Babel Day Centre

Syn-eirmos NGO of Social Solidarity

BABEL

MIGRANTS MENTAL HEALTH

Paths to Integration

Toward a Methodological Framework of Support for Applicants and Beneficiaries of International Protection

Athens 2022

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Preface

The aim of this publication is twofold: to share the experience of the 'Paths to Integration' team and to present the project's methodological framework, along with the theoretical touchstones that guided its development.

The 'Paths to Integration' initiative was developed in June 2018 by Babel Day Centre (www.babeldc.gr), in collaboration with Archipelagos Social Co-op (www.acoop.gr). It was funded by Open Society Foundations and ran until February 2022.

The project team was comprised of six professionals from a variety of disciplines within the field of psychosocial support, an administrative worker, as well as two 'integration support workers' (ISWs) [1] who received training throughout the duration of the initiative. Specifically, the following individuals helped bring this project to fruition: Fatima Ameur, Vasia Valkanioti, Mustafa Chalil, Fani Chondrou, Pelopidas Flaris, Eugenia Giannopoulou, Natassa Mihajlovic, Maria Ntetsika and Eleni Polykreti.

External partners in this initiative included Ioanna Kato, contributing author Amina Moskof, and Prof. RK Papadopoulos, who provided invaluable mentorship.

The project's scientific lead was Nikos Gionakis.

We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to the aforementioned individuals as well as anyone who supported the initiative.

A special 'thank you' to Efi Latsoudi for her comments on the initial drafts of this publication.

Lastly, we would like to mention that the idea behind this publication emerged out of the team's need to share their experience, highlight the challenges and practices involved, and contribute to the valuable contemporary discourse surrounding refugee integration in host societies.

[1] We deliberated extensively on how best to describe professionals who support 'beneficiaries' in overcoming the challenges of their daily lives. Though terms such as Community Psychosocial Worker (CPW), Psychosocial Counsellor, Peer Counsellor, Cultural Mediator, etc. are most used, they do not fully capture the nature of the role that we would like these professionals to play. Therefore, we settled on the term 'Integration Support Worker' (ISW) as a placeholder until we could determine a more appropriate term.

Introduction

The 'Paths to Integration' initiative aimed to support refugees in navigating daily challenges in the society in which they found themselves and were required, or wished, to integrate. Services were extended to beneficiaries and applicants for international protection who were accessing mental health support at Babel Day Centre, all of whom had the intention to remain in Greece.

The following services were offered as part of the initiative:

- One-to-one (or two-to-one) sessions to assess, develop, implement, and evaluate an individualised support plan; critically, this was a collaborative process between our professionals and service users.

- Group meetings and workshops covering topics arising in individual sessions, with the aim of providing essential information on adjusting to the Greek social context, while facilitating community support and open exchange among individuals supported by the initiative[2].

- Meetings with other stakeholders and organisations that provided direct support to beneficiaries of the initiative, with the intent of creating small support networks and ensuring a more holistic care plan.

- Participation in advocacy efforts aiming to shed light on the stressors and issues faced by individuals supported through this project, with the hope of increasing awareness and inspiring meaningful action by relevant stakeholders.

- Continuous reflection on the processes, results, goals, expectations, learnings and experiences relevant to this initiative.

Our objective for the initiative developed in response to the dominant discourse around integration. In exploring different forms of integration support for beneficiaries and applicants for international protection, we resolved to combine the *essentialist* and *constructivist* approach - to consider '*the facts of objective reality*' (accessing employment, education, shelter, etc.) and *'how said reality is experienced by the person in question'*. Over the course of the three years that we spent running this initiative, we remained consistent in this aim and concluded that the common understanding of integration has little bearing on the objective reality or lived experience of the individual. We, therefore, redirected our efforts *away* from

[2] An ongoing point of discussion was, and still is, how best to refer to those being supported by this initiative. Beneficiaries? People served? Asylum seekers? Refugees? Applicants? Perhaps the wordier 'persons with refugee experience' is more suitable, yet we are not certain of that. This is yet another example of how fluid the identities of the people we work with are, leaving us uncertain on how to approach them most effectively.

integration support, *toward* supporting individuals in navigating the challenges of everyday life. It is the collective experience and outcome of these efforts that we wish to document, to the best of our ability, in this publication.

1. Integration: One term, multiple meanings, even more practices

1.1 Why 'Paths to Integration'?

"*A path is defined as a narrow 'non-carriageway' (unpaved road) intended for pedestrians and animals. Unlike a roadway, its width is small and varied. It may also have steps and fluctuate significantly in its slope*."[3]

The governing philosophy behind this initiative was that, for newcomers, the process of integrating into a host society is like *walking down a path*. Put simply, integration encompasses a host of unique characteristics, histories, expectations, dreams, disappointments, personal ambivalences, and dilemmas. Much like *walking down a path*, each integration journey has twists and turns and ups and downs, which must be taken into consideration when offering support.

Rather than proposing a homogenous, one-size-fits-all support strategy (or metaphorically, a *multi-lane highway*), our approach is akin to a personalised *path*, tailored to each unique individual. Refugees are often required to face everyday challenges anew in an unfamiliar context. Our role is to support these individuals as they consider fundamental questions such as: *How do I look for a job and accommodation? Where can I find a dog to keep me company? How are gender relations defined in the society I am now part of?*

We must clarify that the significance of an individual's personal journey does not diminish the critical role that reception conditions and integration policies play in cultivating a sense of belonging in newcomers. Nor does it imply that individuals are personally responsible for finding ways to integrate (this is closer to *assimilation* than integration). Given that private and public experience - the individual and collective spheres - are intertwined and mutually reinforcing, the '*path*' represents an individual journey inscribed within a wider context, with which it forges a continuous dialogue.

This process is not merely undertaken by refugees and asylum seekers, but those who work in the field, and, to an extent, those who live in the host context.

[3]This definition is part of the Draft Ministerial Decision titled "Defining the technical requirements for engraving, signposting, opening, and preserving mountain climbing-hiking paths", which was published for public consultation by the Hellenic Ministry of Environment and Energy in July 2016. For more information: http://www.opengov.gr/minenv/?p=7529#comments

Professionals in the humanitarian field face various unique challenges, many of which stem from their own expectations, tolerances, hopes, and ambitions.[4] These include the ability to remain engaged; maintain a sense of well-being; prepare for the demands of the sector and withstand its pressures; access supports; navigate personal biases and prejudices; and process and deal with outside expectations (from colleagues, organisations, etc.)

To quote the handbook "Psychosocial Dimensions of the Refugee Condition-Synergic Approach"[5], if the goal is integration, then perhaps "*that which must be discussed in depth, is the ways in which human rights, the legal dimension, and the psychosocial dimension must be combined, in order for these people to gain their voices back".* Researchers and professionals ought to deconstruct the idea of a "*refugee archetype*"[6] (Malkki, 1996), '*constantly looking to mobilise against their silencing'*. Unpacking generalisations and stereotypes constitutes a fundamental step toward understanding that "*every refugee, just as every other person, has a name, relatives, personal history, beliefs and convictions, hopes and desires"*.[7]

1.2. The concept of integration

"*Integration is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most*"[8]

The question of integration is persistent, multifaceted, and loaded, lacking consensus or clear-cut answers. Each society brings its history and unique characteristics (socio-political, economic, legislative) to the discussion. An online search for the definition or essential meaning of integration yields a host of different conceptualisations and approaches. The term itself is contentious, with *assimilation* and *inclusion* often regarded as preferable. Of course, each term is associated with specific approaches, meanings, and policies, relating both to the acculturation of newly arrived, nonlocal people, and to a conscious shift toward multiculturalism and ethnic diversity[9]. In

[4]For a brief reference to the challenges faced by professionals in the field, see (only in Greek), Γκιωνάκης, Ν., Μοσκώφ, Α. Ψυχοκοινωνικές διαστάσεις της προσφυγικής συνθήκης: μεταξύ ευαλωτότητας και ανθεκτικότητας. Η εμπειρία του Κέντρου Ημέρας Βαβέλ. Στο: Οικονόμου, Μ. (επιμ) Σύγχρονες Εκδοχές του Προσφυγικού Ζητήματος: Όψεις και Απόψεις. Έκδοση της Α' Ψυχιατρικής Κλινικής του ΕΚΠΑ - Αιγινήτειο Νοσοκομείο. 2022. Αθήνα: 230-254 https://atticaspirit.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/book.pdf

[5] Papadopoulos, R.K. (ed) Psychosocial Dimensions of the Refugee Condition- Synergic Approach. Publication by Babel Day Centre (Syn-eirmos NGO of Social Solidarity) and Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees (University of Essex). Athens, 2019

[6] Malkki, L. H. (1996). Speechless emissaries: Refugees, humanitarianism, and dehistoricisation. Cultural anthropology, 11(3), 377-404

[7] Papadopoulos, R.K (2019). cit.: 36

[8] Robinson, V. (1998), 'Defining and Measuring Successful Refugee Integration', Proceedings of ECRE International Conference on Integration of Refugees in Europe, Antwerp, p. 118

[9] The model of integration employed in the United Kingdom is indicative here, as noted by Ager and Strang. Ager, A. and Strang, A. 'Understanding integration: A conceptual framework', Journal of

formulating our own definition, we will first consider the perspective of international organisations responsible for ensuring appropriate reception, living, and integration conditions for migrants and refugees.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "*integration is a **dynamic two-way process** that places demands on both the refugee and the receiving community. Integrating refugees goes beyond ensuring that they are provided with basic needs and access to services. Integration requires that receiving States and civil society create a welcoming environment which supports refugees to achieve long-term economic stability and adjust to the new society, including **fostering a sense of belonging**, and **encouraging participation** in their new communities*."[10]

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) posits that "*while the term 'integration' is one that is understood differently depending upon the country and context, it can generally be defined as the process of **mutual adaptation** between the host society and the migrants themselves, both as individuals and as groups. Migrant integration policy frameworks should take into consideration the rights and obligations of migrants and host societies, including **access to the labour market, health and social services, and education for children and adults**. Integration implies a sense of obligation and respect for a core set of values that bind migrants and their host communities in a common purpose. In this regard, integration policies and support measures should not be limited to long term migrants but should also tackle the needs and challenges pertaining to shorter term migration*. […] *IOM recognises that successful integration is a **dynamic two-way process** that involves a mutual adaptation of migrants and the host society based on principles of protection of fundamental rights, respect, tolerance and non-discrimination".*[11]

Finally, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) regards integration as "*a process of change that is*:

*a) **dynamic and two-way**: it places demands on both receiving societies and the individuals and/or the communities concerned. From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness to adapt public institutions to changes in the population profile, accept refugees as part of the national community, and take action to facilitate access to resources and decision-making processes.*

*b) **long term**: from a psychological perspective, it **often begins upon arrival in the country of final destination and concludes when a refugee becomes an active***

Refugee Studies, Volume 21, Issue 2, June 2008, pp.174. Available at: https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/21/2/166/1621262

[10] https://www.unhcr.org/52a6d85b6.pdf

[11] https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/migrated_files/What-We-Do/docs/IOM-DMM-Factsheet-LHD-Migrant-Integration.pdf

member of that society *from a legal, social, economic, educational, and cultural perspective.*

c) ***multi-dimensional****: it relates both to the conditions for and* ***actual participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil, and political life of the country of durable asylum, as well as to the refugees' own perception of acceptance by and membership in the host society".*** [12]

Considering the above definitions, it is evident that a uniformly applicable 'solution' or 'recipe for success' - that would support all individuals and work in any context - is simply not feasible. However, we have identified overlapping concepts and terms to guide our discussion of integration, anchored critically to the concepts of time, change, and relationships.

A process, by its very nature, does not span a moment, but encompasses **dynamism** and **duration**. For as long as communities exist, the topic of integration will be a vital one, and the needs of refugees and migrants will continue to evolve. This understanding is essential to extending **holistic support to refugees and migrants**. Each journey begins with the arrival of an individual to a new place and cultural context and evolves and adapts throughout the duration of their stay. Hence, we move beyond the conceptualisation of integration as a journey of uniform development to highlight all the potential in-between stages (setbacks, frustrations, twists, surprises, advances) that make up the experience. Integration is rarely defined by clear markers of progress or progression; it is a process of constant reckoning and realisation.

Integration can be approached from an additional perspective. As stated by RK Papadopoulos, "… *people experience being in a state of suspended transition: not knowing whether they belong to the place they are currently in or whether they belong to the place they come from*"[13]. Moreover, they do not know "*whether they should accept the new situation and the new reality or continue being bonded to their old and familiar forms of 'home' in terms of language, values, traditions, and way of life*".[14] Integration thus has the unique quality of being experienced as a *temporary* state that extends over a long period of time. Papadopoulos posits that this causes people to "… *feel that the very spaces where they felt at home and safe and were familiar spaces are… no longer safe*"[15]. In other words, "*this process of* [refugeehood] *is part of a broader process, leading from dislocation to relocation, the search for a replacement home*"[16].

[12] https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ECRE-Position-on-the-Integration-of-Refugees-in-Europe_December-2002.pdf

[13] Papadopoulos, RK (2021a). The approach of synergic therapeutic complexity with Involuntarily dislocated people. Systemic Thinking and Psychotherapy, 18:49.

[14] Papadopoulos (2021a), cit.

[15] Papadopoulos (2021a), cit.

[16] Papadopoulos (2021a), cit.

Thus, integration is conceived as a complex, non-linear process encompassing tangible (e.g., shelter) and non-tangible (e.g., warmth) qualities, which combine to form the basis for the creation of a new home.

Returning to Papadopoulos, it is important to distinguish and clearly define the phases that make up the process of "*involuntary dislocation.*"[17] Papadopoulos uses this term in reference to *all* aspects of the refugee experience.

