and they are not measured by the same variables as migrants are (Klarenbeek, 2019, 2). This reflects the fact that the host population is regarded as ‘the norm to which immigrants should aspire’ (Saharso, 2019, 1-2) and provides integration with an individualistic

neoliberal logic. Integration becomes the duty of migrants as individuals, based on the simplistic idea that society is simply the aggregation of its members. Thus, a potential failure of integration is conceived as the failure of individuals and not of the series of social systems, power relations and institutions that shape the social setting (Schinkel, 2018, 3).

Integration through accommodation, employment and social relations

Accommodation and employment are central factors for migrants' integration. Research on migrants' accommodation concerns the processes involved in residential integration or segregation 'in areas dominated by indigenous locals' (Valenta and Bunar, 2010, 466). Residential segregation is often ascribed to economic marginalization, discrimination and voluntary self-segregation (Valenta and Bunar, 2010, 466). In times of increased migratory flows, accommodation schemes are either arranged through public policy frameworks targeting social exclusion or are at the mercy of international short-term funding. The latter has been all too evident in the Greek context during the refugee crisis, with NGOs being the main implementing partners of EU-funded accommodation schemes.

Migrants' employment constitutes another crucial factor, conditioning all other aspects of integration (Harrell-Bond, 1996 in Vrečer, 2010). Lack of employment and lack of rights to access employment, usually correlate with marginalization and deskilling (Vrečer, 2010), and even when migrants manage to overcome institutional barriers and enter the labour market, they often have to settle for low-paid and low-skilled positions. In the case of asylum seekers and refugees, deskilling processes are particularly harsh, since in all likelihood they will lack adequate documentation. Of course, such processes are not independent of the dominant neoliberal logic and the creation of a precariat, characterized by increased flexibility and insecurity.

Lastly, social relations are critical for migrants' integration. Ager and Strang (2008) distinguish social bonds, social bridges and social links as important factors for migrants' social integration. Social bonds refer here to the establishment of connections with 'like-ethnic groups', which allow migrants to maintain their culture (languages, customs, religions) and have a point of reference in the new social settings (Ager and Strang, 2008, 178-179). Social bridges refer to the establishment of relations with other social groups. Small acts of friendliness, such as being greeted by neighbours or participating in local activities, foster social bridges and develop sentiments of belonging to the host society (Ager and Strang, 2008, 179-180). Finally, social links refer to 'the connection between individuals and structures of the state, such as government services' (Ager and Strang, 2008, 181), a process that is impeded by structural barriers. Having sketched out how integration processes may occur in the guise of accommodation, employment and social relations, we turn our attention to the practical application of integration policies in Greece.

The integration landscape in Greece

Migrants' integration has never been a priority for the Greek state. According to Tramountanis' (2022) detailed research, Greece's integration policies can be divided into four periods: 1991-2000, an early phase characterized by repressive measures; 2001-2008, when there were more comprehensive attempts to regulate migration characterized by more positive approaches to integration; 2008-2015, when the economic crisis tended to bring about the de-integration of migrants; and 2016-today, which is characterized by the effects of the refugee "crisis".

Up until 1990, Greece was perceived as a departure country, with Germany, USA, Canada and Australia being considered top destination countries. The dissolution of the Soviet Union triggered the first migratory wave, with migrants arriving in Greece mainly from the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Expats of Greek origin known as *omogeneis*, mostly coming from the border region with Albania and the wider area around Pontos, have been welcomed with specific integration policies (Papataxiarchis, 2006, 63-70). However, the same cannot be said for the rest of the border-crossers. Migrants from Albania, who constituted the majority of newcomers, have been assigned an essentially criminal status, both by mainstream media and state officials. The prevailing assimilationist logic forced newly arrived migrants to undergo baptism as Orthodox Christians and change their names to Greek ones (Papataxiarchis, 2014, 50). This first migration wave was met with arrest and deportation policies, with the state treating migration as a temporary phenomenon.

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed the second migration wave, with migrants mostly coming from the MENA region. According to the national population census in 2011, there were around 912,000 migrants living in Greece. Among the non-EU European migrants, the vast majority of them came from Albania (480,851 out of 530,244), while migrants from Pakistan and Georgia made up the largest Asian migrant groups (34,178 and 27,407 respectively out of 138,274)¹⁰. Despite the great number of migrants, the issuing of long-term residence permits was the only available integration policy (Tramountanis, 2022), while the bureaucratic obstacles to applying for or renewing them were manifold and acted as demotivational factors. As such, migrants would seem to have been self-integrated into the Greek reality without any state or market provision.

