

Share Network

Share SIRA

Expanding social orientation and integration for newcomers in rural areas

Karditsa

REGIONAL FACTFILE

2021/22



This factfile was co-funded by the European Union (EU's) Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)

The content of this factfile represents the views of the author and is their sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for any derivative use of the information it contains.

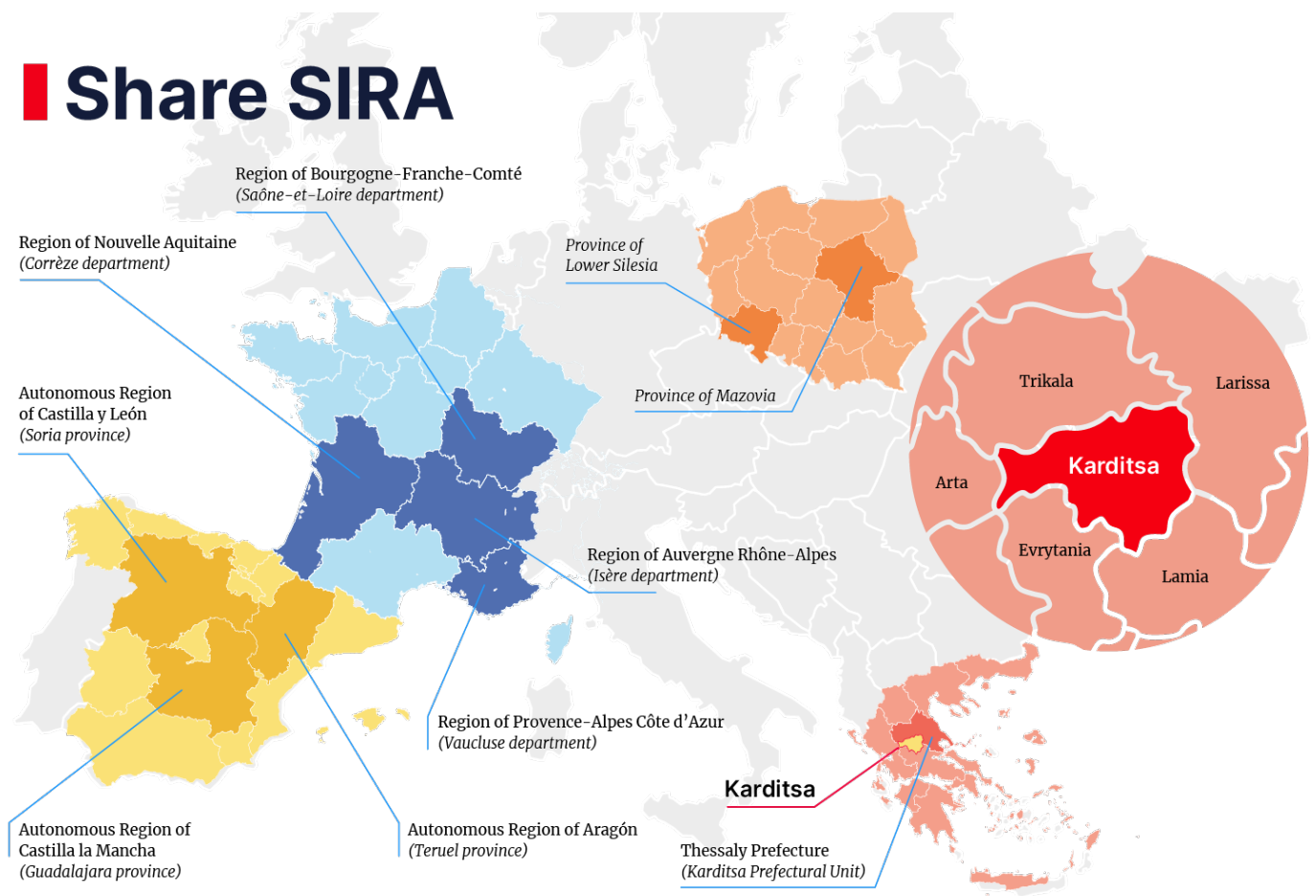
Index

➤ Karditsa	3
➤ 1. Overview of the territory	4
➤ 2. Migration and asylum: Key facts and figures	5 - 7
➤ 3. Political framework	8 - 9
➤ 4. Reception centres	10 - 11
➤ 5. Key stakeholders	12
➤ 6. Social orientation and integration projects	13 - 14
➤ 7. Share SIRA pilot action	15 - 16
➤ 8. Bibliography	17
➤ 9. Annex: Stakeholder descriptions	18 - 19