While the standard narratives identify three key phases (pre-migration, migration, and post-migration), Papadopoulos refers to six:

"(a) The 'internal' dislocation, i.e., when people no longer feel at home while being in their home spaces.

(b) The physical, geographical dislocation: abandonment of the familiar spaces that were once called home.

(c) The search for a new home and sense of belonging in a context that is believed to be safer, more receptive, opportunity-rich, etc.

(d) The discovery and inhabitation of this new context.

(e) The struggle to adapt to this new context and cultivate a sense of belonging.

(f) The ongoing attempt throughout to assign meaning to these different experiences of home."[18]

According to the author, during this final phase, a particular, demanding effort takes place whereby the person attempts to recalibrate their understanding of the original context, current context, and "ideal" context.

Under this framework, the process of integration correlates with the final four phases, with the concepts of **settling in** and **assigning meaning** being vital components.

Equally essential are the terms **two-way** (moving in both directions) and **mutual** (all relevant parties are involved to a similar extent). Simply put, the 'newly received individuals' and host society must work actively to cultivate a relationship built on common aspirations, obligations, and rights, and commit to an ongoing process of negotiation and concession, with the ideal goal being **coexistence and an increasing acceptance of diversity**.

[17] For a more complete understanding of the concept of "involuntary dislocation" see: Papadopoulos R.K. (2021b). Involuntary Dislocation: Home, Trauma, Resilience and Adversity-Activated Development. London & New York: Routledge

[18] Papadopoulos (2021a), cit.

Each of these concepts highlights a different facet of the integration process, hence the importance of the term **multi-dimensional**. The complexity and subjectivity of this experience are alluded to by the European Council on Refugees and Exile (ECRE), when making reference to "***actual participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of durable asylum, as well as to refugees' own perception of acceptance by and membership in the host society***". This definition ties into the singular and overwhelmingly personal experience of searching for a home in an unfamiliar context.

The above terms were instrumental in refining our vision for 'Paths to Integration'. We focused on developing collaborative, reciprocal relationships (recognising that, in many cases, this is a long-term goal not achievable within the first several meetings), remaining mindful of the fact that integration encompasses all dimensions of an individual's life, and accepting that positive development takes time. We believe that this is what made the project unique, bringing the everyday challenges and aspirations of each individual to the fore.

1.3. Dimensions of integration

Often, the term integration is used to signify the host context's willingness and capacity to meet the housing, employment, education, and health needs of newcomers. Under this definition, other essential dimensions of health and well-being, particularly those pertaining to social and personal well-being, are frequently overlooked, or neglected entirely. As can be seen in the following diagram, Ager and Strang[19] advocate for a thinking framework whereby the fundamental components and processes of integration are divided into four distinct domains:

- progress and success in the areas of work, housing, education, and health (**markers and means)**

- the process of social bonding and links between groups within the community (**social connection**)

- the **facilitators** of the integration process and social connectedness

- rights and citizenship as a fundamental step toward integration (**foundation**)

[19] Available here: https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/21/2/166/1621262

The Domains of Integration

(Alastair Ager & Alison Strang, 2008)

In the first category of this inverted pyramid, '*markers and means*', we observe the most widely known and discussed pillars of integration: employment, housing, education, and health. We must emphasise that achievement or progress in these domains, though significant, is not necessarily indicative of integration. Simply put, people who work and have access to shelter, health services and education **may not feel integrated**.

> By way of illustration, consider the case of a refugee who was a doctor in his home country. The process of having his degree recognised in the host context is extremely challenging; to support himself, he now works as an interpreter/cultural mediator. Or take the case of a woman, who, based on religious convictions, is forbidden to be seen naked by any man other than her husband, but does not have the option to be examined by a female gynaecologist in her host country. In these scenarios, the individuals are not precluded from accessing work or health services, yet their professional and religious identity is no longer fully respected or acknowledged.

The second category, '*social connections*', is where social bonds, bridges and links become solidified. Ager and Strang outline three different forms of social connection, which constitute a vital component of integration discourse. **Social bonds** concern the relationships within families and between common ethnic and religious groups; **social**

bridges comprise relationships between different communities and groups; **social links** focus on relationships with state structures and social services. Given that fostering a sense of belonging is one of the primary goals of the integration process, the importance of social connections became increasingly apparent through the development of 'Paths to Integration'.

- Mr. K's perception of himself and his status in his host country transformed the moment he found a job at a social co-op. In developing meaningful relationships with individuals with a migration background and others who grew up in the host country, Mr. K built a social network that made him feel like an active, productive member of his community and society (as he himself indicated).

- For Mr F., a champion athlete in his home country, joining a sports team was both enriching and empowering. The resulting sense of usefulness and community motivated him to learn Greek and pursue friendships, which were so vital to his wellbeing previously.

The next category within the diagram is that of '*facilitators*' or 'facilitating actions', factors that help overcome barriers or challenges that make the everyday lives of refugees challenging.

'Language' and '*cultural competence'* are fundamental aspects of integration that are constantly being placed under the microscope; the degree to which these factors are prioritised varies between reception contexts. Certain countries place great emphasis on assimilating newly arrived people through language and culture; other countries aim to build a context of inclusion that is highly receptive to the cultural capital carried by migrants and refugees. It is outside the scope of this handbook and the interest of its authors to voice a preference for a particular approach, yet we must restate our belief in the essentially bidirectional character of integration. Simply put, it is the responsibility of the host society and its newly arrived inhabitants to take productive steps toward each other, to mitigate the distance created by cultural and language differences.

For instance, a host society should not only provide free language courses, but also coordinate to ensure the provision of interpretation/cultural mediation within health services. This commitment to recognizing and supporting cultural diversity will facilitate access to essential public health services while ensuring the correct and accurate exchange of critical health information.

The need for a felt sense of *'security and stability'* tends to be particularly pronounced for people with a refugee background, whose lives are characterised by perpetual motion and instability until they are legally recognised as refugees by the host country. The experience of safety and stability can act 'therapeutically', facilitating a bond between the individual and host society. However, integration policies often overlook this critical aspect of well-being and belonging, rendering the integration process protracted and inefficient.

The preceding years have offered far too many examples of volatile, inhumane reception contexts that form the foundation of everyday life for refugee and migrant populations. Constant movement and relocation of the refugee population, insufficient or nonexistent reception plans, poorly-structured language acquisition classes that are abruptly suspended or terminated, discontinuation of services and short-term projects, and constant changes to migration legislation and policies are among the primary issues that go largely unaddressed. Simply put, if a reception context is unable or unwilling to create conditions conducive to a sense of safety and stability, attempts to support integration are destined to fall short.

Finally, Ager and Strang's diagram highlights *'legal rights and citizenship'*, the perceived importance of which is highly context dependent. Certain societies and governments are highly receptive to multiculturalism and diversity; others adhere to a more traditional model while endorsing strong immigration policies; still, others create major barriers to any form of legal recognition. Safeguarding refugee rights to security and recognised status does not automatically signify a high tolerance toward diversity, but it helps to facilitate a baseline of respect and individual autonomy within the society. Moreover, it reflects a certain degree of accountability on the part of the host society toward those who reside within its jurisdiction.

If a society refuses to grant work permits to asylum applicants, or makes this process inordinately challenging, it precludes individuals from seeking socially sanctioned forms of work and drives them to support themselves illegally. This creates the preconditions for a 'black market', where 'protection', 'respect', and the guarantee of safety and compensation is contingent on the employer's disposition, as underground economies are not legally regulated.

It is essential that we give adequate attention to the subjective quality of integration. Which factors facilitate integration by creating the conditions for 'a sense of

belonging'?[20] How do individuals conceive of their integration into a social group or community and which avenues do they deem preferable to this end? Which type(s) of integration do they need, envision, desire? Such considerations are vital, in that they acknowledge the existence of the 'individualised path' and encourage people to participate in their own way - "…[their] *own perception of acceptance by and membership in the host society"*.[21] In considering these important questions, we choose to follow Papadopoulos' approach, merging the essentialist and constructivist perspectives where objective and subjective experience are intrinsically linked.[22]

1.4 Integration and determinants of psychosocial health

While Ager & Strang's work concerns the dimensions of integration, other researchers examine the factors that positively and negatively influence integration. We will refer to a relatively recent report, "*Integration and determinants of psychosocial health*", which was produced as part of the project "RESPOND Multilevel Governance of Migration and Beyond"[23] (Horizon 2020)[24]. The study under discussion, which spanned 10 different countries, focuses on the "*psychosocial determinants that can affect a person's resilience, outlook on life and their integration into the host society*."[25]

The report contains an in-depth description of how "resources and opportunities as well as their attributed meanings play a key role in the processes of adaptation, coping and building resilience".[26] The researchers' findings are compelling and reveal multiple factors that meaningfully shape the experience of integration.

We include a small selection of excerpted insights below:

- *"Psychosocial determinants such as legal status, arrest and/or detention at the borders, exposure to violence, etc. have a negative impact on newcomers' health.*
- *Where possible, the ability to choose housing helps newcomers develop resilience and settle into their new homes.*
- *Pronounced discrimination in the labour market and a consequent lack of income have major impacts on health.*

[20] Beginning in 2007, the UNHCR has stressed the importance of proposing policies that acknowledge the highly subjective quality of integration: "…policies recognizing that each individual may need different forms of integration support, depending on personal circumstances, are likely to provide a more targeted response", UNHCR, Note on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union. https://www.unhcr.org/463b462c4.pdf
[21] Definition of integration by the European Council for Refugees and Exile
[22] See Papadopoulos (2021b):96-97
[23] https://respondmigration.com/wp-blog/integration-and-determinants-of-psychosocial-health-thematic-report
[24] https://Respondmigration.com
[25] Pg. 8
[26] Pg. 8

- *Religion and spirituality are prevalent coping mechanisms, with varying positive and negative outcomes*
- *Gender is a significant marker of vulnerability: women are more vulnerable due to potential pregnancy, higher probability of being accompanied by a minor during the migration journey, and an elevated risk of experiencing sexual and psychological abuse and/or rape*
- *Adaptive responses are shown among newcomers with access to resources (such as healthcare, housing, psychological support) while maladaptive responses are shown among newcomers with limited or no access to resources (healthcare, income, support)"*[27]

Another study, conducted by the National Centre for Social Research, investigates, among other issues, the factors that support and impede refugee integration[28]. The researchers stress that these factors are informed by such variables as time spent in the host country ("old-timers"/ "newly arrived"), the presence/absence of a reception & integration strategy, and the defining characteristics of the host environment (level of wellbeing among the population, political situation, etc). As for factors that impede integration, the researchers assert that:

"*Uncertainty about the future, communication difficulties, lack of employment opportunities, contradictory information on their rights, poor healthcare, limited access to social services and security issues add to the desperation of asylum-seekers and compromise their integration prospects"*[29] .

By contrast:

"The *most important factors that contribute to the integration process of migrants and refugees include a sense of empowerment, the provision of clear information on the institutional framework, and the stability of interventions and security. Equally important is support from the local community, formal and informal networks, and access to socio-psychological support services from the very first moment of arrival [in the host country]. Special care should be given to the needs of children and adolescents, both [those who are] accompanied by their families [and those who are] unaccompanied*."[30]

These passages highlight the complexity of the integration journey: its fluidity, multidimensionality, and the many factors that encompass and limit its potential. Our

[27] Pg. 9
[28] A. Frangiskou, G. Kandylis, A. Mouriki, N. Sarris, T. Stathopoulou, M. Thanopoulou, J. Tsiganou, Ch. Varouxi. From-reception-to-integration-migrant-populations-in-greece-during-and-in-the-aftermath-ofthe-crisis, NCSR, Athens, 2020 https://www.ekke.gr/services/publication/from-reception-to-integration-migrant-populations-in-greece-during-and-in-the-aftermath-of-the-crisis
[29] Pg. 215
[30] Pg. 215

approach to the subject of integration must retain a level of nuance and complexity deserving of such a topic.

2. The 'Paths to Integration' initiative

2.1 Project framework

Discussion of the need for an initiative resembling 'Paths to Integration' began in March 2018, a few years following a huge wave of newly arrived refugees to Europe (migration flows began to increase dramatically in approximately 2014). According to figures provided by the UNHCR,[31] the number of people who came to Greece in 2018 was approximately 50,508. Although Greece was primarily a transit country rather than a final destination for people on the move, many of these individuals chose or 'were forced' to stay in Greece, making the topic of integration essential and highly polarising.

During the implementation of 'Paths to Integration', a new National Strategy for Integration was initiated (valid from July 2019 onward), in coordination with the National Strategy towards the integration of third country nationals (2013).

According to the new strategy, the basic principles of integration were as follows[32]:

- *"Enable the integration of beneficiaries of international protection and applicants of international protection who temporarily reside in the country, and/or will remain in the country - if they are granted international protection.*
- *Assist migrants who struggle to maintain their lawful residence status due to the economic crisis.*
- *Involve local government administrations more closely and enhance their role in the formation of social integration policies.*
- *Raise public awareness with regards to the importance of social integration and inclusion.*
- *Coordinate and align the activities of all governmental and state bodies towards the implementation of a common national strategy.*
- *Collaborate and align with international and private state bodies as well as civil society.*
- *Modernise and digitise the administration processes for resident permits and international protection status.*
- *Promptly and thoroughly inform migrants with regards to new national developments in migration policy, activities, and programs, as well as their rights and obligations in the context of social integration."*

[31] https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179
[32] https://migration.gov.gr/migration-policy/integration/politiki-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/

In June 2021, a new National Strategy for Social Integration and Poverty Reduction (2021-2027) was released for public consultation; it was structured around four "Business Axes"[33]:

- Sufficient access to basic needs
- Access to effective, quality services
- Access to the labour market and improved employability
- Governance of the National Strategy for Social Integration and Reduction of Poverty

At this time, many organisations began partially funding essential services (accommodation, healthcare) and services pertaining to the social dimensions of integration (access to education). From June 2019 to September 2021, the International Organization for Migration implemented the HELIOS project, the primary integration program for recognised refugees in Greece, which was funded by the European Commission. Since September 2021, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum has taken over responsibility for this project[34]. The central support activities of "HELIOS" include[35]:

- Integration-related courses
- Accommodation support
- Professional counselling to enhance job readiness
- Monitoring of the integration process
- Awareness-raising activities in host communities

Finally, in November 2019, Law 4636/2019 was enacted: "*International Protection and other provisions*". Its aim is to "*comply with Directive 2011/95/EE by the European Parliament and the Convention of 13 December 2011 with regards to the requirements for the recognition of third country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection for a standard refugee status or for persons entitled to subsidiary protection and for the content of the protection provided*"[36]. This legislation has had a significant impact on the daily lives and experiences of those applying for international protection.

