

Authors:**Jimena Leiva Roesch****Research Fellow at International Peace Institute**Email: leiva@ipinst.org**Cheryl He****Research Manager at Concordia**Email: cheryl.he.sh@gmail.com**SDGs4Peace**

International Peace Institute launched the SDGs4Peace project in 2016 to understand how the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is being rooted at the national and local levels and to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In its preamble, the 2030 Agenda states, "There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development." The SDGs4Peace project asks how countries are operationalizing this link in practice to realize the 2030 Agenda's holistic vision.

The project focuses on five case studies: the Gambia, Greece, Guatemala, Lebanon, and Myanmar. Each of these case studies is based on fieldwork, including interviews with representatives of governments, the private sector, academia, and civil society. While these countries are at different levels of development, each is going through a period of internal transformation. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda therefore provides them an opportunity not only to buttress existing aspirations but also to build new partnerships that transcend traditional approaches.

As many countries are only just starting to implement the 2030 Agenda, this project also presents an opportunity to spread the word about the SDGs and why they matter to local leaders and communities. By bridging the local with the global, it can highlight ways of working toward shared goals and adapting them to specific contexts.

This issue brief was drafted by Jimena Leiva Roesch and Cheryl He. The views expressed in this publication represent those of the authors and not necessarily those of the International Peace Institute or Concordia. IPI welcomes consideration of a wide range of perspectives in the pursuit of a well-informed debate on critical policies and issues in international affairs.

A Greek Recipe for Overcoming Crises: Can the SDGs Be Used as Ingredients?July 2017

Introduction

Despite internal and external pressures, economic recession, and severe reductions in social services, Greece has remained peaceful. People has found ways to weather a very long storm. However, international headlines have primarily focused on debt relief and refugees rather than on what people have been doing to creatively address day-to-day challenges, missing out on a powerful story of citizen-led sustainability.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its focus on “people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership,” offers a platform to challenge this narrative by adopting a new approach to Greece’s crises.¹ Through a holistic approach to sustainable development, Greece can complement its current debt relief measures with other priorities that have been neglected: generating inclusive economic growth by strategically focusing on its comparative advantages, increasing partnerships with civil society and the private sector, protecting and managing its cultural and natural wealth, strengthening its social services, and building a public sector with inclusive, transparent institutions. All of these priorities need attention for Greece to achieve sustainable development and lasting peace.

The universal application of the 2030 Agenda offers developed countries a new chance to review domestic policies. Contrary to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there is no country in the world that has met all the targets and indicators of the 2030 Agenda. Traditionally, the role of developed countries in the international community has been as donors; Greece is member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), provides overseas development assistance, and is a member of the EU. Like many other developed countries, has a long way to go to achieve many of the targets and indicators in the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda can be one of the tools to help Greece harness its potential and lift itself up.

The global financial crisis of 2007-2008 was a shock to Greece — a “cultural shock, financial shock, social shock, and physiological shock,” according to one Greek diplomat.² Greece’s institutions were not equipped to shield the country from the impact, provoking a government-debt crisis by late 2009. Facing the biggest budget deficit in the European Union and one of the biggest trade deficits in the world, Greece lost 45 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) between 2008 and 2015.³ The greatest impact was felt by the public, which faced sudden pension cuts, an increase in the national retirement age, delayed salary disbursement and reduced wages, restricted access to healthcare, and rising rates of poverty and hunger. According to one Greek author, “Many of the things that Greeks thought of as unthinkable were rapidly turned by the crisis into the order of the day, resulting in a profoundly disorienting effect.”⁴

On top of this, more than 1 million refugees and migrants have crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Greece since 2015. This influx of arrivals in Greece is often referred to as a “crisis within a crisis.” It has exerted pressure on the Greek Government and placed further stress on a country already beset with difficulties.