Karditsa

This factfile provides an overview of Karditsa region* in Greece and its refugee and migratory flows. Created within the framework of the Share SIRA project, the file also presents the political framework, key actors, challenges and innovative initiatives related to the reception and integration of migrants and refugees in Karditsa. All the information provided comes from the contributions of Karditsa's multi-stakeholder platform, which is composed of local and regional authorities, service providers, public employment bodies, NGOs, migrant-led organisations and others.

The **Share SIRA** project fosters inclusive territorial approaches for welcoming and integrating newcomers at 10 rural sites across five European countries. In addition to Karditsa, Share SIRA works in Spain (Guadalajara, Teruel and Soria), France (Corrèze, Isère, Vaucluse and Saône-et-Loire) and Poland (Mazovia and Lower Silesia). Their approaches and pilot actions will be implemented from January 2021 to February 2023, and they are co-funded by the European Union's (EU's) Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).



***Note:** Within the framework of the Share SIRA project, the word 'region' is used as a generic term to achieve consistency among the four countries. However, in Greece, regions are also referred to as prefectures, which are further divided into prefectural/regional units.

1. Overview of the territory

Karditsa Prefectural Unit (KPU) is one of 74 prefectural units in Greece. It belongs both geographically and administratively to Thessaly prefecture — one of 13 across the country. More specifically, KPU is one of the five prefectural units housed within Thessaly prefecture. The capital of KPU is the homonymous **city of Karditsa**, which has a population of 32,031 inhabitants and is the **largest municipality in KPU**. The prefectural unit is further divided into six municipalities (Karditsa, Sofades, Palamas, Mouzaki, Plastira Lake and Argithea).

KEY FACTS:

Main city:

Karditsa

Surface area:

2,576 km²

Number of inhabitants:

113,070 people

Number of third-country nationals:

KPU: 1,200

Karditsa city: 1,100

About 1,200 third-country nationals are legal and permanent residents in KPU, according to the Residence Permits Directorate of Foreigners and Immigration of the Decentralized Administration of Thessaly, Central Greece. Migrants mainly come from Albania, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Serbia, Belarus and China. Out of these 1,200 persons, about 1,100 (92%) live in Karditsa Municipality.

Territorial challenges

Third-country nationals tend to be concentrated in urban areas. One of the main challenges in the KPU is to create incentives for newcomers to relocate from cities to rural areas by providing greater employment opportunities (particularly in the agricultural sector), housing and improved access to healthcare. Consequently, the challenge is to demonstrate to third-country nationals that there are significant opportunities for employment and residence in rural areas in specific sectors with a high demand for unskilled labour, such as in agriculture/constructions/home care, as well as low living costs.



Author: Anka. Seasonal refugee workers in the agricultural sector.

2. Migration and asylum: Key facts and figures

The history of migration in Greece and Karditsa region

1980

- First wave of refugees arrive from Palestine.

1990

- Significant flow of migrants from Eastern European countries including Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and especially Albania.
- Albanian migrants become heavily involved in construction and agriculture. They begin establishing strong links in Greece; many second and third generation Albanian migrants will become highly skilled and successful entrepreneurs working in handicrafts and construction.

2010-2021

- Influx of third-country nationals arrive from Pakistan and Bangladesh for seasonal agricultural work.
- In 2020, 26,818 people were granted international protection status while 8,505 were granted subsidiary protection status.
- In 2020 most of migrants with residence permits were originally from Albania, China and Georgia.