[33] http://www.opengov.gr/minlab/?p=5140
[34] https://migration.gov.gr/migration-policy/integration/draseis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/programma-helios/
[35] https://greece.iom.int/el/hellenic-integration-support-beneficiaries-international-protection-helios
[36] https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-allodapoi/prosphuges-politiko-asulo/nomos-4636-2019-phek-169a-1-11-2019.html

2.2 Planning and designing the initiative

In opting for a participatory design for this initiative, our team intended to lay the groundwork for truly reciprocal client relationships, while enabling the provision of support services that cater to the individual's particular and evolving needs. In the early stages of development, we observed a notable scarcity of truly participatory integration programs, perhaps because this approach was regarded as too time-consuming, and therefore costly, or because a participatory model was generally not seen as overly important or effective. However, in the past few years, we have seen integration initiatives shift toward a more participatory methodological approach.

'Paths to Integration' arose out of an acknowledged gap by our mental health professionals in the support services being offered to those attempting to navigate everyday challenges. By *everyday challenges,* we refer to the issues that individuals with refugee experience deal with throughout their integration journey, including everything pertaining to their social life.

The first stage of the initiative was a pilot stage, which lasted three months and entailed a large number of one-to-one interviews with people who fit the preconditions for participation in the project. These discussions aimed to assess the applicants' individual needs, as this was deemed significant for potential future participants. Participants were encouraged to speak freely about their needs and the ways in which they hoped to be supported. Our own approach gradually developed as a direct extension of these interactions, as did our foundational questions concerning the most effective way to provide support and care. We cannot overemphasise the importance of this pilot stage; it comprised the foundation for the implementation of this initiative.

Periods of reflection, re-identification, and re-definition emerged through the structuring and formation of our support framework. Having determined from the onset that integration was an open question we were asked to negotiate, we often opted to modify our approach and re-examine our prevailing ideas. In other words, we were asked to think, to act, frequently to bear the failure of these actions, to feel disappointment, to try, to think, to think differently, to acknowledge our dependence on the social context and broader integration policies; in sum, to forge our own path toward supporting people.

The formation of an interdisciplinary team was fundamental to achieving this aim. In building a team of professionals of different backgrounds, with diverse areas of specialisation, we ensured that each member was equipped to consider questions of integration from a unique vantage point. This effort quickly proved justified, facilitating the creation of a well-rounded support system, while reminding us of the necessarily ***incomplete*** knowledge and understanding of any given professional. The

acceptance of this *partialness* was vital in allowing us to approach the needs and desires of our beneficiaries through their own unique prism.

The participation of two integration support workers (ISWs) in this initiative was fundamental to its impact. Having had their own unique integration journeys in Greece, our two colleagues illuminated dimensions and challenges unique to their experiences, while offering us insider knowledge of relevant support networks. Additionally, their ability to educate our professionals on both culturally specific and culturally sensitive matters facilitated an ongoing dialogue on key issues within the organisation. How could we speak about 'Paths to Integration' without offering sufficient space to *the otherness* that newly arrived persons bring with them?

Lastly, our commitment to co-creating an action plan with our beneficiaries and routinely inviting them to evaluate its relevance and effectiveness helped us maintain awareness of our primary objective; namely, to support these people to navigate and forge their own 'integration path'. In this way, beneficiaries were given the opportunity to remain active and engaged and establish their own goals through our work together. Our role as professionals was to support them in making these ambitions a reality, while assisting them in becoming acquainted with the social/legal/political environment in Greece. The support offered by our professionals did not qualify them as integration experts, but as individuals with specific knowledge of the everyday challenges that may arise in this social context.

As we have illustrated, 'Paths to Integration' encouraged us to build and maintain a relationship of openness with the needs, desires, and dreams of the people we were called on to support. In remaining attuned to the bidirectional nature of integration, we continuously sought ways to ensure beneficiary participation through all stages of the project's implementation, which partially informed the uniqueness of this initiative. Keeping in mind that there is no single way to encourage and support integration, we endeavoured to remain open to all possible paths that our beneficiaries drew for themselves. The participatory processes outlined above were essential in achieving this aim.

3. The approach behind "Paths to Integration"

3.1 The foundation

The *approach* behind 'Paths to Integration' did not develop during the project's implementation but emerged out of the practices followed at Babel Day Centre. This approach anchored us and allowed us to draw inspiration, to grasp more broadly, to ask for advice and to reflect; it formed the basis for the design and implementation of 'Paths to Integration' and expanded our understanding of the '*refugee condition*'. By extension, it helped us pursue an individualised approach to defining and experiencing integration.

Throughout the duration of the initiative, the 'Paths to Integration' team collaborated closely with the director at the Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees (CTAR) at the University of Essex, Professor Renos Papadopoulos. In his supervision of, and extensive discussions with, our team members, his participation in educational workshops that took place regularly in Athens, his synergic approach (which he termed "Synergic Therapeutic Complexity"[37]) and consistent championing of the importance of therapeutic presence, which greatly influenced our team, Professor Papadopoulos was an invaluable "remote partner". In fact, it was while implementing this initiative that Babel Day Centre published the handbook "*Psychosocial Dimensions of the Refugee Condition-Synergic Approach*", which was invaluable in helping the team better understand the refugee experience and navigate their relationships with beneficiaries.

Another integral element informing the approach behind 'Paths to Integration' was the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings[38], which were translated and published in Greek by Babel Day Centre during the first months of the initiative's implementation. Integration should not be approached as an emergency, but certain principles in the above document were very instructive in creating common ground for thought and action for our professionals.

Alongside these frames of reference, the act of *'caring'* played a central role in our professionals' daily practice. We are referring to the commitment to show genuine concern for the people being supported by the project, and to strive to develop a

[37] Papadopoulos (2021b), cit.

[38] Inter–Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2007). IASC Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. Available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-force-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/iasc-guidelines-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings-2007

trusting, open relationship with them, rather than one based in obligation. This aspect is difficult to capture, in that it takes a different form for each unique relationship. What is certain is that it is a prerequisite for successful outcomes in such initiatives.

In the absence of a genuine mental and emotional connection with the beneficiary, the intervention is destined to remain didactic, paternalistic, and in the end, ineffective.

To conclude, the team was faced with the challenging question of what constitutes 'a start and an end' to the integration process, as well as how to go about preserving the autonomy of the people supported by the initiative. In the following section, we will provide an overview of the theoretical frameworks that inspired our thinking and practice, and how these were utilised and absorbed by the 'Paths to Integration' project team.

3.2 The synergic approach

An in-depth description of the synergic approach cannot be adequately conveyed within the space of this handbook; however, we will briefly mention its three key pillars as they are presented in the handbook "Psychosocial Dimensions of the Refugee Condition-Synergic Approach"; we will also explore how these pillars influenced the team's everyday practice.

The synergic approach advocates for collaboration and co-action as crucial principles in the planning and implementation of therapeutic interventions. "*The first pillar characterizing the synergic intervention pertains to cooperation. Namely, synergy implies that both the professional and the beneficiary know how the therapeutic relationship ought to take shape, and both are involved in the goal-setting procedure. Such an intervention above all seeks a collaborative exchange, whereby two persons can relate to each other and interact in equal terms. Feedback is essential from both sides. These aspects usually lack in a traditional intervention, stemming from the fact that rather than being therapeutic, a professional is tempted to quickly cure. This is manifested in a 'I know, you do not know' type of relationship, where the mental health expert is called on to fix an object that offers no response and who has no valuable feedback to provide."*[39]

This pillar is especially significant, as it discourages professionals from offering support without first consulting 'beneficiaries' as to what they deem useful. We should highlight that it is not necessarily possible at the beginning of a therapeutic relationship to establish '*equal terms*'; this is achievable only when the power dynamics between both sides are acknowledged.

[39] 'Psychosocial Dimensions of the Refugee Condition-Synergic Approach'. Pg. 92
https://babeldc.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022_01_Psyxokoinonikes-diastaseis_EN.pdf

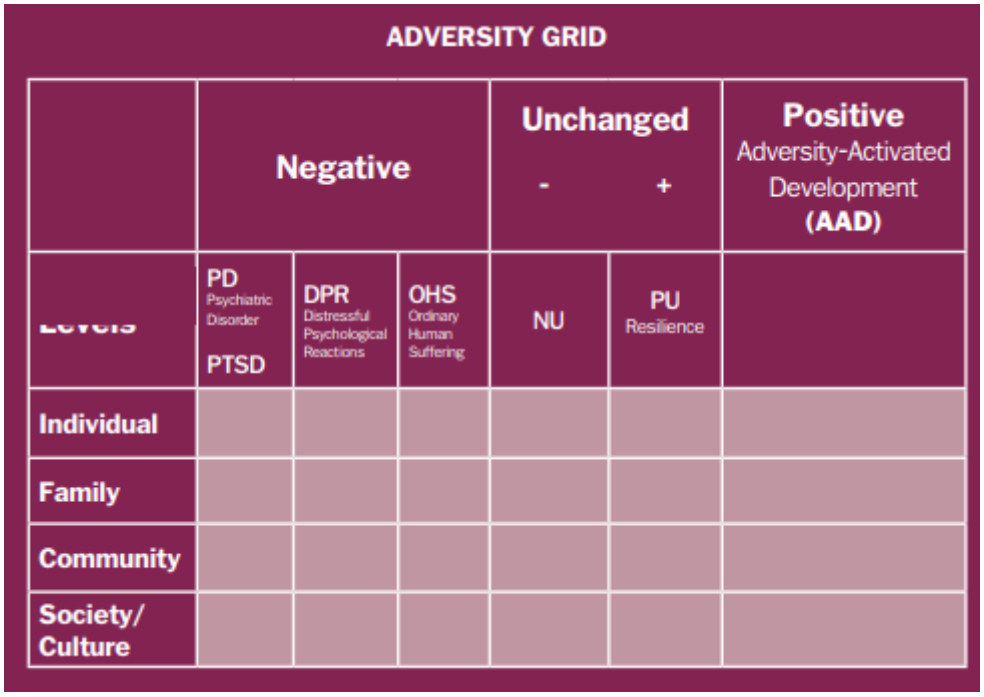
The second pillar of the synergic approach advises that CUT be employed throughout the relationship between professionals and the people they support. CUT, according to Renos Papadopoulos, represents a unique thinking and practicing framework for better understanding the refugee condition; it advises that this phenomenon be approached through its Complexity, Uniqueness and Totality. "*This not only presupposes viewing each dislocated person as a complex and unique being, but also the importance of attending to wider contexts, contrasted with a focus in fixing just the person in question. This goes back to the idea that assisting one person is part of a path towards assisting their wider circle, which in turn is part of a larger population, who interconnect with an entire society in complex manners. It is essential that this totality is communicated with the beneficiary too, because understanding their predicament in its wider background (their family members, other refugees, host society) is therapeutic on its own*."[40] Through CUT, the dislocated person is able to view themselves outside of select pre-determined identities, that of the refugee, the victim, and the mentally traumatised individual.

The third pillar of the synergic approach counsels "…*deconstructing the expert-patient dichotomy. The relationship ought not to focus on solving an identified deficit or a fault, but on attending to such negative elements within the context of the totality that is also naturally comprised of positive elements. Utilising that, it should eventually become clear to beneficiaries that any progress they experience owes itself to more than a therapist's magical expertise. In fact, it is argued that the expertise of the professional is their very technique of successful collaboration and synergic work; helping a person reframe the trigger of their inner feelings and reminding them of their weaknesses and strengths as part of a process that can mobilise them*."[41]

Insisting that there is no universally satisfactory answer to the question of 'who the refugee is', while pushing for subjects to be understood through their complexity, uniqueness and totality, led Papadopoulos to the creation of the '*Adversity Grid*'. The Adversity Grid is a working framework with the ambitious aim of integrating the elements that make up the experience of dislocated individuals, while systemising both the potential reactions to adversity and its consequences. The purpose of the Grid is to support an understanding of people living through a refugee experience as active subjects who are victims of specific circumstances, but whose identity is not exhausted by this victim state[42].

[40] Psychosocial Dimensions of the Refugee Condition-Synergic Approach' Pg. 93 https://babeldc.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022_01_Psyxokoinonikes-diastaseis_EN.pdf
[41] Psychosocial Dimensions of the Refugee Condition-Synergic Approach' Pg. 93 https://babeldc.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022_01_Psyxokoinonikes-diastaseis_EN.pdf
[42] See footnote 4: (Publication pending but only in Greek)

Adversity Grid



'Paths to Integration' did not set out to establish therapeutic relationships, but equitable relationships, in which both sides were seen as active subjects. We were thus conceptualising a relationship, which, without being therapeutic per se, could function remedially and prove inherently therapeutic. In this context, the synergic approach provided a stable and consistent foundation, both in the planning stages and for the team's everyday practice. How were we to speak about integration support without making space for newcomers to participate in an equitable manner? To express their own goals, needs, dreams, disappointments, and desires? A space where people's refugee experience signifies a part of their story, rather than the only means by which they have encountered the host society. It was this space that the 'Paths to Integration' team endeavoured to create, to establish collaborative relationships rather than adhering to a traditional, hierarchical model, whereby the professional is the owner of knowledge, and the beneficiary is called upon to comply with their requests and suggestions.