In the face of these crises, many Greeks agree that they need a new recipe for how to do things, one that is locally made and locally owned. Instead of working in silos, the Greek government must invest in building partnerships and increasing collaboration between the public and private sectors, both within and beyond its borders. The 2030 Agenda and its seventeen SDGs, unanimously adopted by UN member states in 2015, provides a platform for such collaboration and has generated optimism among various sectors in Greece (see Figure 1).

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Greece

¹ UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (October 21, 2015), UN Doc. A/RES/70/1.

² Interview with Greek official, Athens, Greece, February 20, 2017.

³ Data from World Bank, available at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=GR>.

⁴ Yannis Palaiologos, *The 13th Labor of Hercules: Inside the Greek Crisis* (London: Portobello Books, 2014), p. xvi.

Fortunately, Greece is not starting from scratch in implementing the 2030 Agenda. The government has already moved forward by putting in place multiple programs aimed at implementing the SDGs. Despite this progress, Greece's nine-year-long economic recession has had a deep impact on its population. Austerity measures have weakened social services, exacerbated poverty and income inequality, and decreased public morale. While such trends work against the goals of the 2030 Agenda, opportunities to make positive headway on implementation remain.

Responsibility for coordinating and monitoring national implementation of the SDGs in Greece has been delegated to the General Secretariat of the Government since December 2016. By assigning this responsibility to the General Secretariat, the government has given a high priority to the SDGs, as this entity is capable of ensuring a whole-of-government approach, reducing silos, cooperating directly with other governmental bodies and ministries, and working closely with parliament. In parallel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for the external dimension of national efforts, while the Ministry of Environment and Energy is "thematically/technically" responsible for the implementation of more than one-third of the SDGs (Goals 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 15, as well as part of Goal 14).

As of May 2017, the Greek government has finished mapping priorities and assigning responsibilities through an interministerial coordination network, which was established to better coordinate among ministries in implementing the SDGs. A national action plan scheduled for completion in 2018 will focus, inter alia, on revising existing legislation, strategies, and policies (like the 2016 development law and the 2014 partnership agreement with the European Commission); building on them; and, making them more "SDG aware" by improving their coherence and interactions. Moreover, it will identify a few key crosscutting priorities to pursue through new tools and arrangements designed to promote integration across different sectors. Given that there is increased momentum by all sectors to participate in the implementation of the SDGs, this top-down approach exhibited through the mapping exercise would benefit from being connected to bottom-up initiatives that are already addressing many of the SDGs in a holistic manner at city and local levels. Moreover, some interviewees highlighted that this mapping exercise needs to be better communicated and provide broader engagement opportunities throughout its development.⁵ According to civil society interviewees, the current NGO registry is outdated and therefore limits successful inclusion to the SDG planning and implementation by all relevant parties.⁶

At the international level, Greece will present its first national voluntary review at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2018. This event will provide the opportunity to present the challenges and progress made to members of the international community. Moreover, in 2018, the European Commission will also present the EU's implementation strategy outlining timelines, objectives and concrete measures to reflect the 2030 Agenda in all relevant EU internal and external policies. This regional approach should trigger greater alignment of national policies with this global framework.

Strengthening Governance and Service Delivery: Goals 1, 3, and 16

⁵ Civil society participants in roundtable at the Concordia Europe Summit, Athens, Greece, June 7, 2017.

⁶ Desmos, Ekavi Valleras, , Athens, Greece, June 7, 2017

Even though the EU has poured billions of euros into Greece, and it ranks twenty-ninth on the Human Development Index,⁷ almost one in four of Greece's citizens (22.2 percent) were reported as being "severely materially deprived" in 2015.⁸ This figure sits in stark contrast with the overall EU figure of 8.1 percent, and Greece is now the third poorest country in European Union.⁹ Multiple years of austerity cuts have worn down social protection mechanisms and other buffers to economic shock, such as strong family networks and social solidarity. The economic crisis also revealed the deficiencies of Greece's social protection system, including poor management.¹⁰ SDG 1 ("End poverty in all its forms everywhere") calls for improving social protection programs for the poor and vulnerable. Greece needs strengthened institutional capacity to put in place such programs and progress toward this goal.