2015-2021

- Mediterranean refugee crisis begins, resulting in a significant influx of refugees in Greece.

Quick facts on migration and asylum in Greece and the KPU

Current status of migration and asylum in Greece (2021)

According to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA), 2,463 persons seeking asylum arrived while 4,027 departed from Greece during the first 4 months of 2021. The total number of asylum seekers in April of that year was 55,493, of whom 21% resided on the islands and 79% on the mainland. This number was down from the previous year which recorded 92,909 total asylum seekers.

Of the total asylum seekers in 2021, 10,233 reside in Reception and Identification Centres (RICs/KYT), 20,975 in urban areas under the ESTIA II accommodation program and 24,285 at other sites (usually outside of the cities).

Between January and April 2021, Greece registered 8,109 new asylum applications; 4,949 people were granted international protection status and 2,068 were granted subsidiary protection status.

Additional MoMA statistics published in April 2021 reported that there were 758,701 third-country nationals legally residing in Greece out of which 53,268 had refugee status.

Current status of migration and asylum in KPU (2021)

In April 2021, 1,100 permanent and lawful migrants lived in Karditsa city and some extra 100 permanent residents were scattered across all other KPU municipalities. The number of total migrants in KPU increases depending on the time of year because an estimated 2,500 migrants engage in seasonal agricultural jobs every year.

Most migrants come from Albania, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Serbia, Belarus and China.

Integration of migrants and refugees in KPU: Main challenges and needs

The **main obstacles** that newly arrived migrants face include:

1. **Lack of language skills** – either of the local language or of English as an internationally spoken language.
2. **Lack of vocational training.**
3. **Lack of a solid and efficient National Strategic Plan for the refugee community.** In November 2021 MoMA announced a National Strategic Plan for asylum seekers and recognized refugees; it remains to be seen how effective these policies will be and how they will be implemented in practice. This is the first national plan of its kind, despite the large influx of asylum seekers to Greece during the crisis of 2015–16. For migrants, there is a National Social Integration Strategy that was issued in July 2019, following revisions to the original document from 2013.
4. **Prejudices and biases** within the host community.
5. **Differences in culture and religion** between the refugee/migrant population and the locals.
6. **Lack of interest in integration** from the newcomer(s).