As a thinking framework, the Adversity Grid aims to elucidate the complex and unique needs of the beneficiary. Adjusted in accordance with elements specific to 'Paths to Integration' (which we will unpack later), the Grid helped us clarify the pressures and challenges that newly arrived individuals face, their strengths, resources, and vulnerabilities, as well as the protective factors most relevant to their experience.

Simply put, the features that make each person unique; features which we as professionals require an understanding of to better support them.

3.3 Therapeutic presence

A core aspect of the approach followed by 'Paths to Integration' is the effort to be 'therapeutic' without practicing 'psychotherapy'. To offer a therapeutic presence for beneficiaries, and to accompany them through periods of overwhelm and turbulence. By remaining present, the professional creates a safe place to trust and be trusted, to co-exist while reflecting on the challenges presented by our everyday reality.

Inherent to this approach is the building of a 'therapeutic' synergic relationship where there is no presupposition of authority. The professional is not perceived as an expert - the possessor of knowledge who provides solutions. Rather, he/she explains their role and capabilities within the context of the initiative and emphasises their availability to listen and be present through an attitude of openness and caring. Together, the professional and beneficiary embark on a process of mutual discovery, discerning ways to respond to the beneficiary's arising needs. Crucial elements of this contract include the establishment of a consistent schedule and a mutually agreed upon set of principles and protocols, which help form a therapeutic environment of safety, predictability, and trust.

Therapeutic presence requires that we listen, observe, and validate people's needs, challenges, expectations, and resistances, rather than rushing to find solutions for them. The effort to not merely illuminate the difficulties faced by beneficiaries, but also their strengths and areas of resilience, reinforces their ability to reconnect with and recover the complexity of their lived experience.

3.4 The main principles

As previously mentioned, the everyday practices of the 'Paths to Integration' team were supported by a set of principles which formed the basis for a common framework between professionals and beneficiaries. Some of these values were solidified through team discussions, while others were agreed upon through careful review of the handbook on Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. In both cases, we deemed the following values to be particularly significant in the cultivation of our individual approach:

- Advocating for the fundamental respect of **human rights** was a central tenet of the team's everyday practice. For a project focusing on integration, this generally entails recognition of potential inequalities and forms of discrimination, along with participation in advocacy efforts staged in opposition.

- The principle of **do no harm**, though often taken for granted or neglected, was a point we often returned to while designing and evaluating plans of action for our beneficiaries. Given the psychosocial dimension of our work and its potential impact on beneficiaries, we avoided certain controversial practices and sought to build a space for educating our team members, a crucial facet of our approach.

- The facilitation of **greatest possible participation** by beneficiaries of the initiative, both in the planning and implementation stages, was also emphasised. We asserted that it was critical for beneficiaries to be able to set their own goals and prioritise their needs. Besides, for an intervention aimed at accompanying people through their integration journeys, it was mandatory to cultivate conditions whereby beneficiaries could assume control over the decisions that influence their lives.

- The **building of a relationship** rooted in **respect, empathy, and acceptance** is a prerequisite for any intervention aimed at facilitating integration support. It was evident that we had to invest time and effort to construct a space where every beneficiary felt safe and empowered to express themselves freely. This principle played a vital role in the approach followed by 'Paths to Integration', and helped distinguish the initiative from other social services that cater to particular requests and demands.

- The importance of **cultural humility** and **structural competency** was prioritised in the early stages of designing this initiative. The concept of cultural humility represented an essential advancement on the notion of cultural competence; "*it involves a dimension of self-reflection and self-evaluation by the respective health professional, in order to restore power imbalances in physician-patient dynamics and to develop mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities*".[43] On the other hand, structural competency is defined as "*the trained ability to discern how a host of issues defined clinically as symptoms, attitudes, or diseases (e.g., depression, hypertension, obesity, smoking, medication "non-compliance," trauma, psychosis) also represent the downstream implications of a number of upstream decisions about such matters as health care and food delivery systems, zoning laws, urban and rural infrastructures, medicalisation, or even about the very definitions of illness and health"*[44]**.**

The above principles were heavily discussed by the project team throughout the implementation of the initiative. Integration, as we have come to understand it, begins with the recognition of cultural differences within a host society and evolves into an acceptance and welcoming of these differences - as well as of the influence of political

[43] Tervalon, M.; Murray-García, J. (1998). "Cultural Humility versus Cultural Competence: A Critical Distinction in Defining Physician Training Outcomes in Multicultural Education". Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved. 9 (2): 117–125. doi:10.1353/hpu.2010.0233

[44] Metzl JM, Hansen H. Structural competency: theorizing a new medical engagement with stigma and inequality. Soc Sci Med 2014;103:126e33. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.socscimed.2013.06.032

decisions on health, as its social determinants[45], and on the lives of people. Just as the acknowledgement of different cultural practices shapes the attitudes and perceptions of professionals and beneficiaries, so too does the close monitoring of political happenings and decisions, which further accentuates our efforts to intervene through advocacy efforts.

3.5 'Caring' as a crucial factor

Having provided an overview of the thinking and working frameworks that shaped the approach of 'Paths to Integration', we conclude by unpacking a concept that continually resurfaces in discussions of the initiative, that of *caring*. We note that this term did not immediately emerge as part of our working framework, but rather, was introduced through recurring discussions of the type of support that beneficiaries were to receive. Gradually, the term came to encapsulate a primary feature of the intervention, by which beneficiaries were allowed the space and safety to express their true desires and vulnerabilities. Within this context, *caring* was fundamental in building authentic relationships and providing lasting support.

The 'therapeutic' presence offers a caring energy for all those being served. Simply carrying out tasks for beneficiaries and responding to their direct needs is insufficient to address certain complex challenges, forge trust and emotional connection, and make room for the beneficiary's desires, goals, stressors, and deeper motivations. Caring must be developed and cultivated. It demands that we reflect inwardly on our own thoughts, impulses, and emotional triggers. To permit the stories of those we encounter to move us requires that we become more "human", and consequently, more vulnerable. Such caring allows us to form a genuine "therapeutic" relationship with the person we support.

In one of our final team meetings for the initiative, we returned to a discussion of the significance of caring in fostering successful outcomes within interventions like "Paths to Integration". A team member inquired: in cases where caring does not naturally develop through the professional-beneficiary relationship, is it possible to cultivate it otherwise?

This is certainly not an easy question to address, and we should be cautious with general statements like "*Always approach beneficiaries with caring*". This is not always feasible and may fuel the perception of omnipotence that is sometimes linked to professionals in our field. That said, our experience as professionals has demonstrated the value of cultivating caring when it is possible. Through weekly team discussions, supervision, continuing education, and trainings, we endeavoured to better

[45] L. Hiam, N. Gionakis, S.M. Holmes, M. McKee, (2019) Overcoming the barriers migrants face in accessing health care, Public Health, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2018.11.015

understand participants of this initiative. We did our best to appreciate the context surrounding everyone in all its totality, uniqueness, and complexity.

Coming 'closer' to the Other, learning to listen, giving space and time to this relationship makes it increasingly possible for professionals to develop caring. It is this process that distinguishes 'a refugee beneficiary' from 'this specific person with a unique personality, goals, and dreams, who has experienced refugeehood through their own individual lens'.

Connecting mentally and emotionally as a requirement of the synergic approach, but also as a prerequisite for its success, is a premise that may cause pressure, anxiety, or embarrassment to a professional. It might cause them to wonder:

• If I connect with the beneficiary, do I run the risk of creating an attachment (to me) that they won't be able to move past?

• Will I be able to withstand the beneficiary's emotional transparency and vulnerability? Should I become more specialised or complete certain certifications, e.g., psychotherapy? Or is it more ethical/professional to strive for greater distance in the relationship?

Mental connection as a prerequisite

Supporting a beneficiary requires much more than offering guidance and information. Even if it was limited to this - if we want to ensure that the information is being absorbed and applied, we must make use of the most vital tool available to us: our capacity for human contact and mental connection. We know from other fields, education for instance, that the absence of a mental connection between teacher and student hinders learning potential.

To clarify, this connection does not imply a sweet, idyllic exchange that flows impeccably from the first moment.

Connection derives through the recognition of another individual's otherness and distinctness, through an invitation to the beneficiary to share their vision of a fruitful collaboration. Through the more analytical case studies we will present later, it will become apparent that this form of connection is a fluid, frequently unpredictable concept, rendering it highly distinct from most standard interventions available.

The acknowledgement of the beneficiary's otherness and uniqueness compels the professional to leave behind prefabricated, universal solutions to integration. They must be willing to co-construct (alongside the beneficiary) a unique and exclusive path for the individual to journey through. This is the essence of connection. Connection is achieved through respect, patience, time, commitment to understanding, cooperation, and collaboration.

Mental connection as 'requested'

The acknowledgement of a person's otherness and the commitment to form a deep bond with them does not in any case demand specialisation in a particular psychotherapeutic approach[46]. An in-depth understanding of what a synergic approach entails is sufficient because it acknowledges the subject as unique, complex individual capable of defining and pursuing their own path.

At the same time, it requires us to turn to another dimension of the synergic approach, that of collaboration and communication between colleagues in staff support or supervision teams.

For instance, the job consultant who is discouraged that her beneficiaries are not showing up to their appointments can be supported to reframe the situation. This reframing requires recognition of the complexity of each beneficiary's experience, and acknowledgment that the intervention may simply not meet their present needs.

Professionals should encourage one another to consider:

Could the intervention not be working because I am trying to be useful without first determining what the 'beneficiary' deems useful?

By the same token, each professional is given the space to recognise what *is* being accomplished.

In this way, it may be concluded that connection IS integration! That is, integration into this reciprocal relationship can give rise to integration into groups and the wider society, as it is possible. The esoteric, small-scale integration precedes the external, exoteric integration.

It is no coincidence that professionals who express concern around their ability to form mental connections with beneficiaries ('Am I qualified? Could I cause harm?') tend to succeed in this aim. In such cases, the team can support the professional to recognise how much they achieved through their ongoing interactions with those they support.

Finally, it is important to note that the 'fear of dependence' can be addressed when the goal of healthy dependence is fully articulated. Healthy dependence is encouraged by positive, productive relationships, so long as the people in question are approached with caring, supported to own their experience and take it with them as part of their internal reality.

To conclude this discussion of caring and its impact on the realisation of 'Paths to Integration', it is worth noting that we have not always managed to cultivate caring. There were cases where individuals did not receive adequate or targeted support,

[46] On differences between psychotherapy and therapeutic stance see "Psychosocial Dimensions of the Refugee Condition-Synergic Approach" pg. 93 https://babeldc.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022_01_Psyxokoinonikes-diastaseis_EN.pdf

cases where we did not dedicate sufficient time, or cases where we were simply unable to approach the other person through a prism of caring. When, through team meetings or trainings, we became aware of such cases, we initiated a dialogue that helped us frame these failures in a way that could contribute to cultivating caring conditions in the future. This restorative process took place many times over the three years of this initiative, encouraging growth and reflection for the entire team.

There were admittedly other cases where the lack of caring was not formally acknowledged. For those individuals, not much can be said other that we retain the hope that another caring structure and supportive relationship served them in the way that we could not. This potential was a large part of the reason for emphasising the development of support networks for each beneficiary.

3.6 Support in the integration process – where does it start and where does it end?

Through our experience with 'Paths to Integration', we were able to comprehend that integration does not have a predetermined start nor a prescribed end. To initiate this process, all that is required is a daily challenge. The process manifests individually and is co-constructed through the beneficiary's relationships with loved ones, with professionals, with the host society and socio-political environment.

Naturally, this journey cannot have a set end point, as it may be interrupted or spontaneously redirected because of unanticipated needs or challenges. Moreover, the integration support journey ends for some people with the possibility of reprising the process in future. The conclusion to the support cycle may leave **the door open** for a new focus or phase of the journey. In fact, this context can be particularly useful as a safe space, to which the person can return when they so require. That is why we emphasised service continuity earlier, in place of temporary and fragmented integration programs.

As we have seen, refugee integration takes place across multiple dimensions: the pursuit of legal status and access to basic rights, e.g. health, education; the economic sphere (securing a means of survival, e.g. employment); the socio-cultural sphere (adjusting to new circumstances and socio-cultural conditions). The integration process ought to preserve the dignity of people while helping to fulfil basic needs such as adequate accommodation and living conditions, language acquisition, employment, education, and any other need deemed personally significant by the individual.

A house worth living in, a language worth speaking, work worth pursuing, an education worth completing; all these elements combine to form a new home for the refugee, a state of onto-ecological settledness.

This state of being is constantly under construction, persistently structured and restructured; it is shaped through the person's evolving relationship to their environment and their own existence; for this reason, there is no defined endpoint.

3.7 Do independence and autonomy of beneficiaries constitute a goal?

The project 'Paths to Integration' did not necessarily aim to strengthen the independence of beneficiaries, as is frequently the case for integration programs. In our view, a more useful, practical, and humane objective is to strive for co-dependence and an expanded capacity to interact and grow one's network. To live in a society is to exist co-dependently: we provide and we receive, we support and are supported, we create networks and turn to these networks when required. In the same way, we believed that newly arrived people in a host society should be encouraged to develop a healthy relationship of co-dependence with the people around them.