Similarly, austerity policies have eroded Greece's once-functioning healthcare system. Health coverage of Greek citizens dropped from 100 percent in 2008 to 86 percent in 2015, the lowest of all countries in the OECD.¹¹ Severe funding cuts to the health sector have left hospitals struggling to procure medical equipment, basic supplies such as gauze pads, and critical vaccines and reduced the number of medical personnel. SDG 3 ("Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages"), which includes a target for achieving universal health coverage, could be an impetus for restoring Greece's healthcare system.

Improving social services and healthcare requires strengthening governance, including by making the public sector more productive and efficient and increasing accountability.¹² SDG 16 ("Promote just, peaceful, and inclusive societies") offers a framework for increasing transparency and building the public sector's capacity for managing services. One high-level Greek official noted that making the system less dependent on the top could increase ownership and accountability at all levels of governance. This bureaucratic shift from a top-down model is needed across all areas of the public sector, from healthcare and education to immigration. The increased visibility of the SDGs is encouraging the government to move toward such a bottom-up approach.¹³ It will be important to set up an inclusive mechanism in which civil society, academia, the private sector and other stakeholders actively participate in implementing the 2030 Agenda at local levels.

Corruption also continues to undermine public services in Greece. According to the 2014 EU anticorruption report, 93 percent of Greeks say that "bribery and the use of connections is often the easiest way of obtaining certain public services"—the highest in the EU—and 66 percent of Greek companies consider "corruption to be a problem for doing business."¹⁴ A number of countries, including in the EU, have undertaken anticorruption campaigns geared at improving

⁷ See <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/rankings.pdf>.

⁸ UN Development Programme, *2016 Human Development Report*, available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/GRC>.

⁹ Eurostat, "Severe Material Deprivation: Early Estimates for 2015," April 14, 2016, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7231454/3-14042016-BP-EN.pdf/837178ca-f682-4923-8627-27767201816d>.

¹⁰ Interview with Greek official, Athens, Greece, February 20, 2017.

¹¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "OECD Health Policy Overview: Health Policy in Greece," January 2016, available at www.oecd.org/greece/Health-Policy-in-Greece-January-2016.pdf.

¹² Interview with Greek official, Athens, Greece, February 28, 2017.

¹³ Interview with Greek official, Athens, Greece, February 20, 2017.

¹⁴ European Commission, *Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: EU Anti-Corruption Report*, February 3, 2014, available at https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/policies/organized-crime-and-human-trafficking/corruption/docs/acr_2014_en.pdf.

transparency and accountability of institutions. These have shown that reducing corruption can increase trust in government and contribute to building a peaceful and inclusive society and transparent and effective institutions, as envisioned in SDG 16.

Growing the GDP Pie: Goals 4, 8, and 9

According to a foreign journalist living in Greece, the previous economic reality will not be restored. Instead, the country must consider how it can move forward: “What can we do better than other countries? What are the relative strengths.... What kind of services can we provide? How could Greece take on or compete for a place in [the] broader digital economy?”¹⁵ A new strategic vision for the country is needed—one that builds on Greece’s rich historical and cultural legacy, strategic geographic location, resilience to shocks, and comparative advantages. As one Greek official conveyed, “Greece needs a new recipe, one that is locally made and locally owned.”¹⁶

While the economic recession has deeply impacted Greece’s population, the country has many comparative advantages that are not being fully utilized.¹⁷ The 2030 Agenda provides a platform for strategically leveraging Greece’s strengths, particularly through SDG 8 (“Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all”), which many interviewees highlighted as the highest priority for Greece. It is not difficult to understand why: more than 23 percent of the population is currently unemployed, and youth unemployment stands at almost 50 percent.¹⁸

