

Curing the Limbo - From apathy to active citizenship: Empowering refugees and migrants in limbo state to ignite housing affordability

13.000
refugees are currently estimated to be living in the City of Athens.
20.12%
of the City of Athens' population is without a job (Greece's unemployment rate is at 20.6%, the highest unemployment rate in the EU)
30,85%
of Athens' total housing/apartment stock remains vacant. The municipality has mapped over 1.800 empty buildings in the city center alone.
2.900
citizen led activities have been connected to the city's civil society platform "synAthina".
Within the last 4 years, 360 active community groups have been submitting their solutions to the local city needs.

"Curing the Limbo" is a program aiming to implement a dynamic and innovative model for integration that allows refugees to become socially active. This can be achieved through attending courses in Greek, English, Creative Expression and ICT, gaining access to affordable housing, and receiving professional counseling services tailored to their needs. Refugees are thus integrated in the life of the city, by interacting with active citizen groups and participating in public events held in the neighbourhoods of Athens. In coming together, the refugees and the city exit their "limbo" state, boosting activity, cooperation, and co-existence.

"Athens has been addressing the refugee issue in an exemplary manner, which first and foremost honors and respects human rights. At the same time, our chief concern lies in ensuring the orderly functioning of the city and the residents' everyday life. In this light, the "Curing the Limbo" program aspires to bring together active citizens and refugees who have received asylum through mutually beneficial joined initiatives. Blending educational courses, affordable housing, and citizen-led activities across the neighbourhoods of Athens forms a novel, meaningful relationship between new and existing residents, thus realizing social cohesion. — Georgios Kaminis, Mayor of Athens

The Challenge addressed

The problem identified by Athens is the long-term inactivity that characterises a large part of its recently arrived refugee population, adding up to a similar condition of its own local unemployed people. This is one of the "limbo" aspects pointed out in the city of Athens, which in its eighth consecutive year of crisis witnesses a growing number of properties remaining vacant, topping to the overall isolation all of its inhabitants equally experience.

We estimate that about 13.000 refugees reside currently in the municipality of Athens, a city they did not choose as a final destination, stranded after the closing of the borders. They need to find incentives and motivation to become part of the society, despite the unevenness of the surrounding reality, where the rate of local unemployment exceeds 20%, the highest among the EU countries.

The challenge is how to activate the refugee population, capitalising on the vibrant civil society of Athens that has been spreading in the city offering its intelligence to the emerging pressing urban needs. Using these invaluable results at the opposite end of the crisis we aim to overturn the established inertia and offer positive impact to the city at a wider scale.

The solution proposed

The “Curing the Limbo” project capitalises on Athens’ vibrant civil society to help refugees and the local unemployed to overcome the stage of inertia. The programme develops around a circular “gift” system, addressing the twofold issue of both housing and inactivity: Refugees receive affordable living spaces from the city’s available housing stock and in return, they work for the public benefit, supporting the needs of the local community and participating in citizen-led activities that improve quality of life in Athenian neighborhoods.

Beneficiaries receive on-the-job training supervised by the University of Athens, which includes language learning, psychosocial support, “street law” knowledge and other basic social and soft skills. These skills are tailored to the beneficiaries’ needs and are offered in an integrated way, during which other parallel activities are also gradually introduced. The modality of exchange is developed around the incentives given both to tax-paying proprietors of currently empty spaces as well as to the beneficiaries through their integrated inclusion in the city.

Partners:

- Municipality of Athens
- Athens Development and Destination Management Agency S.A
- National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
- Catholic Relief Services - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Greek Branch
- The International Rescue Committee (IRC Hellas)

Expected Results

“Curing the Limbo” is an inclusive integration initiative to help refugees and the underprivileged to move from apathy to motivation, create strong bonds with the local

communities, acquire new skills, solve local problems together with active citizens, improve the quality of life in the neighborhoods and build self-confidence and self-respect, qualities essential for their development as responsible people and citizens in society.

At the end of the three-year period, programme beneficiaries will be given the possibility to afford housing, access to a network of active and engaged local people, and even the possibility to move on with some form of employment related to their newly acquired skills, with the support of professionals. 375 people are expected to be housed through 75 affordable housing units and more than 200 people will attend Greek language courses and ICT courses. It is however expected that many more people will benefit from the programme's cyclical exchange rationale. Seed funding and community work will help the programme beneficiaries interact with over 100 local stakeholders and citizens' led initiatives, leaving an undeniable impact on the city.

Images

ATHENS, MY NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD: The pilot integration program #CuringtheLimbo together with #synAthina and the City of Athens organized a special celebration in the heart of the city on the occasion of World Refugee Day. The event aimed to present good practices across the civil society, to connect refugees and active citizens in neighborhoods across Athens and to create new collaborative actions opportunities for the long-term benefit of the city itself.



Syrian and Greek Youth Forum



Community Lunch



Curing the Limbo programme



Co-creation exhibition



Children's games



Athens my new neighbourhood



Athens my new neighbourhood



Sharing food and stories from our countries