In place of independence, we established the goal of autonomy. When an individual is autonomous, they think and act freely, make decisions and choices based on personal principles and desires, regulate their everyday schedule, and pursue personal goals and ambitions. This state does not imply that they are not, or ought not to be influenced by their relationships and surrounding context. Autonomy signifies an ability to acknowledge one's limitations and seek support through external relationships, while independence represents a desire to not be reliant on others. In 'Paths to Integration', we wished to support people to support themselves, to achieve a balance between autonomy and healthy relationships of co-dependence.

4. Collaboration with Integration Support Workers (ISWs)

4.1 Team onboarding and relevant training

Contemporary practice in the field of refugee support acknowledges the importance of collaborating with people who have direct, overlapping experience with those being supported, both during the planning and implementation stages of the intervention[47]. Thus, the 'Paths to Integration' team opted to collaborate with two integration support workers (ISWs), who joined us in February 2019 and remained until the end of the initiative. This collaboration had an experimental quality and was driven by our desire to explore the possibilities of such a partnership. A significant inspiration behind this decision was the work of Nancy Baron at the Psychosocial Services and Training Institute in Cairo. It has been the practice of this Centre for many years to involve psychosocial workers with refugee experience, offer them continuous training, and allow them to provide psychosocial services to refugee communities[48].

We selected two individuals, one of whom had refugee experience, the other migratory experience; both were still undergoing their long integration into Greek society, though they were virtually integrated in multiple aspects. Both had a background supporting refugees in different capacities, yet the choice to hire them was equally motivated by their pronounced ability to understand, to be empathetic and genuine, and by their desire to give back to the community. The ISWs were trained by the other professionals, along with the entire team at Babel Day Centre.

Through the first three months of our collaboration, the ISWs took part in all team meetings, attended various supervision sessions and individual trainings with professionals from different disciplines, while also having the opportunity to attend external seminars and workshops. During this period, they mainly had an observational role in the individual meetings with beneficiaries. They made certain contributions, but the primary aim was to provide them with valuable information and understanding of our everyday practices. This phase also served to illustrate the principles on which our working framework was built, and to introduce the ISWs to the professional ethics and responsibilities relevant to our organisation. They gradually transitioned into offering (partial) support to beneficiaries, always with the team's guidance, in a process that facilitated their ability to eventually engage independently with beneficiaries, assessing their needs, and co-creating individualised action plans.

[47] See for example https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/en/partners/pstic/
https://www.msf.org/international-activity-report-2017/germany
[48] For more information see Nancy Baron "Urban mental health and psychosocial support in Egypt" https://www.fmreview.org/issue66/baron

Throughout the project's implementation, as with other team members, significant effort was invested in supporting the ISWs and enhancing their training opportunities. The ultimate objective was to furnish them with the best possible support and care. For a person to care for and provide support to others, they must also receive care and support; this is a core principle of Babel made apparent through multiple years of practice. We attempted to transmit this knowledge to the ISWs, recognising that they may not be very familiar with this workplace model. After all, many professionals (including many of us!) in the field are not altogether familiar with this model.

4.2 Contribution of ISWs

Collaboration with ISWs was extremely valuable for our team, as they very often shared common (or uncommon) experiences with the beneficiaries. They could illuminate certain dimensions of these people's stories and histories, and identify unofficial, nonstandard support networks. In addition, they played a vital role in acquainting the other professionals with different cultural practices and perceptions, allowing us to become more culturally competent. Moreover, in cases where desperation and disappointment were prevalent, particularly as a result of poor or absent integration policies and external barriers that made beneficiary efforts futile, their presence and proposed interventions offered a singular source of support and reassurance. They often managed to restore a sense of hopefulness, through their shared experience and ability to survive and succeed in the same social context.

We strongly believe the ISWs' participation in this initiative had a positive impact on beneficiaries, though we unfortunately lack systemised feedback from their side to confirm this. However, we can offer indicative examples of beneficiaries' comments or responses, for instance, that of a young beneficiary who mentioned that he would like to one day be like an ISW, to be able to speak Greek equally well and offer support to other refugees. Another young woman, upon learning that the ISW had herself come to Greece at a very young age, unable to speak a word of Greek, was very moved and said that this gave her a lot of hope. Additionally, we observed that the mere presence of ISWs often fostered a sense of comfort and security in beneficiaries. There were multiple instances where the ISWs were absent and the beneficiaries asked after them, especially when they were feeling down or disappointed.

Based on the above, it can be said that the ISWs' contribution was valuable both in a practical and symbolic sense. As an actual space was being constructed in which the beneficiary could share their challenges, plans and desires (with those with similar experience), this process was facilitating the mapping of another space, rife with possibility. If these individuals managed to accomplish all this, then *so can I* (from the side of the beneficiary); or *they can too* (from the side of the ISW). Connecting to this

sense of possibility is essential, as it can serve as a source of inspiration - a torch in the darkness.

4.3 The challenges we faced

The challenges that we faced in working with the ISWs began with the very creation of their positions, since, as mentioned, we had no previous experience with such a collaboration. Therefore, it was necessary to consider how we could accommodate this new role in our current structure. We asked colleagues who had collaborated with ISWs to describe their experience and surveyed the existing literature to see how the collaboration was presented. What would the ISWs' contribution to the project be? During the initial planning stage, we recognised that this question could not be answered 'outside' of everyday practice. Yet, it was important to identify certain basic pillars around which to structure this new partnership.

The next challenges that arose pertained to matters of integration and team dynamics. The creation of informal hierarchies based on the duality of "professional"/ "non-professional" and the language gap were frequent topics of conversation. This conventional approach to organisational dynamics, which often prevails in interdisciplinary contexts, was antithetical to our desire to create a space for equitable exchange and co-construction. Supervision helped us massively in this regard, as did the time we had to reflect together as a team, particularly about topics relating to shared values and team dynamics. Simply put, we had to work hard, both collectively and individually, to build a space where each team member would become aware of the partiality of their knowledge and experiences, and through that acceptance, seek collaborative support and insight within the team.

Another issue we needed to address relates to the distinction between the personal experiences held by ISWs and the experiences of beneficiaries. We felt it was essential to avoid 'easy' generalisations, recognising how comparable situations can have radically different impacts, depending on the person. We took it upon ourselves to engage in constant dialogue with ISWs about this important subject, despite the difficulty of setting a limitation that can feel so paradoxical. On the one hand, we asked the ISWs to contribute to the team through their invaluable experience, and on the other hand, to distance themselves to truly 'meet' the experience of beneficiaries.

5. Support during the Covid-19 pandemic

The sudden outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic at the start of 2020 brought forth new needs and priorities for our beneficiaries; it postponed, if not annulled, many of their previously set goals. These emergency circumstances forced the Paths to Integration team to reconstruct their working framework and everyday practice while preserving therapeutic presence and caring as central pillars.

During a time when physical contact and other aspects of social living were being disturbed in unprecedented ways, the team endeavoured to stay in touch via distance communication. Babel Day Centre had already implemented its own policies[49] with regard to keeping contact with beneficiaries. Thus, through the first stage of lockdown, we aimed to communicate with our beneficiaries on a weekly basis if they so desired. Our objective was to support them in meeting their basic needs and navigating their experience of isolation. We also provided them with information relevant to the new regulations and restrictions[50] and explored any potential needs that may have arisen.

At the same time, we noted down the challenges that our beneficiaries were experiencing and attempted to bring awareness to these issues through advocacy efforts and events.

To this end, we created the **Challenges and Supports Grid** (see Appendix), which we utilised as a framework to record the challenges that our beneficiaries were facing, along with any supports they could rely on to overcome them.

[49] (Only available in Greek) Gionakis, N. Chondrou, F., Tome, S. (2020) Preparing a mental health unit for the management of psychosocial consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, New Health magazine, 107: 20-21 (https://neaygeia.gr/wp/wpcontent/uploads/2020/05/%CE%A4%CE%95%CE%A5%CE%A7%CE%9F%CE%A3-107.pdf)

[50] Access to available information for all beneficiaries was not ascertained by any means, due to language barriers or access (and lack thereof) to different media.

6. Case studies

In this chapter, we will offer an in-depth analysis of how we supported three of our beneficiaries, to elucidate the practical dimension of our approach. For everyone, the requirements of the support process were unique. To this end, we will let each story unfold on its own terms, rather than through a pre-established framework.

6.1 Faris

At the time of our introduction, Faris was 21 years old. He came from a country in sub-Saharan Africa. He arrived in Greece as an unaccompanied minor five years prior. In 2017, he began participating in psychotherapeutic sessions with a mental health professional at Babel Day Centre. Having experienced multiple losses and adverse life experiences, he presented with depressive symptomatology and was prone to anger, which often led him to risky and provocative behaviour. In November 2018, he was referred to 'Paths to Integration' to gain support in navigating the day-to-day challenges that he was facing in Greece.

6.1.1 Introducing the framework

The way we approached Faris reflected our desire to help him build trust with his psychotherapist, and Babel Day Centre as a whole.

In our first sessions with Faris, we stressed that our meetings were a space in which to negotiate his daily needs and address challenges relevant to transitioning to the host society. We agreed to work collaboratively - following the synergic approach - and explained what this meant for us. We also explained that, as professionals, we did not yet have answers and solutions to most of the issues he had come to us with but would do our best to support him in addressing these challenges while facilitating and assisting his efforts to integrate.

6.1.2 Assessing needs and setting of goals

In our first meetings with Faris, we explored his needs and the requests he had brought to us. Using a diagram[51], we recorded the anxieties and challenges he was facing in daily life and established certain goals, prioritising them according to his preference. At this early stage of our needs assessment and goal setting, the team approach already began to be rooted in CUT (Complexity, Uniqueness, Totality) as a work framework.

[51] See Psychosocial Dimensions of the Refugee Condition: Synergic Approach https://babeldc.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022_01_Psyxokoinonikes-diastaseis_EN.pdf pg.116

6.1.3 Initial requests

Faris' initial request, which he presented as his chief priority, was to identify local fitness and sports-related activities. He believed that this would give him a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction, fill his schedule, and 'relieve' him of stress and other difficult emotions he was struggling to manage.

In our meetings, he spoke of his desire to build a stronger, more muscular body, one that would make him 'more of a man' and "stronger than his enemies back in his homeland", as he put it. He thus presented himself to us as someone who wished to acquire 'power', which he associated primarily with physical strength. He perceived this idea of strength very ambivalently – he wanted it, yet appeared to be afraid of it.

Our intention was to unpack what Faris' need to feel strong signified, and what fears and anxieties were concealed behind his ambivalence. We were also interested in unpacking his areas of strength and vulnerability, and naturally, helping him gain access to sports activities. We identified fitness centres and athletic groups that he could join at little to no cost and presented him with a range of possibilities based on his interests. We also assisted him in completing the medical examinations required to sign up and accompanied him to services if he needed help communicating.

In accompanying Faris to his medical appointments, we identified that he required guidance in accessing the National Health System (booking appointments, accessing services, etc). We offered to accompany Faris as needed until he felt comfortable navigating this world himself. Later, Faris became comfortable booking appointments and accessing services without accompaniment.

Meanwhile, in exploring his desire to join athletic groups and activities, we became aware of Faris' interest in volunteering. We attempted to delve deeper into the solidarity and compassion driving this wish to be of use to others, which he seemed to have cultivated in part through the adversities he had faced. We discussed potential volunteering activities with Faris and brought him in touch with an organisation. He had already started to form social networks for himself, enriching his communication skills and establishing personal contact with different people.

A second request he brought to us was to find a Greek language class. He had previously attempted to locate a class but hadn't found anything.

6.1.4 Obstacles and challenges

Faris faced certain challenges in following his athletic activities and Greek classes. Often, after being punctual for a certain period, he chose to stop attending. This pattern tended to repeat itself; Faris would sign up for new activities with high expectations, only to become disappointed. Bureaucratic obstacles that were presented to him, such as racist behaviour or discrimination, angered him deeply, and

his response was to abandon his efforts. Any wound to his ego made him give up the activities that so excited him in the beginning.

Our meetings offered Faris a space to talk about these challenges and express ambivalent and intense emotions. As professionals, we tried to bear his frustration (and ours too) after each effort to pursue an activity fell through. We tried to 'mirror' this ambivalence back to him, this repeated 'forth-and back' movement. Faris seemed unable to move forward, at least at that moment. It is important to note that positive progression was something *we* desired for him.

At a certain point, Faris expressed his concern that he was wasting our time. Given he could not see through any of the activities we had identified together, he suggested that we stop the meetings. We remained at his disposal. We clarified that he could use our services whenever he wished, in whichever way he chose. Even if he decided to stop coming, our door would always remain open for him. Shortly thereafter, Faris returned and asked to resume our meetings. Ultimately, he was able to locate activities on his own and stay with them over a longer period of time.

Both professionals who were collaborating with him felt that this young man was looking for something - through us, or in us, beyond the requests he brought - some form of guidance and support from caring 'adults', who could furnish him with a sense of safety. He sought a relationship with us beyond any request or demand.

Regarding Faris' desire to learn Greek, rather than referring him to the first option we found, we tried to really attend to his specific needs and preferences. The young man expressed that he was not interested in participating in big classes with many students, nor classes with a sporadic frequency, which were unfortunately the most commonly available options. He thought that these structures were a waste of time, reflecting a lack of effort and investment on the part of the organisations, which he found 'derogatory' to him.

He continued to experience a broad sense of futility and frustration; he expressed he would never be able to learn the language, as Greece did not invest in refugee integration. This made him not want to invest in the classes. These frustrations and anxieties were frequent topics of discussion in our meetings. We validated his challenges, while at the same time attempting to illuminate the positive characteristics reflected by his efforts - namely, the value he placed on education, his persistence in finding a suitable learning context and environment, his previous successes in educational contexts (his high grades in school, his ability to interact and engage with relevant bodies).