3. Political framework for the orientation and social integration of newcomers

At the national level

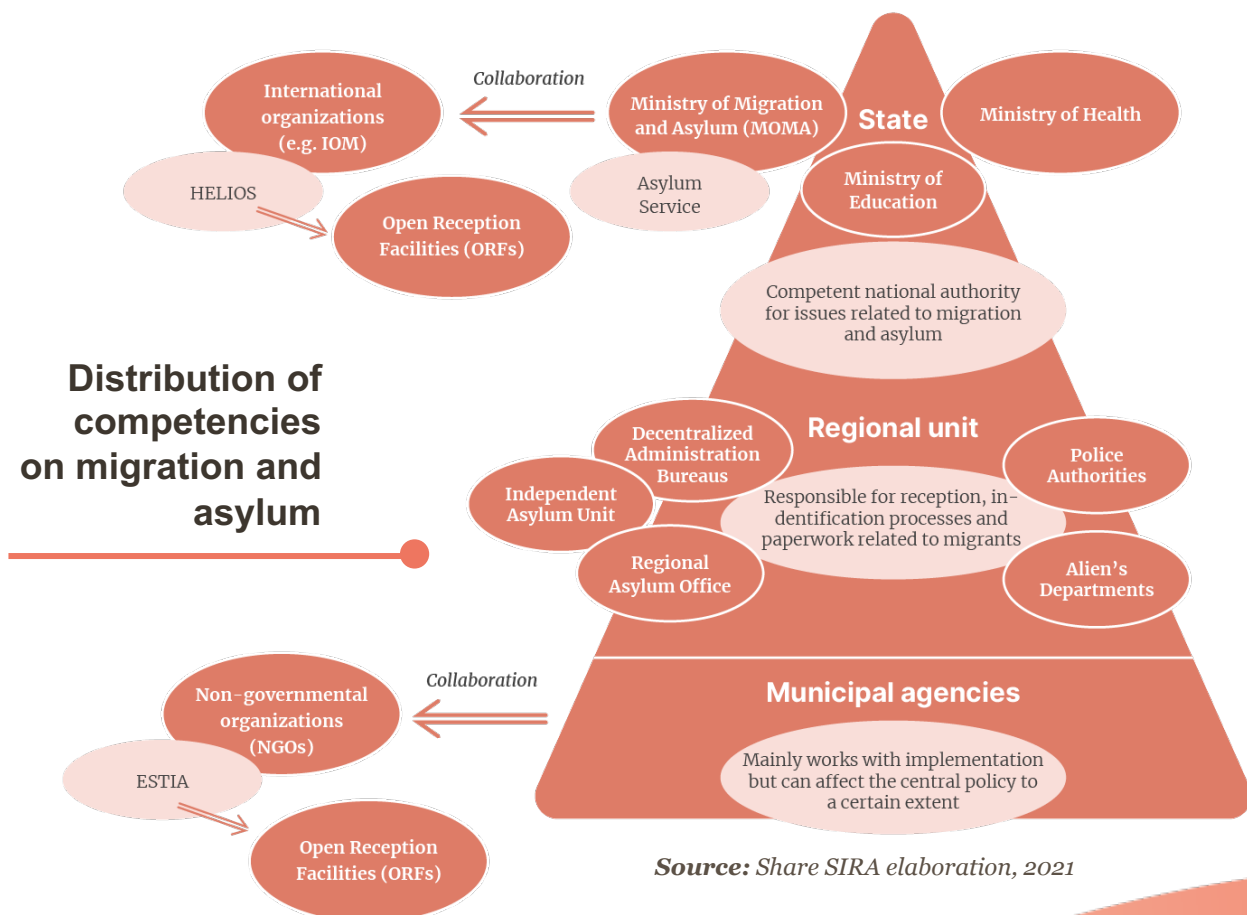
The Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA) is the national competent authority for issues related to migration and asylum in Greece. **The Asylum Service**, which falls under the MoMA umbrella, is in charge of interviewing asylum seekers and reviewing their applications; they decide whether to grant international or subsidiary protection status.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has also partnered with MoMA to welcome asylum seekers in Open Reception Facilities (ORFs).

In terms of health care, **the Ministry of Health** provides services to Greek citizens and asylum seekers equally. **The National Organization of Public Health (EODY)** also provides primary health services in most ORFs and is the organization responsible for vaccinating ORF residents against COVID-19.

Free access to education for all migrants and asylum seekers is granted through the Ministry of Education and its institutions.

Furthermore, MoMA launched a **national strategic plan** for the integration of refugees & asylum-seekers in November 2021. This much-needed government action expands on the current National Strategy for Social Integration of migrants, which was issued in July 2019.



At the regional level

MoMA works closely with the **Decentralized Administration Bureaus**, which fall under the Ministry of Internal Affairs and have offices in each regional unit across the country. The bureaus handle all the paperwork related to migrants alongside the police authorities and aliens' departments, which fall under the Ministry of Citizens' Protection. These departments are also responsible for issuing travel documents to refugees.

When third-country nationals have completed the reception and identification process, they are transferred to the Mainland Structures. From there, they are referred to the **Regional Asylum Office or the Independent Asylum Unit**, if they would like to request international protection. In case of a non-request for international protection, migrants are referred to the appropriate office for readmission, return or deportation, depending on the circumstances.

At the local level

Karditsa municipality is the only one out of six municipalities in KPU that has drafted a **Local Strategic Plan on Integration** for refugees and migrants in the area. Several actors are currently engaged with this draft including the local government of Karditsa municipality, Karditsa Development Agency (ANKA), IOM and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).



Together, these actors are also establishing an **urban working group** made up of regional stakeholders such as education secretariats, the Chamber of Commerce and the local unemployment centres.