The 2010 economic crisis, marked as it was by a steep rise in unemployment and by austerity cuts, aggravated the already vulnerable economic plight of migrants. The breakdown of the market negatively affected employees' mobility, with migrants facing increasing difficulties in moving away from low-paid and low-status jobs, while welfare state retrenchment decreased funding opportunities with respect to integration initiatives (Trenz and Triandafyllidou, 2016). Furthermore, the lack of employment has turned many long-term documented migrants to irregular work, since they tend to lack

¹⁰ Tables A.06, <https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SAM03/2011>

the social security stamps derived from formal employment, which are prerequisites for renewing their residence permits.

The 2015 refugee "crisis" was a critical point, since almost a million migrants used Greece as an entry point to the EU (Table 1). Initially, Greece was a transit country, with migrants continuing their journey into Northern Europe. However, the closure of the Balkan corridor and the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016, indirectly transformed Greece into a destination country. More specifically, the initial arbitrary nationality-screening at the Slovenian borders reduced mobility and created a chain reaction which was replicated on the Greek-North Macedonian borders and eventually resulted in the closure of the Balkan corridor (Mantanika, 2022). Moreover, according to the abovementioned statement "All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey", as those who are not 'applying for asylum or whose application has been found [to be] unfounded or inadmissible', while 'For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU'¹¹. Migrants were thus in practice trapped in Greece, while those who entered after March 2016 had to remain in the overcrowded and poorly equipped camps on the North Aegean islands until such time as their asylum applications had been scrutinized, a process that might take over two years. In December 2020, the UNHCR estimated that Greece was hosting approximately 119,700 refugees and migrants who had entered after the 2015-2016 refugee crisis, with 19,100 being on the North Aegean islands¹² and greatly exceeding the latter's accommodation capacities.

Table 1. Source: http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179#_ga=2.50999529.1953732923.1620892598-1980877699.1620655236

Institutional approaches to integration

According to the UNHCR, in February 2021 Greece was hosting 91,945 refugees and 80,784 asylum seekers¹³. The vast majority of the former come from Syria (36,013), Afghanistan (15,581) and Iraq (10,455), and the latter predominantly from Afghanistan (29,716), Syria (7,520) and Pakistan (7,138). Despite the relatively low number of asylum seekers and refugees, the Greek state was unable to cater for migrants' integration, with this inability being informed also by a traditional unwillingness to "otherize" newcomers or persons with different customs and values.

As Papataxiarchis (2014; 2006, 30-38) notes, the coercion and assimilation of otherness can be traced back to the very constitution of the Greek state in the nineteenth century. The nationalization processes that followed the acquisition of new territories were combined with the suppression of ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences, and reinforced the idea of a solid and coherent national identity. This in turn promoted an

11 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

12 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/84481>

13 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/85820>

assimilationist perspective in both institutional policies and everyday social responses throughout modernity, which determined the policies of the Greek state on migration (Ventoura, 2004). Bill 3838 in 2010 and the establishment of local Migrant Integration Councils (SEMs) were an exception. According to Tramountanis (2022), Bill 3838 granted specific categories of legally-residing long-term migrants voting and electoral rights in local elections and allowed children with one non-Greek parent to acquire citizenship at birth, if their parent had been legally residing in Greece for at least five years, or if they themselves had attended a Greek school for six or more years. Moreover, SEMs were responsible for investigating the problems of long-term migrants, raising awareness and promoting their smooth social inclusion. Nevertheless, problems of reduced resources and personnel limited SEMs' success (Tramountanis, 2022). In addition, the law was deemed unconstitutional in 2013, a ruling serving to reinforce the perception that citizenship should be awarded as a "trophy" of successful integration and not as a means for its application. This perception was also in evidence in the 2013 integration strategy and in the 2015 parliamentary discussions on the new citizenship bill¹⁴.