By once again utilising our networks, we managed to find an appropriate language course for him. Faris remained committed this time, until the program of which the classes were a part was unfortunately terminated. It must be emphasised that the discontinuation and instability of services in Greece represents a very real challenge

for refugees. Following this, despite seeking similar opportunities, Faris decided not to register for a new course. Months later, he informed us that he signed up for a class by himself, feeling that the time had come to improve his Greek in order to be eligible to work.

6.1.5 A puppy for integration

At some point, Faris expressed a desire to have a dog. We wondered how a program designed to support people in navigating their everyday needs and progress in their integration journey could possibly cater to such a wish. We opted to discuss Faris' request with him, to determine what it meant for Faris to have a dog, and to look into the pragmatics of caring for a dog.

We once again made use of our network, with one of our colleagues offering Faris a recently born puppy. Our team was present to support Faris in caring for the dog's needs, for instance, by accompanying him to the vet.

Taking in a dog opened new pathways for Faris to interact and connect; he began to get acquainted with his neighbours and other dog owners on his walks and ended up establishing relationships with some of them. A small community was created around Faris' dog, one which generously supplied him with advice and support concerning the animal's needs.

Caring for the dog also brought to the surface many of Faris' other positive characteristics. He was immensely caring and loving with his dog and began taking on new roles and developing greater accountability and maturity. His daily life also became more structured, as the dog's needs helped Faris to build a schedule.

6.1.6 Finding work

As Faris' integration process began to take on different forms and dimensions, it came time for us to focus on his efforts to gain employment. He had very elevated goals and ambitions when it came to work. At the same time, he experienced a tense dysphoric feeling when his goals felt out of reach due to situational restrictions and socio-political limitations. When we first met and had our initial sessions, it was rather clear that Faris was not ready to take on the responsibilities that employment brings. These were areas that he was working on as part of his therapy; we remained in close contact with his mental health professional to get updates on this process.

From our side, we accepted the pace that he was able to progress and how he articulated his desires; we did our best to ease his concerns and help him reach his objectives. At the same time, we tried to help him adjust to his social reality, offering him a more realistic picture of the labour market. We demonstrated the steps that he had to take to find a job that was closely aligned with what he desired.

Regarding the more practical aspects of the job hunt, we assisted him in building a resume, briefed him on the possible ways to seek employment in Greece, and

prepared him for future interviews. As he started to get some interviews, we continued to offer him targeted guidance and support in ways that we thought he would find meaningful. Sometimes, Faris was overwhelmed by stress, especially when he had an online interview. To relieve this stress, we performed role plays and simulated interviews with him via the phone and online, giving him feedback to improve the ways in which he presented himself, his skills and areas of strength. This provided him with a greater sense of self-assurance and confidence during future interviews.

Of course, finding employment was a difficult task, which led Faris to become easily discouraged. At times, he ceased his efforts out of frustration. On these occasions, our relationship acted as a springboard, encouraging him to not give up while assuring him that these challenges and setbacks were to be expected. After some time, Faris was able to secure a temporary position at an island hotel as an entertainer for children, which he enjoyed. However, he quickly quit the job and returned to Athens, telling us that he could not support a real job with responsibilities and duties at that moment. Once again, we had to accept that these processes had to be undertaken at his own pace.

Following the suspension of Faris' accommodation benefits, his financial pressures became more intense. To maintain his present living situation with his housemate, Faris began to seek other types of work. His inability to settle on a job that did not match his ideal was very challenging for him. We gave him the space to talk about these emotions and helped him to review the spectrum of possibilities and consequences relevant to choosing employment that did not fit with his expectations.

Furthermore, we shed light both on the challenges and difficulties inherent to finding work, and the opportunities that would become open to him once he became employed. We also frequently discussed his strengths and admirable character traits, his prior working experience - in which he had been successful - and the positive impact that working could have on his life.

Faris determined that even manual labour, which was available, could be a temporary, viable solution for him to support himself and gain valuable work experience. In addition, it would help him gather general insights into the labour market, and perhaps cultivate valuable skills and grow as a person, while critically investing in his future.

He thus undertook certain jobs, such as working in construction and at a cleaning service run by 'Archipelagos'[52]. At the cleaning service, he was able to form multiple

[52] 'Archipelagos' Social Co-op (www.acoop.gr) was founded in 2014 by Babel Day Centre, as a means of offering a practical alternative to the idea of 'employability'. It seeks to create work positions for people who face difficulties gaining access to the 'standard' labour market due to their unique characteristics. The Social Co-op supports and is supported by Babel Day Centre, and for this reason, we share many

positive relationships with his colleagues and supervisor. Clearly, Faris had the charisma necessary to get others to like him. These experiences helped him to believe in himself and feel successful, which reinforced his desire to put in a consistent effort in all employment contexts. These early experiences were also critical in enhancing his sense of autonomy, which had been a primary goal of his for quite some time.

Ultimately, Faris managed to find a better - based on his personal criteria - work position as a chef's assistant during the summer months. He received great satisfaction from this new job and built interpersonal relationships that he valued highly. Upon completing his work with 'Paths to Integration', Faris signed a new contract with the Social Co-op for a full-time position with more responsibilities and better pay. Faris appeared more confident and adaptable than ever, while remaining open to finding other positions aligned with his goals and ambitions.

Of course, our efforts will inevitably be affected and challenged by the socio-political context. For example, the expiration of Faris' residence permit and its long-delayed renewal represented a major obstacle in his employment journey. For a long period, Faris was not able to sign his new employment contract, as the asylum service was slow in moving forward with his renewal application. After substantial efforts, we secured the assistance of a lawyer who provided specialised support to refugees. He facilitated the application procedure, resulting in Faris once again possessing the necessary paperwork to work legally.

6.1.7 Finding an apartment

During the first stage of our collaboration, Faris was evicted from his apartment. This apartment was designated for applicants of international protection (through the ESTIA program), but Faris had just been recognised as a beneficiary of international protection, meaning that he either had to locate accommodation for himself or find a different program to support him. Faris registered for the "HELIOS"[53] program, and, due to the regulations of this particular initiative, was granted a few months to find an apartment to rent. Searching for an apartment was a very difficult process. Faris was constantly disappointed, particularly when faced with persistent discrimination at the hands of landlords and agencies. He felt that he was constantly being treated unfairly, which in turn triggered strong outbursts of anger. He would sometimes resign himself completely and abandon every effort at securing housing for days or even weeks, regarding his impending homelessness as a certainty. "A refugee like me won't be given an apartment", he would say. At this stage, our discussions served to remind him that he was not alone, and that even though it sometimes didn't feel this way, his life was not only made up of insurmountable difficulties.

initiatives together. The Co-op offers key support to Babel by offering work positions to people whom Babel supports.

[53] The International Organization for Migration's integration programme is directed at beneficiaries of international protection.

As professionals, we committed to continuing to search rigorously with Faris until we located suitable accommodation. We engaged our informal networks, as did Faris, and asked friends, other organisations that had assisted him in the past, even his therapist at Babel. Finally, with the assistance of an agency, Faris managed to find a place.

Only a few months later, he decided to move to a different apartment, which he found on his own. The rent of the first place was too high, so he called on his new networks and friends to track down new opportunities. Finally, this past year, he moved for the third time, to a flat he really liked, in a comfortable, lively neighbourhood where he has built his own community. He and his neighbours often organise community meetings and events; they host each other often. Faris has had a flat mate throughout this process, and the three of them (together with the dog) have built a 'home', functioning as a surrogate family.

6.1.8 Additional thoughts

Throughout our three-year partnership with Faris, we approached the challenges of his daily life through an individualised lens, accounting for his uniqueness, specific needs, strengths, and vulnerabilities. Given the complexity and singular nature of every integration journey, our support of Faris would not have been nearly as effective had we not fully accounted for his personal characteristics. Had we attempted a general, one-size-fit-all intervention, as is often the default in integration programs, we are confident that our efforts would not have been successful.

Naturally, the quality of our relationship allowed for the fostering of resilience; the ability to bear (on his part and ours) all the frustrations and obstacles that presented themselves. In our meetings, we tried to bring him in touch with his own innate complexity and resilience, as well as his many strengths, which shined through in the face of the difficulties and adversities he was experiencing. We remained available to listen to his experiences of failure and disappointment and endeavoured to not contribute to this narrative. Our relationship represented a foundation of safety from which he took crucial steps forward (and backward, as the situation demanded). In this way, we co-constructed Faris' unique path to integration.

6.2 JP

JP is a 44-year-old man from a country in Central Africa. He came to Greece in 2015. He made his first contact with Babel Day Centre after having been informed that he was HIV-positive. During that time, he was homeless and in a state of desperation because of his diagnosis. For over a year, JP accessed psychotherapeutic support services to try to process his new reality.

Through this period, Babel's interdisciplinary team helped JP find accommodation, referred him to an organisation that supports HIV-positive individuals, and initiated contact with a lawyer who took on his asylum case. As a result, JP managed to build a

daily routine, and gradually stopped attending his psychotherapy sessions. However, from his first contact with us in the summer of 2015, he never ceased communicating with Babel Day Centre. He frequently visited our premises, either to request support, both for practical or bureaucratic reasons, or to share news with the psychologist and staff nurse, with whom he felt a close bond.

6.2.1 The referral

JP was referred to our initiative by his psychologist. By the time he was suggested as a potential participant for the program, he had already ceased attending regular psychotherapeutic sessions with Babel. The psychologist briefed the interdisciplinary team, believing that JP could benefit greatly from the initiative, as he was currently looking for a job and had expressed a desire to be supported in his job search.

6.2.2 Inaugural meeting

A week before JP agreed to take part in 'Paths to Integration', we asked if he would come in for an inaugural meeting. In this meeting, a professional and newly inducted ISW were present. We held this appointment with the synergic approach in mind, seeking to build a connection with the potential beneficiary while adopting certain practices to facilitate this relationship.

JP was briefed about the role that professionals play, and what they can and cannot do in these meetings. We discussed the importance of adhering to a consistent schedule while maintaining a diligent approach to the work. Moreover, we highlighted the importance of mutual respect and how seriously we take confidentiality. The primary goal of this inaugural meeting was to alleviate JP's anxiety concerning our partnership. We must note that JP first contacted Babel in order to access psychological support, whereas 'Paths to Integration' had a different structure and intention altogether. We therefore emphasised that, while our professionals were not psychologists, JP should feel comfortable communicating any feelings or worries to us, as long as he understood what we could and could not do in response.

At this first meeting, JP was called on to identify the challenges that he was currently facing, assign a level of priority to each one, and briefly discuss his expectations around the outcomes of our work together. Our goal at this point was not to go into depth around our processes, but to co-construct the content of the meetings to come, while stressing that JP should be the one determining the direction and focus of our partnership.

6.2.3 Searching for work

From the very first meeting, JP expressed a strong desire to find a job, and proposed that future meetings centre on this need. JP already had an updated CV, which he had produced with the assistance of another organisation. We proceeded to support him

in his employment search, by assisting him in identifying available positions online and preparing him for prospective interviews.

Our meetings were held on a weekly basis; JP was generally very reliable and attentive in these sessions. In most cases, phone calls to employers were carried out by the professional, though JP was always present. When we received a positive outcome and impending invitation to an interview, we spent the rest of the meeting discussing and preparing. Even though JP was exceptionally communicative throughout our partnership, he insisted that we call employers on his behalf, expressing a lack of confidence in his spoken Greek. As such, first contact with employers was always made by one of the two professionals who were supporting JP.

In many meetings, we spoke about the importance of making positive first impressions on employers. Eventually, we encouraged JP to reach out personally (with us by his side). JP responded by conveying his gratitude for our willingness to make first contact on his behalf. In his own way, JP was searching for a space where he could freely express his vulnerability, and in our dynamic, he felt listened to and accepted. It is important to note that JP found it very challenging at first to accept support and care. The ability to 'let go' and invite care and openness was a big step for him, and we continued to support him in the ways that he deemed most useful.

After our first weeks together, JP began opening about his stressors and challenges, both past and present. He discussed disappointments and setbacks he had faced in previous work environments, along with the frustration and anxiety caused by the delay in his asylum decision. Slowly but surely, a relationship was built, and a mental and emotional connection was established, which allowed JP the comfort and trust to share increasingly personal matters with the two professionals. He finally felt like he had a voice and the right to be heard. As he repeatedly mentioned, he felt right at home at Babel.

6.2.4 Finding work

Three months after our initial meeting, JP identified a promising position on a Greek island, through an agency that we had come in contact with previously. Following his interview, he was given a position at a hotel, where he was responsible for the mini bars in the rooms. JP expressed great satisfaction and relief that he could finally generate income, some of which he intended to send back home to his family in Africa. In the week before he left for the island, he came to Babel every day, to ask for help with booking his tickets, gain insights into what to expect in this next context, and express mixed emotions around his looming departure.

During his first few days on the job, JP called us often to share his gratitude and enthusiasm about his new work.

6.2.5 Quitting

As more tourists began arriving on the island, JP's job became increasingly demanding. The lack of free time, in conjunction with the newfound sense of routine, caused JP's contact with us to wane significantly. Three months after leaving for the island, he came to visit us. He told us he had resigned after having been blamed for stealing money. When the truth came out and his employer realised their mistake, they apologised to JP and asked if he would keep his post. However, JP had been greatly hurt by the accusations and overall mistrust and opted to leave.

Over our next few meetings, we discussed JP's resignation in depth. Eventually, he also expressed his fatigue, sharing that his responsibilities had been exhausting and that he had been deceived with regards to his pay. He had trouble understanding why this position had carried so much pressure. We emphasised the importance of workers' rights, explaining terms and regulations of employment contracts, and sharing our perspective on acceptable working conditions. JP was not particularly receptive to these discussions at first, but we deemed it essential to acquaint him with the reality of the Greek labour market, particularly his rights and the process of understanding 'a contract'. The very fact that JP resigned from his summer position despite his dire financial need demonstrates ability to claim his rights – an empowering willingness to fight for humane working conditions.