4. Reception centres

There are no reception centres in KPU. However, there are two Open Reception Facilities (ORFs) in Thessaly Prefecture to which KPU belongs. One of the centres is located in Koutsochero, approximately 15 km away from Larissa municipality; it can house a maximum of 1,500 people. The second centre is at Volos, approximately 5 km away from Volos city in Magnesia Prefectural Unit (MPU); it has a maximum capacity of 150.

Although they do not have ORFs, Karditsa, Trikala and Larissa municipalities facilitate ESTIA II accommodation programs to host asylum seekers in their urban centres. These programs can host up to 460 (Karditsa), 420 (Trikala) and 420 (Larissa) persons (last data update: 31/12/2021).



Centre category	Name	Leading organization	Localization	Maximum capacity
 Open Reception Facilities (ORFs)	ORF Koutsochero	MOMA	Koutsochero, Lárisa Prefectural Unit	1500
	ORF Volos	MOMA	Volos, Magnesia Prefectural Unit	150
 ESTIA II accommodation programme	ESTIA II	ANKA	Karditsa	460
	ESTIA II	E-Trikala	Trikala	420
	ESTIA II	DIKEL	Lárisa	420

Ward migrant demographics in Karditsa

The ESTIA II program

Karditsa municipality has the largest ESTIA II accommodation program in Thessaly Prefecture. This AMIF-funded program provides accommodation to refugees through 71 apartments and supports their integration in local community life (last data update 31/12/2021).

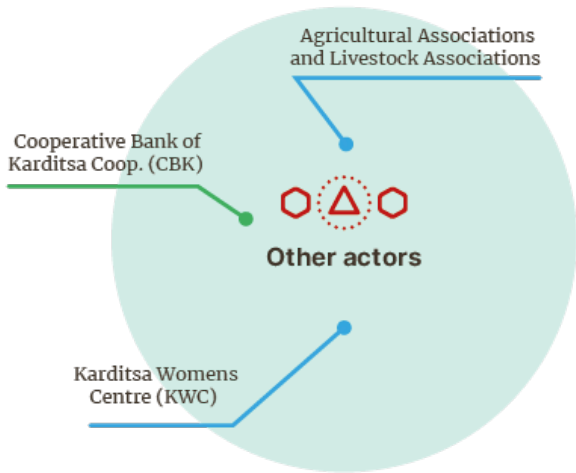
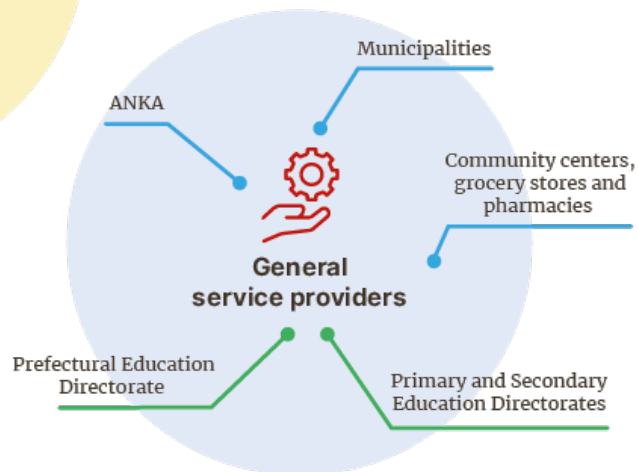
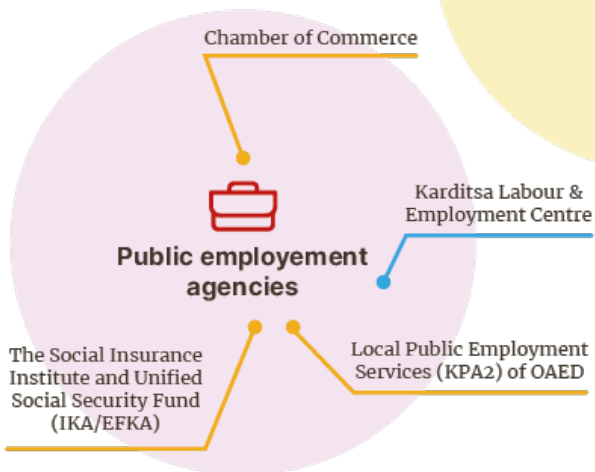
As of June 2021, 368 migrants were living in Karditsa's ESTIA II apartments including 95 adult males, 112 adult females and 161 children. This cohort of refugees came primarily from Algeria, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, Ghana and the Ivory Coast.