In 2013, the right-wing government of New Democracy introduced the National Strategy for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. Although the Strategy referred to the protection of human rights and the equal access of all residents to the country's economic, social and political life, it adopted a rather assimilationist perspective: it highlighted migrants' obligations in integrating themselves into Greek society while downplaying the role of the state. Indeed, in this document integration was framed as migrants' incorporation into the dominant economic and social reality of Greece, citizenship remained an end and not a means to successful integration, while throughout the Strategy there were references to the problem of *illegal* migration that needed to be tackled¹⁵. As such, the Strategy was merely adding an institutional stamp of approval to the already existing, albeit hidden assimilationist approach of the state.

Prior to 2016, integration policies were subject to departments within a number of different Ministries, the Ministry of the Interior among them. In the aftermath of the refugee "crisis", the integration of third-country nationals became the responsibility of the newly-created Ministry of Migration Policy, but left the Citizenship Directorate under the Ministry of the Interior (Tramountanis, 2022). Along with the establishment of the Directorate of Social Integration, Migrant' Integration Centres (KEMs) were established as branches of municipal community centres, their purpose being to provide information, to create networks and to offer language courses for legally residing third-country nationals, refugees and registered asylum seekers¹⁶. In addition, the agencies previously known as SEMs were transformed into Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils (SEMPs), without however addressing their structural weaknesses (Tramountanis, 2022).

14 <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/a08fc2dd-61a9-4a83-b09a-09f4c564609d/es20150708.pdf>

15 Pages 86-87 in https://www.ypes.gr/UserFiles/f0ff9297-f516-40ff-a70e-eca84e2ec9b9/ethniki_stratigiki.pdf

16 <https://migration.gov.gr/en/migration-policy/integration/draseis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/kentra-entaxis-metanaston/>

In 2019 and before the new electoral round, the Syriza government sketched out a new National Strategy for Integration, which aimed to reframe the previous Strategy from a more progressive perspective and also to address the greater integration needs of newcomer migrants. The new Strategy adopted a somewhat multicultural perspective, underlined mutual adaptation and highlighted the crucial role of local municipalities in fostering migrants' integration¹⁷. Nevertheless, and despite their different characteristics, both Strategies seemed to reflect political declarations made at a time when migration dominated public discourse, rather than actually shaping enduring integration policies and putting forward institutional changes. This was also reflected by the decision of New Democracy, directly after taking office in 2019, to merge the Ministry of Migration Policy with the Ministry of Citizen Protection, declaring that migration management should not create insecurity for citizens, only to reconstitute it six months later as the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (Tramountanis, 2022).

Along with a number of other initiatives, such as the Cities Network for Integration¹⁸, the establishment of the Help Desk¹⁹, and the efforts made to officially register experts working as inter-cultural mediators²⁰, the EU-funded Helios²¹ project is probably the most widely-used. Having served around 30,775 refugees²², Helios provides rent subsidies to recognized refugees for 6 to 12 months after they have found an apartment of their own, while they are also obliged to participate in integration courses, which they attend daily, such as language learning and soft skills development. Although positive, these scattered efforts did not reflect a holistic and inclusionary approach to migrants' integration. Moreover, they have been supervised by international and EU funds at a time when Greece was under the spotlight, and their (smooth) continuation is not guaranteed once they have passed under national control²³.

Overall, we can argue that since institutional attention was mostly drawn to reception policies, subsequent steps which could perhaps connect reception to integration have been sidelined (Mantantika, 2022). Employment and accommodation are indicative here. Although both registered asylum seekers and refugees have the right to employment, the former do not have the right to be self-employed or start their own enterprises²⁴. Furthermore, Bill 4636, introduced by the New Democracy government in 2019, suspended the right to employment for asylum seekers for the first six months after their application had been lodged²⁵. The data supplied by IOM and UNHCR

17 <http://www.opengov.gr/immigration/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2019/01/ethniki-stratigiki.pdf>

18 https://greece.iom.int/sites/greece/files/CNI%20NEWSLETTER%20JULY%202020_EL.pdf

19 <https://migration.gov.gr/migration-policy/integration/drasis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/helpdesk-entaxis-dikaioychon-diethnoys-prostasias/>

20 <https://migration.gov.gr/migration-policy/integration/drasis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/drasis-diapolitismikis-diamesolavisis/>

21 <https://greece.iom.int/sites/greece/files/HELIOS%20Factsheet%20May%202021%20W1.pdf>

22 36,5% Syrians. 32,8% Afghans and 12,3% Iraqis, with 52,12% of housing contracts concerning the region of Attica and 19,08% the one of Macedonia.