6.2.6 Searching for an apartment

During the first months of our partnership with JP, in addition to supporting his search for work, we dedicated significant time to helping him locate an apartment. Although this desire was not explicitly discussed in our first few meetings, difficult relationships with his flatmates had rendered his current living situation untenable. This newly determined priority resulted in our increasing the frequency of our meetings to bi-weekly. Following an extensive online search, the ISW began contacting landlords on JP's behalf. The process of securing accommodation was time-consuming and often frustrating, but eventually, JP found an apartment to rent. His communication skills and cheerful disposition quickly helped him establish trust and comfort with the landlord, and JP was chosen for the apartment many other candidates. This success was noteworthy, when considering the dramatic increase in demand for housing in Athens, along with the frequently racist stance and behaviours that landlords express.

Before signing the contract, JP and the two professionals had an in-depth conversation about tenant and landlord rights and the points of the contract that were essential to understand. JP was also briefed about the formal and informal rules that govern tenant relationships in an apartment building.

6.2.7 Support during the first lockdown

During the first lockdown, JP felt anxious and isolated, only venturing outside of his apartment to buy food. We remained in contact with him through weekly phone conversations, discussing his new routine and giving him information about the regulations that were in place to prevent Covid-19 transmission. He spoke about his fear of the virus and admitted he was finding it difficult to secure sufficient food for himself. We referred him to an organisation near his house that functioned as a social kitchen, with meals being offered for free. JP frequently expressed how important our communications were to him, as he felt that he had lost contact with his social networks. Over time, he found that he could stay in touch with friends and loved ones through different means. Gradually, despite the lack of physical proximity, he resumed communicating with many close social contacts.

6.2.8 Resuming the search for work

As a result of the first lockdown, we were unable to see JP in person for a rather long time. During this hiatus, JP identified new priorities; he stopped looking for a job temporarily and strived to manage the reality of the pandemic. After these difficult months, JP approached us to resume the search together. From this point on, the ultimate goal of our weekly meetings was to secure employment for JP.

Greece's gradual reopening for tourism inspired JP to seek a temporary job within this sector. Since his arrival in Greece in 2015, JP had worked on a couple of islands, and was open to doing the same again. We primarily looked for online job ads, while JP utilised his own networks, inquiring at agencies that his acquaintances had suggested. At first, JP was upbeat and optimistic; he had not had trouble finding temporary summer jobs in the past and had not been unemployed for a prolonged period. We felt that he had built an adequate social network for himself, was a fast learner, and had the communication skills necessary to make good first impressions on employers. Yet, he was unable to find a job in the summer of 2020, which caused him immense stress and anxiety around his future employment prospects.

The meetings we held at this time provided space for the expression of negative emotions, allowing JP to articulate his stress, disappointment, and desperation. We talked about his skills and strengths and explored new approaches and opportunities to get him back into the labour market. JP was diligent in these appointments and rarely cancelled or postponed a meeting. To our surprise, when the second lockdown was announced, JP pled with us to continue meeting face-to-face, as the routine we had built together was helping him remain active and engaged.

He continued to draw motivation from wide-ranging sources and persisted in his job search, despite repeated disappointment. After much effort, Archipelagos Co-op offered him a position in their cleaning services, initially for a few weeks, later with a

long-term contract. He enjoyed his job there and continued to work for the Co-op until 'Paths to Integration' came to its conclusion.

6.2.9 Waiting for asylum decision and its impact on the integration process

Predictably, one aspect that was crucial to our discussions of integration within the Greek context was the delay in JP's asylum decision. Though JP had applied in 2015, his application had not yet been examined four years later. The total lack of information concerning his application's progress filled him with a sense of rejection and anger. He felt unfairly treated by the Greek state and provided examples of acquaintances who had come to the country much later than him but had already received positive asylum decisions. This may help explain his ambivalent attitude to pursuing language classes (JP could already speak some Greek, thanks to his prior work experiences and time spent in the country).

The asylum topic came to the forefront when JP was finally invited to the Asylum Service in September 2020 to renew his residence permit. The fact that they communicated with JP gave him renewed hope that his application was finally making progress. Upon realizing that this wasn't the case, JP's disappointment was immeasurable. He had even turned down a temporary job outside of Athens in order to attend the appointment for his legal papers. Our meetings during that month gave JP ample space to express feelings of anger toward the Greek state, and to expand on his sense of being trapped and in limbo.

6.2.10 Additional thoughts

JP took part in the 'Paths to Integration' initiative to access support with his job search. However, JP had already visited other organisations that not only provide this service but have greater expertise than Babel in the field of employment. It became evident through our meetings that JP did not come to Babel for this reason alone, but to address other issues he was facing in his daily life. Of course, our appointments focused on the pursuit of work, yet JP's primary motivation for attending was revealed to be far more nuanced and broader. Though we had agreed on a consistent day and time for our meetings, JP often visited without informing us beforehand, to discuss something that had been bothering him, or to share a recent decision he had made.

An obstacle in our regular interactions with JP was his tendency to use language that might be described as 'empty speech', i.e., fluent speech that lacks information or meaningful content; we found it hard to connect with him during these moments and tried to understand what was driving this. We spoke to his psychologist many times to explore possible reasons for why he communicated this way. In general, our collaboration with his psychologist was vital in gaining insight into JP's reactions and demeanour. When JP chose to speak in this way, we offered him the space to do so, and made an effort to grasp as thoroughly as possible the content behind this seemingly 'empty speech'. At any rate, the process of constructing a safe space, a

'home' where JP could feel accepted and safe to share his thoughts, challenges and expectations was challenging and non-linear in its progress. Until the conclusion of 'Paths to Integration', we wanted JP to feel that he could visit Babel whenever he lacked motivation to continue his job search, or simply to share feelings of disappointment and/or desperation; above all, whenever he desired human contact with people he could trust. This was not an option that JP always felt comfortable pursuing; despite his diligence and commitment to our work together, there were periods, particularly early in our partnership, where he would disappear or struggle to actively pursue his goals.

Perhaps one of our most significant realisations in our relationship with JP was the interconnectedness of various facets of integration. We recognised the need to be atypically flexible in our support of JP. Initially, the psychologist did not attempt to address JP's psychological challenges, but instead referred him to professionals and organisations that could support him in navigating the roots of these issues (lawyers, services for people living with HIV, etc.). In the same way, the professionals from 'Paths to Integration' who partnered with him did not merely follow-up on his request of finding employment, but supported him to prepare for interviews, to find accommodation, and to connect him more broadly to the host society. They also supported him during the difficult lockdown period, during a time when beneficiaries in various programs lost contact with the people supporting them.

Another important pillar of this relationship was our emphasis on helping JP develop autonomy from the start. He was always the one who prioritised the issues that concerned him and was given freedom to choose the topics we would discuss (absolutely anything that caused him distress or anxiety). On occasion, this led to regressions and fluctuations in our approach, and it was difficult to preserve the agreed-upon structure. As mentioned, there was a brief period when he stopped attending appointments; he would show up without notice and express frustration if we did not immediately cater to his request. In time, however, JP came to truly appreciate our flexibility and grasp the meaning and significance of the rules we had established to facilitate more effective communication. In our last months together, he was exceptionally diligent in his attendance, and always briefed us in advance if he needed to reschedule an appointment.

Lastly, the fact that we allowed JP feel heard and validated, in control of his needs, fears and dreams, was the primary reason we managed to build a meaningful relationship with him. Achieving this dynamic is one of the greatest challenges in the relationship between professionals and beneficiaries. JP was encouraged to share his frustrations, weaknesses, and ambivalent emotions toward the host society, something which gradually helped us better understand his experience. Though we struggled to grasp what he intended to convey at times, by encouraging him to speak freely, we formed stable lines of communication and mutual understanding.

6.3 ATM

ATM is a 34-year-old man from a country in Central Africa. In his homeland, he studied Sociology and International Economics, while being very active in politics. He spent his first month in Greece detained at the Reception and Identification Service in Moria camp (in Mytilene, Lesvos). He is still unsure as to why he was detained, given all the requests he submitted. For ATM, sharing this confined space with dozens of people under awful conditions was an unbearable experience, filled with anger and desperation. Eventually, he managed to get to Athens, and has lived there since that time, renting an apartment with his own money.

6.3.1 The referral

ATM started seeing a psychologist at Babel during his first months in Athens to work through various issues that were impacting his mental health. At that time, he described feeling socially isolated and not like himself, sometimes exhibiting aggressive behaviour or going into fits of rage. After a couple of months, ATM managed to build a relationship of trust with his psychologist and found his mood lifting significantly. He said: “the psychologist was there for me during a very dark time, a period when I felt broken in two, as if [I had] a dual personality”. ATM regained his sociability, which we came to understand was one of his most pronounced traits, along with a renewed sense of self-control, composure, and hope. In July 2019, he was referred by his psychologist to ‘Paths to Integration’ as a potential candidate. His desired area of focus was to rediscover his creativity and gain support in chasing after his ambitions and dreams.

6.3.2 First meetings

From the moment we met ATM, we realised he was a person of unique temperament and major charisma. He had excellent communication skills and was a very self-confident individual who believed in his abilities. It took us little time to co-construct an action plan, a stable schedule and to establish ‘rules’ for our partnership. ATM knew exactly why he was there and possessed a solid understanding of what we could and could not do for him. He also had great appreciation for the ‘Paths to Integration’ initiative and was very happy to be a part of it. One of the things that really struck us was his familiarity with ‘western thought and ideas’, even though he had only been in Greece for a short period of time. We were also impressed by his diligence when it came to our appointments; he never arrived late or postponed a session. His energy and motivation were sky-high, and it did not take us more than a couple of meetings to form a genuine connection with him.

6.3.3 Requests, goals, and expectations

ATM expressed his first aim quite clearly: “to spread and transmit my visions and ideas”, and “to feel seen and acknowledged in a country where my legal status is still

pending and where I am still far from being integrated". His financial situation permitted him to get by rather comfortably, at least with regards to his basic needs. He had no challenges relating to his accommodation either. For this reason, as he liked to repeat to us, his "main priority crossing the fourth decade of my life concerns self-actualisation and fulfilling my dreams". His goal was not to find just any job, but rather a challenge - an activity that would give him the space to grow and evolve. He was hoping to create a working framework that supported his vision for the future and could eventually offer him greater opportunity for career progression and a sustainable income.

According to ATM, the main difficulty he faced in accomplishing his goals derived from stereotypes and prejudices toward refugees and migrants within the host society. He also acknowledged the social, political, economic, and cultural barriers that existed in starting a business in Greece, relative to what this process would have entailed in his home country.

What we found striking was that ATM never expressed worry or stress about his legal status, even though his application had already been rejected twice. Objectively, the chances of him being granted refugee status were slim, yet he did not seem to be emotionally impacted, nor did he stop believing in his dreams for as long as we held meetings with him.

6.3.4 Ways of support

The objective of this integration journey was to co-create an approach befitting ATM's skillset and nuanced and unique ambitions. As such, our appointments were somewhat different than what we were accustomed to, in that we ended up focusing on very targeted areas of development, assisting ATM to build his networks and access initiatives and groups that interested him. In this way, we respected and supported ATM's willingness to create his own meaningful path.

Our meetings were thus aimed at 'bridging' ATM's creativity and vision and Greece's social reality. We wished to design a plan that was tangible and achievable, comprised of clear, practical steps. We searched for relevant learning and development and networking opportunities – anything that would strengthen his skills, while enhancing and making use of his existing capabilities.

ATM began to get involved in various workshops and meetings relevant to his professional development; some were directed specifically toward refugees, while others were open to the public. In many of these contexts, he did not simply participate, but initiated contact with organisations that shared his ambitions and values, declaring his availability and seeking opportunities to lend his support. Many of our meetings thus focused on his experience of these workshops and interactions. We discussed the ways in which he chose to approach professionals and other individuals, the realisations he had made, and the lessons he felt could be taken from

these experiences. He often asked us questions like: “Do you think I may have monopolised the conversation? Did I speak too much about myself?”; “Was I open enough in my communication? Was I adequately prepared?”; “Does this organisation really share my goals?”; and of course: “What can I do better and how can I improve?” We avoided giving him one-dimensional answers and instead tried to parse through the meaning behind these questions, considering how we could support him to reach his own conclusions.

When ATM did not receive responses from individuals or agencies after reaching out, he met this with acceptance rather than disappointment. He continued to bring new ideas and challenges for us to work through together, always striving to improve himself. He sought ways to enhance his skills and become more efficient in the ways he presented himself and his ideas. During meetings, we mainly played the role of facilitator rather than support figure, as ATM was called on to draw his own conclusions based on all the different forms of information or possible scenarios we presented him. He spoke openly about his plans and was appreciative of our insights and feedback. He never hesitated to communicate any disagreements or points of contention with us.

By the time that we held our final meeting, ATM had already come up with a specific business plan and was in the early stages of implementation. He was enthusiastic about its potential and felt truly excited about the partners he would be working with, as well as the creative space that he had identified to develop and carry out his initiative.

6.3.5 A safe space to live and dream: a long-term process

ATM faced multiple complex, longstanding challenges, perhaps the most significant of which was his uncertain legal status and the prospect of his receiving international protection. He generally avoided sharing his stress and frustration surrounding this facet of his daily life. We did not pressure ATM to discuss this topic, as our priority was to help him achieve increased feelings of self-acceptance and acceptance in the host society.