The HELIOS program

The HELIOS Programme is run by IOM and provides financial and cultural support to those with official refugee status. Their services include a basic living stipend, individual counselling sessions, cultural counselling for integration, access to employment opportunities and employer networks, job application training and certificate translation. According to an IOM report from June 2021 the HELIOS programme in Karditsa city was hosting 21 recognised refugees, 10 of which were minors.

Neither the ESTIA II or HELIOS programs work with unaccompanied refugee children in KPU.

5. Key stakeholders



- Local stakeholders
- Regional stakeholders
- National stakeholders
- International stakeholders

**Note: See the Annex (p. 18) for more detailed descriptions of each stakeholder.*

6. Social orientation and integration projects in Karditsa

Education

- ❖ **Arabic-speaking school:** started in 2019, this school was run by volunteer teachers from the refugee community and facilitated by ANKA. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) provided initial learning material to teachers. Additionally, local teachers and volunteers from the community still run a French-speaking school.
- ❖ **Greek language lessons by ANKA:** also started in 2019, this program caters to adults and minors, focusing on specific topics that are useful for refugees. For example, they may learn vocabulary that is relevant for driving-license exams and agricultural employment.
- ❖ **Integration Learning Centre (ILC):** the centre offers Greek language lessons and employment guidance for those with refugee status. It is run by IOM in partnership with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and under the framework of the HELIOS project.

Employment

- ❖ **Employer networking sessions for refugees (ad hoc basis):** this program creates a liaison with employers who are interested in recruiting refugees; interpretation can be facilitated.
- ❖ **Employment coaching sessions for unemployed asylum seekers and refugees:** in 2021, ANKA initiated this pilot program for people aged 18–29 who are excluded from Education, Employment and Training (NEETs), under the European “YES!” project. “YES!” is funded by the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway Grants and was initially targeted towards Greek citizens.

Community bonding and social mixing

- ❖ **Community mobilizers:** Starting in 2021, ESTIA II accommodation program designated **18 people** to serve as community mobilisers under the guidance of the UNHCR. UNHCR recently concluded its mobilizer training program, which sets out a code of conduct and plan for Prevention Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).
- ❖ **Home gardens:** refugees are encouraged to cultivate individual vegetable gardens at their homes. The produce from these gardens are sometimes shared with other members of the community.
- ❖ **Social events:** From 2018 to present, the community has organized bonding activities between locals and refugees such as **friendship tea** and women’s empowerment events through the Greek Women’s Association, the local Women’s Centre, which also provides psycho-social support to victims and survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). Other activities have included the 51st International Festival “**Karaiskakia**” in conjunction with the World Refugee Day. During the festival, ESTIA beneficiaries cooked and sold foods from their home countries and danced traditional dances in the town’s central park.
- ❖ **Cultural publications:** in 2020, ANKA published a collection of **fairy tales** —from members of the refugee community, including one from the local community — in Greek, French and Arabic. The costs of publication were covered by UNHCR.

Health

- ❖ **Free medical treatments:** between 2020–21, various stakeholders provided medical services to asylum seekers and refugees in the area. For example, the Hellenic Anti-Cancer Association offered free pap tests. Karditsa General Hospital offered vaccination for children aged 0–18, according to the National Vaccination Program; furthermore, the hospital initiated a cervical cancer awareness and outreach program, mother and baby health classes, and eye exams for 35 Arabic and French-speaking children aged 5–17. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Organization of Public Health (EODY) also provided free tests to ANKA beneficiaries.