23 Indicative here are the evictions of persons granted international protection from the ESTIA apartments, see <https://www.msf.org/greece-evicts-vulnerable-refugees-leaves-them-streets>

24 For more detailed information with respect to asylum seekers' and refugees' rights to employment and the requisite documentation, see <https://help.unhcr.org/greece/living-in-greece/access-to-employment/>

25 <https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/%CE%9D.-4636.2019-%CE%A6%CE%95%CE%9A-169.%CE%91.1.11.2019.pdf>

for asylum seekers and refugees residing in camps and shelters set up by the ESTIA programme reflect the broader picture. In particular, asylum seekers and refugees are hard pressed to meet the basic bureaucratic prerequisites for finding employment and accommodation, such as tax identification number, social security number, and bank account (Table 2). Increased unemployment due to the country's economic breakdown, the preference of employers for local employees who are Greek nationals and the bureaucratic obstacles asylum seekers and refugees face when trying to access the labour market often led them to the unofficial market and dependence upon state subsidies (Skleparis, 2018). In addition, many refugee families tend to stay for longer and longer periods in refugee camps due to their inability to pay for independent accommodation (Vlastou-Dimopoulou et al, 2022). In this regard, we suggest that SSE can provide a more holistic and inclusive approach to integration, one that combines labour with social integration.

	CAMPS	ESTIA	
Posts	32 sites 29,757 posts	20,805 posts (55% Attica, 20% central Macedonia)	
Residents	25,676 persons	Asylum Seekers	Refugees
Country of origin	Afghans-45,74%, Syrians-26,31%, Iraqis-10,52%	Afghans-41%, Iraqis-18%, Syrians-17%	Syrians-72%, Afghans-9%, Iraqis-9%
Sex	F-24%, M-33%, Min-43%	F-24%, M-25%, Min-51%	F-23%, M-23%, Min-54%
Social Security Number (AMKA)	74,23%	34% (+20% temporary)	69%
Tax Identification Number (AΦM)	31,46%	28%	43%
OAED (Registered Unemployed)	10,36%	11%	20%
Bank account	-	2%	6%
Education	5202/7408 minors subscribed to schools, 3,13% adults	71% subscribed	83% subscribed

Table 2, Source: For camps https://greece.iom.int/sites/greece/files/_Merged%20Mainland%20Mar_21_compressed.pdf, for ESTIA apartments <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/83982>

Exploring the alternatives of social and solidarity economy

SSE prioritizes social over economic profit and develops close relations with progressive social movements, differentiating itself from private and public sectors alike. SSE consists of a heterogeneous ecosystem of formal and informal initiatives, which advocate for the ethical, environmental and democratic operation of the economy and the inclusion of socially marginalized populations. The institutional approaches involved embrace cooperatives, associations, trade unions and charities, and highlight the fact that SSE improve people's lives by intervening where the state and the market cannot or do not wish to. By contrast, movement-oriented perspectives highlight initiatives which

are usually the product of collective action, advocate for social change and vest SSE with a radical identity (Kavoulakos, 2018).

Although Greece has a rich tradition of agricultural cooperatives starting in the mid-nineteenth century, the real development of the SSE sphere dates from the recent economic crisis. Bill 4019 in 2011 introduced social enterprises into Greece and aimed to link them with the reintegration of social groups excluded from the labour market (Adam and Kavoulakos, 2020). Nevertheless, the actual development of the SSE sphere was mostly realized through the remarkable rise of bottom-up solidarity practices triggered by the politics of austerity.

The structural adjustment programmes imposed by international creditors considerably affected the already-ailing welfare state, sent unemployment rates sky high and consigned large parts of the population to the margins of poverty and social exclusion. In this context, the development of the five-year long anti-austerity protest cycle combined street politics with the provision of solidarity services (Malamidis, 2020). More specifically, the exclusion of almost 3 million people from the public healthcare system led to the development of grassroots social clinics. Set up by doctors and other individuals in solidarity, social clinics provided primary healthcare services and medicines free of charge to everyone in need, answered to the members' own general assembly and organized protests against the closure of public hospitals (Cabot, 2016; Kotronaki and Christou, 2019). Similarly, collective kitchens were organized by squats and political social centres in order to provide daily meals that were low cost or even free of charge (Malamidis, 2020). Additional examples include citizens' initiatives reappropriating urban space (Chatzinakos, 2020), time banks and barter networks involving citizens in the mutual exchange of services, solidarity schools offering free support to schoolkids (Giovanopoulos, Athanasiadis and Dalakoglou, 2019) and worker and consumer cooperatives suggesting horizontal organizational models in the workplace (Amanatidou Tzakou and Gritzas, 2021). All in all, the conjunction of SSE with social movement practices was promoted as a practical, radical democratic and prefigurative alternative to neoliberal governance (Howarth and Roussos, 2022), one that foregrounds the caring aspects of everyday social reproductive activities (Kouki and Chatzidakis, 2021).