Despite his uncertain situation, ATM found ways to remain highly productive and pursue his goals. He made use of his pre-existing skills and education and relied on his social skills to build his network. The ‘weight’ of the refugee identity can be monumentally painful and traumatising to one’s sense of omnipotence, yet JP managed to use his assigned status as fuel to learn, grow, and overcome barriers. Accompanying ATM through this process of navigating challenges represented a core aspect of the support we hoped to provide.

After a difficult start to his journey in Greece, ATM found the motivation to remain active in the community and pursue his ambitions. Our role was simply to accompany this effort, highlighting his strengths and offering him a consistent source of caring.

We supported him to better appreciate his growth through adversity and the ways in which he was evolving as an individual.

6.3.6 Additional thoughts

The process of building relationships with beneficiaries helped shift the emphasis from "procuring information" to "highlighting individual experience". Our objective was not simply to bring people in touch with organisations and services that could help fulfill their requests, but to create a safe space for each person to feel comfortable and express themselves freely. ATM's case was quite different than that of most beneficiaries, reminding us that the refugee experience is neither uniform nor homogeneous. ATM had the means to cover his basic needs; thus, his goals were more anchored to self-realisation and meaning attribution in the host society. On this journey, our role was to accompany ATM through the process of identifying and realising his key aspirations. He defined the pace and sequencing of this process.

As with every person, needs arose for ATM, sometimes with great urgency, that were not directly associated with his initial request or goal. Our role in these cases was not to 'bring the person back' to their original goal, but to meet his needs on their own terms, to recognise that this constant redirection is healthy and necessary.

Through our meetings, we made space for a wide range of topics and themes corresponding to ATM's various requests and identified a number of attractive creative opportunities for him. ATM also gained access to the public health system and quickly learned how to book appointments on his own. At one point, ATM asked us to help him find a suitable holiday destination. In other instances, we talked about love and how he imagined his ideal home and family. We discussed what fatherhood meant to him. When infusing caring into the professional-beneficiary relationship, such conversations end up surfacing all on their own.

7. Challenges

The 'Paths to Integration' team had to deal with various multifaceted challenges throughout this initiative. Some challenges concerned the operation of the team and relationships between members, others related to communication and relationship building with beneficiaries, and of course, challenges arose that were associated more generally with the broader social/economic/political context. Whether or not these challenges were surmountable, they became a springboard for reflection and prospective change. Here we present a number of these issues, briefly describing our approach and any valuable takeaways.

- The **creation of a unified language and approach** amongst our team proved an ongoing challenge, given that each member brought a unique understanding of integration, deriving from personal experiences, knowledge, and available tools for learning. In other words, the question: 'What does integration mean?' would have been met with exactly as many answers as there were team members. To develop a more cohesive approach and consensus around best practices, we needed to commit to ongoing processes of discussion, reflection, and action, while prioritising professional development and training.

- **Cultural humility exhibited by professionals** was another point of focus throughout this initiative. As is reflected in the recent literature, effective refugee support requires both an understanding of the relevant social and cultural practices that have shaped the identities of your beneficiaries, and a healthy dose of self-criticism and humility to offset the inevitable power dynamic that develops between professionals and refugees. Meanwhile, we stressed the importance of studiously avoiding paternalistic attitudes, while maintaining structural competency to avoid psychiatrisation phenomena.

- **The distinct requests for support** that were presented by our beneficiaries represented a further challenge for our professionals. Ranging from topics relating to work and health, to themes more broadly related to integration, such as the nature of gender relations and the position of women in the host context, the 'Paths to Integration' team was met with an exceptional range of requests and challenges that we did not anticipate from the start. To better manage this issue, which often produced overwhelm and even helplessness among our professionals, sharing and internal guidance played a very important role, as did our general approach - which discouraged professionals from taking on an expert role. Therefore, a condition was created whereby all requests were heard and attended to, without the expectation of being able to address or 'solve' all issues.

- **Frequent changes, both in service provision and within support networks, as well as at the political and legislative level, was a major source of turbulence and frustration throughout the initiative**. It is highly time-consuming, if not impossible, to stay on top of all these developments in such a volatile and constantly changing environment. It is also difficult to foster a sense of safety and stability, which is so necessary to facilitate integration. Greek classes that abruptly started and stopped, financial support that was abruptly suspended or restricted following an unanticipated change in terms, poor accommodation conditions for beneficiaries, professionals being let go or transferred with little notice, services losing funding after three months; these and numerous other unforeseen developments presented a challenge for the team and beneficiaries. To better manage these instances and the resulting sense of frustration and disappointment, we devoted time and energy to remaining apprised of all changes, while simultaneously trying to accept that this experience of flux is practically inevitable in this field of work.

- An additional barrier for this integration support project was the widespread **uncertainty, disappointment and frustration** caused by the protracted **asylum process, the management of negative decisions, and the multiple difficulties** associated with the often-hostile environment and its exclusionary policies. A large proportion of our meetings with beneficiaries focused around this experience of waiting; a constant uncertainty which we returned to again and again amidst the progress being made in other facets of the integration journey. The frustration and anger of this process tended to resurface most forcefully after a particular goal was met. It was as though, by moving 'closer' to the host society, the individual felt the prospective pain of negative asylum decision more forcefully. In this way, it was extremely difficult for the professional when they had to accompany a beneficiary to the Asylum Service to manage a negative decision.

These frustrations had a pronounced impact on the team's professionals, whose role was simply to support. We were called on to manage our own frustrations when we came face-to-face with inhibitory factors and obstacles. Mutual support, sharing, and advocacy efforts relevant to claiming one's rights acted 'therapeutically', helping us bear the painful, difficult-to-manage aspects of our work practice.

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge for the team was the **lack of policies in place to facilitate integration, as well as the streamlined, centralised planning of interventions to this end.** Simply put, we are talking about the complete absence of an integration plan on the part of the host society. This leads to a sense of chaos that can overwhelm the everyday experience of beneficiaries and undermine the efforts of professionals. At the same time, it permits and even encourages stances and behaviours that are not favourable to any form of integration. More generally, the lack of integration policies can be understood as a policy for (non)integration. In this context, in which beneficiaries experience a spectrum of responses ranging from

indifference to hostility, our team of professionals was forced to find creative ways to support and sustain our beneficiaries and ourselves.

8. In search of good practices

Over the three-year duration of 'Paths to Integration', in attempting to navigate the aforementioned challenges, we discovered and affirmed certain practices that enhanced team functioning and allowed us to better support our beneficiaries. We include several of these practices below, with the acknowledgment that their effectiveness is context dependent.

- **Systematic mapping and monitoring of services available by other organisations, stakeholders, public bodies, communities, and groups is an essential process for these types of interventions.** By remaining up to date on existing resources, professionals can build an effective pathway for referral and networking for beneficiaries, while avoiding service duplication and the provision of redundant resources. This process is highly valuable in getting a fuller picture of which services are lacking, to explore possibilities for organisations to restructure, to the extent possible, their own services and methodologies to better meet the needs of beneficiaries and/or to inform or mobilise responsible entities to take action. It is vital that service mapping include informal resources that are available within the community, of which professionals are frequently unaware. The contribution of ISWs can be particularly useful in this regard, as they are likely aware of, and may even have used, such informal networks, thereby providing a comprehensive picture.

- **Mapping comprises a long-standing process of engaging and networking with existing resources in the community.** When we speak of mapping, we are not merely referring to the identification of available services; familiarity and collaborative relationships with relevant entities is the key objective. Building a shared understanding of integration and working together to harness and utilise key resources is vital to achieving better outcomes. Although this practice might at first seem overly time-consuming given the demanding schedules of most professionals on the ground, it is in fact very useful in avoiding unnecessary referrals while opening the door for more caring and meaningful forms of networking on behalf of beneficiaries.

- **Communication between professionals (and across different bodies and organisations) who support the same person can foster a more holistic approach toward refugee support.** It is vital that professionals who cover different needs of the same person share challenges and concerns, exchange information and ideas, and create shared goals. This removes the possibility of overlap, allows for a shared distribution of tasks, offers insight into other aspects of the beneficiary's life, and provides a safe space in which professionals can communicate setbacks and disappointments.

- **Support interventions for refugees should be long-sighted and stable,** given that integration into a new society is time-consuming and replete with sudden changes and adjustments. This understanding is relevant both in the planning and execution of the intervention. Long-standing, stable interventions are vital in establishing a sense of safety for professionals and beneficiaries alike. The level of trust necessary to support a person in navigating the challenges that may arise throughout their journey takes time. The discontinuity and abrupt suspension of interventions causes fatigue and disappointment among those we support, the result of which is diminished trust toward the existing support structures and, by extension, toward professionals.

- **Time for reflection and discussion is valuable, and ought to be prioritised on an everyday basis.** The daily challenges of refugees are often framed in emergency terms, perpetuating the notion that we must act immediately. This often causes professionals and beneficiaries to feel exhausted, resentful, and may even lead to their resignation. One can easily be consumed by this sense of urgency and constant activity and forgo the need for reflection and team discussion. Yet these practices allow us to reframe the situation, find new ways to manage it, and accept that certain circumstances are beyond our control. While we acknowledge that refugees face multiple challenges that require an emergency response, seeking out space for reflection and reframing can enhance and sustain one's daily practice over the long term.

- **Building an equitable relationship between professionals and beneficiaries is vital for any intervention offering integration support**. As professionals, we may fall into the trap of thinking that we know better than the person we are supporting what their integration journey should look like, given that we are more familiar with the social/legal/economic/political system in place. This approach leads to an inevitable power dynamic and an unequal relationship where the beneficiary is perceived through the lens of victimhood and perpetual dependency. By looking beyond this oversimplified model, we can truly connect with what the person values and prioritises. Though people with refugee experience may not be familiar with this new context, they are still the architects of their own life, and should be empowered to pursue whichever direction they see fit. An equitable relationship with a professional can serve as a bridge to the broader social context, offering essential information to guide beneficiaries in their own decision-making process as they navigate their unique 'path to integration'.

- **Inclusion of ISWs in integration support interventions is crucial to better support individuals.** As mentioned, ISWs can play a decisive role in fostering cultural competency and humility within the team; they can illuminate other facets of people's stories, enrich our knowledge of informal support networks, and provide significant support to beneficiaries. Consequently, it is our responsibility to cultivate a collaborative work culture that privileges the contributions of ISWs, viewing them as essential, rather than auxiliary, team members; ISWs should be granted a permanent, stable position within the team.

- **Advocacy efforts represent another piece of the puzzle in supporting beneficiaries, and therefore time and energy should be devoted to them**. Professionals accompanying refugees through their integration journey become witnesses to the challenges they face, the obstacles that the context itself generates, and, often, the violation of their rights. Shedding light on these elements, while providing concrete proposals for improvement, is an important step in creating a more hospitable and supportive integration framework. While advocacy is often left to the discretion of the professional, perceived as a secondary means of support or overlooked entirely, it is in fact an essential tool for facilitating positive change and should be integrated into all interventions.

Epilogue

Having reached the conclusion of the 'Paths to Integration' initiative, many of the questions that we initially posed around integration remained unanswered, or rather open, while others emerged unexpectedly. At any rate, it was never our intention to 'solve' this complex and multidimensional issue, but rather, to inject knowledge and experience into this increasingly fraught conversation.

Our experience over the past three years has illustrated that unique paths require fertile ground. In other words, a centralised integration structure offering long-term, multilevel support is essential in allowing newcomers to develop comfort and self-sufficiency and contribute to the host society. Of equal importance is that this structure includes many voices and perspectives. Voices not relegated to the narrative of newcomers 'taking' from the host society, but rather speaking of what newcomers 'bring' and 'can offer' in future.

As a team, we are grateful to the people we supported, and the learnings we derived from this process. We learned, for instance, that refugeehood is only a part of a greater whole, which is experienced differently by each individual. We learned that vulnerability and resilience co-exist in people, that bearing witness to the stories of others increases our humanity, and that, perhaps, integration is made possible when a refugee transcends this status and is recognised as a person, and only a person…

APPENDIX

Challenges and Supports Grid

The following grid can be used to monitor the pressures and challenges that people face due to their condition and the consequences deriving from it, as well as the supports they have and can utilise in response. The grid serves as a tool by which the professional can assess and document information relevant to the person being supported. It can also be completed in collaboration with the person and have a more 'therapeutic' function as a result.

In the first column, we include any challenges faced by the individual. These encompass challenges pertaining to basic needs, as well as challenges of medical, psychological, spiritual, social, and relational nature, among others.

Challenges are categorised as follows:

- Challenges that the person had to deal with in the past and is still facing
- Pre-existing challenges that have been intensified or affected by the person's current situation (for instance, issues relating to the Covid-19 pandemic)
- New challenges that have emerged because of transitioning to the host context

In the left column, we document the primary sources of support and guidance available to the person to construct meaning and manage challenges. These sources include, but are not limited to, the following categories:

Intra-individual: personal characteristics; management strategies; defence mechanisms; past experiences; motivations, strengths, abilities, and skills; systems of meaning attribution, etc.

Interpersonal: family; significant others; support structures; group and community networks; the broader social context, etc.

Socio-political, cultural, spiritual: socio-political circumstances; issues of access, appropriateness and suitability of services and organisations; access to rights and opportunities; the dominant social narrative; issues of faith, religion, spirituality, culture; political, philosophical, ideological, and other beliefs, etc.

These sources may be pre-existing or have newly emerged because of present challenges. Each category is therefore divided into pre-existing and newly emerged sources.

Challenges	Sources & Supports		
		Pre-existing Sources	Newly Emerged Sources
	Intra-individual		
	Interpersonal		
	Socio-political, Cultural, Spiritual		
		Pre-existing Sources	Newly Emerged Sources
	Intra-individual		
	Interpersonal		
	Socio-political, Cultural, Spiritual		