Karditsa community centre running under ANKA/Intercultural Hub “Stavrodromi” meaning “Crossroads”.



Moments from the daily life of ANKA beneficiaries in Karditsa



Demonstration of folklore dances by Arabic-speaking and local minors at a public High School during the International Language Day.



Courses at the Arabic speaking school of ANKA (Mother Language School)

7. Share SIRA pilot action

Local communities are at the heart of creating welcoming spaces for newcomers to settle and thrive in. In July 2021, Share SIRA launched a call for proposals at each of the 10 rural regions featured in this factfile series. The winning proposal launched a pilot action to improve the orientation and early-integration outcomes for newcomers living in rural areas. Over a period of 10 months, these actions strive to put communities at the centre of innovative activities and initiatives that welcome and support migrants in their new homes.

In KPU, the selected pilot action is:

A website adaptation by the Karditsa Cooperative Bank (KCB). The updated site will facilitate and enable accessible web banking and financial information for migrants and refugees nationwide.

Located in KPU.

The proposed pilot action will include:

- 1. Translation of the bank's website into French and Arabic** (it is already available in Greek and English) as well as the enrichment of the website with useful financial information for refugees and migrants. The update will include information on payroll accounts, trademarks, debit cards, online purchases, access to public services via web-banking codes, foreign money transfers and web-banking services (e.g. mobile banking, business networking, potential support of business ideas etc.).
- 2. Translation of web-banking services into English, French and Arabic.**
- 3. Creation of QR-code information points** at the city hall, citizens' service centre and other public squares.

About Karditsa Cooperative Bank (KCB)

KCB was inaugurated as a credit cooperative in 1994 and evolved into a credit institution in 1998. It aims to support contract farmers' groups, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), general farmers and professionals. As a member of [the European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks and Financiers \(FEBEA\)](#), its focus is centred on the development needs of its clients, both individuals and enterprises. For KCB, each client is unique and should be assessed not solely based on their finances but also their social profile, activity and viability. The bank is proud to serve vulnerable social groups including women, Roma people, refugees, immigrants, youth and single-parent families through flexible banking products, services and partnerships that meet their needs. This special focus has made KCB a vital support in refugee and migrant integration by enabling these groups to more easily access the labour market.

Karditsa Cooperative Bank (KCB) was inaugurated as a Credit Cooperative in 1994 and evolved into a Credit Institution in 1998. It aims to support farmers' groups under contract farming, Small-Medium Enterprises, farmers and professionals. As a member of FEBEA – the European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks and Financiers (<https://febea.org>) – its main approach is centered around the individual/the enterprise and their development needs. For KCB each one is unique, so each one's needs are being assessed not solely based on their finances but also their social profile, activity and viability of an enterprise. WCB focuses on vulnerable social groups - women, Roma people, refugees / immigrants, youth, single-parent families - through flexible banking products, services and partnerships that meet their needs. The role of the Bank in the integration of refugees - immigrants in Karditsa has been vital since the latter are given the opportunity to access the Bank through short-term procedures which enable their access to the labour market.



8. Bibliography

MoMA (Ministry of Migration and Asylum). 2021a. *Statistics on international protection*. Greece: MoMA. <https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021.pdf>

MoMA. 2021b. *Statistics on legal migration*. Greece: MoMA. <https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/Statistics on Legal Migration/2021/.pdf>

MoMA. 2021c. Professional counselling. Greece: MoMA. Accessed 23 January 2022. <https://migration.gov.gr/en/migration-policy/integration/draseis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/epagelmatiki-symvoylevtiki/>

MoMA. n.d. Greek policy for social integration. Greece: MoMA. Accessed 23 January 2022. <https://migration.gov.gr/migration-policy/integration/politiki-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/>

OAED (Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization). n.d. Greece: OAED. Accessed 23 January 2022. <https://www.oaed.gr/>

Cover photo:

"Hotel Arni - Karditsa - Greece" by Ava Babili is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

9. Annex: Stakeholder descriptions



Public authorities

- **The Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA)** is the primary government agency responsible for the integration of refugees and migrants.