The rise of SSE both in institutional and everyday grassroots politics continued unabated in the following years. The legislative framework was updated by the introduction of bill 4430 in 2016 (Adam and Kavoulakos, 2020) and SSE initiatives proliferated still further. By the same token, the advent of the refugee crisis opened a new field in which SSE initiatives could flourish.

Solidarity towards migrants started with rescue operations and the provision of first aid by local and international volunteers, political groups and humanitarian organizations on the Aegean islands and at Greece's northern borders, and continued with the meeting of their accommodation needs in mainland Greece after the closure of the Balkan corridor and the EU-Turkey Statement (Oikonomakis, 2018). At each stage, solidarity was given a different meaning: from the universal right to life itself to the right to free

movement, and from political disobedience to migrants' everyday self-organization (Kotronaki, Serdedakis and Alexandridis, 2022).

Being the key value of SSE, solidarity bridged the economic and the refugee crisis. According to our own desk and field research, a great number of SSE initiatives, which supported the domestic population during the economic crisis, used their experience and turned their attention to the newly arrived migrant populations, while by the same token new ventures were born. Collective kitchens have been serving meals free of charge in the Northern Aegean islands, social clinics for their part have been providing medicines while solidarity groups have been distributing dry clothes during disembarkation (Rozakou, 2016). Along with the provision of information and translation services, similar actions took place also in the ports of Piraeus and Thessaloniki when migrants left the islands, as well as in Idomeni unofficial camp at the Greek-North Macedonian borders, before they continued their onward journey into northern Europe. In their essence, SSE initiatives, together with political groups, unions and NGOs amounted to an unofficial reception system (Mantanika, 2022; della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021; Oikonomakis, 2018).

The EU-Turkey Statement and the gradual take-over of reception duties by institutional authorities and humanitarian actors led to solidarity practices being applied to the provision of accommodation in urban centers (Oikonomakis, 2018). Given the initial lack of institutional accommodation, Notara 26, City Plaza and other refugee squats in Athens and Thessaloniki promoted a horizontal and inclusionary approach to conviviality, where migrants were not passive beneficiaries but actually involved in the squats' everyday operation (Kotronaki, Serdedakis and Alexandridis, 2022; Oikonomakis, 2018). Collective kitchens met the squatters' daily nutritional requirements, social clinics provided refugees with primary healthcare services and a number of traditional social movement organizations catered for migrants' everyday economic, social and cultural needs (Malamidis, 2020). As such, up until their eviction, first by the government of Syriza and later on by that of New Democracy, refugee squats became important hubs for defending refugees' rights.

Apart from the informal initiatives, in our desk and field research we encountered formal SSE initiatives to promote migrants' social and labour inclusion. Many cooperatives established during the economic crisis have been regularly collecting and distributing clothes and basic goods to asylum seekers, selling products made by them in the camps²⁶, organizing events for migrants and Greek kids, and publishing books written by refugees²⁷. Moreover, newly formed social and workers' cooperatives have tried to engage migrants in their actual operation: the cooperative of Staramaki²⁸ in Northern Greece set out to produce environmental-friendly straws, with its members'

26 <https://www.facebook.com/events/163853138807444/>

27 <https://akybernitesspoliteies.org/shop/martyria/i-pena-mou-den-spaei-ta-synora-einai-pou-tha-spasoun-grammata-ston-kosmo-apo-ti-moria>

28 <https://www.lifo.gr/now/greece/staramakia-10000-oikologika-kalamakia-apo-proin-aner-goys-ellines-kai-prosfyges-sto>

assembly also including newly arrived refugees; the Nan²⁹ cooperative restaurant in Lesbos, which was established jointly by Greek activists and refugees as a response to migrants and local inhabitants' employment needs, promoted a multi-ethnic ethos; the Welcommon³⁰ cooperative hostel in Athens reflected an ambitious effort to promote collective models of social and labour inclusion through the joint efforts of local people and refugees to collectively offer accommodation to vulnerable groups; the Emantes³¹ LGBTQIA+ social cooperative, which was formed by refugees and people in solidarity, offered psychosocial support and distributed food parcels; and Khora³², an association run mostly by international volunteers, provided legal support, a daily collective kitchen, a makers' space and other activities for asylum seekers.