General service providers

- **At a local level, municipalities** are expected to provide migrants and refugees with the same services as they offer to regular citizens and other vulnerable groups (e.g., Roma people, disabled individuals, the unemployed and single-parent families). Municipal social departments and their sub-departments such as community centres, public groceries and pharmacies also provide support where necessary. Local community centres in particular offer useful information about how to access social services and allowances for all members of the community.
- **Karditsa Development Agency (ANKA)** engages in numerous projects which encourage social integration (e.g., ESTIA II accommodation program, “YES!” employment coaching-training-mentoring, Share SIRA project etc.)
- **The Primary and Secondary Directorate of Education** in Karditsa, along with the Prefectural Education Directorate based in Larissa, are responsible for ensuring young refugees and migrants have access to public schools of the region. These directorates also facilitate lifelong-learning centres for adult refugees and migrants.
- **The local hospital and the National Organization for the Provision of Health Services (EOPYY)** provide secondary and primary health care services, respectively. Specialized (tertiary) health services are provided at Larissa University Hospital. Additionally, the Mobile Mental Health Unit offers psycho-social support to refugees and migrants.



Public employment agencies

- **Local Public Employment Services (KPA2) of the Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization (OAED).** OAED contributes to the fight against poverty and helps unemployed individuals find and keep jobs. The KPA2 program of OAED operates at a local level; unemployed individuals may visit KPA2 centres to receive professional counselling job-search support. These centres are also in charge of issuing unemployment cards to local residents.
- **Karditsa labour and employment centre**, although not technically a public employment agency, is a non-profit organization that advocates for employee rights and protections, especially for those in the blue-collar working class.
- **The Chamber of Commerce** is also not strictly a public employment agency; however, it is a valuable reference point for enterprises seeking employees; this includes businesses who may be interested in recruiting migrants and refugees.
- **The Social Insurance Institute and Unified Social Security Fund (IKA/EFKA)** are also engaged in ensuring that labour legislations are respected. If not, these institutions impose fines on those violating the law.



Civil society

- **International organizations:** the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has appointed an Associate Liaison Expert to support Karditsa municipality's efforts on the social inclusion and integration of refugees. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with other NGOs, is also running the HELIOS project, which grants refugees with a living subsidy, helps them identify suitable housing, facilitates access to social services and offers skills training.
- **NGOs:** the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and INTERSOS work with IOM to implement the HELIOS project. For example, the DRC has established an Integration Learning Centre (ILC) that offers Greek language courses and fosters access to social services and employment. INTERSOS is responsible for helping refugees find housing by building networks and liaisons with local homeowners.
- **The Greek Forum of Refugees (GFR)** is a refugee-led organization located in Athens which is currently working closely with Karditsa municipality to establish a local Council for the Integration of Migrants and Refugees (SEM). This work is aligned with the 2010 and 2018 legislative obligations governing municipalities across the country.
- **The Greek Forum of Migrants** is a migrant-led organization working at a national level. However, they also assist municipalities to establish SEMs whenever there is lack.
- **Delegation of Refugees and Migrants:** this delegation is still in its early stages of development, and there were no official actions at the time of publication.
- **Local cultural associations and sports clubs** occasionally facilitate initiatives aimed at supporting vulnerable groups.
- **Local volunteers** assist with various civil society organizations including those listed above.



Other actors

- **Cooperative Bank of Karditsa Coop. (CBK) L.L.** is a regional cooperative bank geared towards financing rural economies, supporting local entrepreneurship and social economic projects and improving financial access for vulnerable social groups. CBK is member of the European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks and Financiers (FEBEA).
- **Karditsa Women's Centre (KWC)** is a local non-profit organization that provides psycho-social support, legal advice, guidance and counselling to women. The centre has an emphasis on "vulnerable" women such as migrants, refugees, victims or survivors of violence, single-headed households and others. KWC works closely with ANKA, which is one of its stakeholders.
- **Various agricultural and livestock associations** will often recruit refugees and migrants.