All in all, SSE provides a self-organized response to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees, and acts as a connecting point between reception and migrants' social inclusion. However, we cannot be sure about labour inclusion. Although vibrant, the SSE sphere in Greece reflects only a small portion of the market share, which faces many financial problems, and has not managed yet to guarantee the economic sustainability of its members or to develop economies of scale³³. In this newly-developed field of SSE, according to our research, initiatives that have been launched either jointly or solely by migrants and refugees, or their activities focusing on migrants' inclusion, represent a rather small share. This is also evident from a closer look at the state's archive of SSE initiatives³⁴, which shows that very few out of the more than 2,000 formal SSE registered initiatives across Greece underline migrants' inclusion in their programmatic declarations. Furthermore, the bureaucratic obstacles asylum seekers and refugees face in order to access the labour market, and the increased mobility of migrant populations conflict with long-term commitments and the creation of a trust environment, which stand as prerequisites for the development of collective procedures in SSE initiatives. As such, it seems difficult for the newly developed sphere of SSE in Greece to move from the short-term provision of solidarity-based support to that of participatory long-term planning.

Conclusions

Integration became popular both as an academic concept and a policy instrument. Despite its support for the mutual adjustment of host societies and migrant populations, integration has been criticized for covertly obscuring a hidden culture of assimilation. More specifically, integration implies the dominance of the domestic culture over that of newcomers, perceives society as a homogeneous entity, and places the burden of integration mostly on the shoulders of migrants. Greece does not seem to have escaped

29 <https://www.vice.com/el/article/zm8npx/sto-kalytero-estiatorio-ths-mytillnhs-ergazontai-prosfyges>

30 <https://welcommon.gr/>

31 <https://www.emantes.com/about-emantes>

32 <https://www.khora-athens.org/about>

33 Among others, see the 2017 report of British Council on SSE in Greece, https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/greece_social_and_solidarity_economy_report_english_british_council_0.pdf

34 <https://kalo.gov.gr/i-grammatia/>

this trend. Starting from the first migratory wave in the 1990s, Greek policies have focused ever since on the prevention of migration rather than the inclusion of migrants. The 2015 refugee “crisis” found Greece in the thick of an economic crisis and this led to institutional attention being directed at the reception of migrants. However, the closure of the Balkan corridor and the EU-Turkey Statement transformed Greece from a transit to a destination country and further underlined the need for integration policies.

Our research shows that subsequent integration initiatives were scattered and piecemeal, with bureaucratic obstacles preventing asylum seekers and refugees from finding employment. In this respect, SSE practices, which flourished during the economic crisis and promoted the social, labour and political reintegration of the domestic population, suggested a more inclusive alternative.

Already from the summer of 2015, political organizations and SSE initiatives combined their efforts and provided the newcomer migrant population with informal welfare services. Through participatory, direct-democratic and collective management processes, SSE initiatives promoted inclusionary models of doing things in common. However, these initiatives had usually been limited to the short-term provision of solidarity, with bureaucratic obstacles and increased mobility of the migrant population preventing long-term planning in terms of labour inclusion.

Here, we do not propose to idealize SSE with respect to migrant integration. On many occasions, SSE has been criticized for reproducing social inequalities and individualism (Gkagkelis, 2021). However, SSE has the potential to transform asylum seekers and refugees from passive subjects of the state and beneficiaries of NGOs to active agents. This inclusionary approach is not based only on the prefigurative practices of SSE, but is informed also by its relationships with social movements and the grassroots. As such, social and labour integration meets political integration and participation in the commons. In this respect, further research on cooperatives, which have been set up by the mutual efforts of Greeks and migrants, promises to enrich migration literature with empirical evidence regarding the inclusionary SSE models and shed light on how social and political participation can be combined with labour inclusion.



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