The implications of unemployment extend beyond loss of income, also including loss of access to healthcare, pensions, and other benefits. According to one professor in Greece, this is also having an impact on the morale of youth, causing them to “lose confidence and optimism in the future.”¹⁹ As a result, Greece has experienced significant flight of human capital: since 2008, more than 427,000 Greeks, mostly young and educated, have left the country in search of greater economic opportunity abroad.²⁰ A recent study by the University of Macedonia highlights that this “brain drain” has had a severe impact on Greece, further lowering its already low birth rate, decreasing tax revenue, and significantly reducing human resources.²¹

Greece provides quality and free education covering from primary through tertiary, yet many educated Greeks are unable to find jobs in their home country. Nonetheless, Greece could become an attractive higher learning destination center if courses are designed fit the needs of international students.

¹⁵ Interview with Daniel Howden, Athens, Greece, February 22, 2017.

¹⁶ Interview with Greek official, Athens, Greece, February 20, 2017.

¹⁷ For a detailed assessment of these comparative advantages, see McKinsey & Company, “Greece 10 Years Ahead: Defining Greece’s New Growth Model and Strategy,” June 2012, available at www.mckinsey.com/greece/overview/greece-10-years-ahead.

¹⁸ Data from Trading Economics, accessed May 25, 2017, available at www.tradingeconomics.com/greece/youth-unemployment-rate.

¹⁹ Interview with a professor at the American College of Greece, Athens, Greece, February 21, 2017.

²⁰ “Greece Central Bank Reports ‘Brain Drain’ of 427,000 Young, Educated Greeks since 2008,” Deutsche Welle, July 2, 2016.

²¹ Lois Labrianidis, “Investing in Leaving: The Greek Case of International Migration of Professionals,” *Mobilities* 9, no. 2 (2014); Bank of Greece, “Summary of the Annual Report 2015,” pp. 16–17, available at www.bankofgreece.gr/BogEkdoseis/ekthdkth2015.pdf.

While this exodus of highly skilled job seekers is largely driven by the economic situation, it also highlights that the education system is not entirely matching the opportunities in the local labor market. Despite the high unemployment rate, most Greek businesses report difficulty filling positions, particularly trade vocations.²² The 2030 Agenda provides an opportunity to focus on the links between education and employment through SDGs 4 (“Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”) and 8. While universities in Greece traditionally focus on professions such as medicine and law, there is a need to create an expanded curriculum that is more attuned to market demands. Restructuring university curricula would deliver direct economic benefits at minimal cost—an area where implementing the SDGs could complement current austerity policies.

The private sector and civil society can also do more to match talent with opportunity. For example, the Bodossaki Foundation, a private foundation dedicated to health, education, the environment, and empowerment of civil society, offers a six-month paid internship program in Greek and European companies to undergraduate and graduate students in an attempt to reduce the talent drain.

The influx of refugees and migrants could provide another solution to this disconnect between skills and jobs, presenting an untapped talent pool. As an entrepreneur in Athens noted, “The refugee crisis is a brain gain,” adding that he had been looking at the refugee population to fill positions that the local population could not adequately fill.²³ The 2030 Agenda’s spirit of global cooperation should provide an opportunity to harness the capacities of refugees and migrants.

While the economic recession has caused many businesses to shrink or shut down, it has also created momentum for innovation. As stated by the director of the Bodossaki Foundation, “The crisis made us very creative.”²⁴ This highlights the links between SDG 8, on economic growth, and SDG 9 (“Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation”). Goal 9 calls for developing infrastructure that supports innovation and higher levels of productivity, which can be achieved by creating an environment conducive to entrepreneurship.

Such an environment can be achieved by establishing more innovation hubs and startup incubators that could help propel the economy forward. The startup scene, particularly for tech enterprises, has significantly grown in the last few years. One notable example is the Athens-based taxi-hailing app Taxibeat, which has attracted interest from foreign investors, including the German company Daimler. The recession has also lowered rent costs, allowing young entrepreneurs to set up new businesses in rental spaces they previously could not have afforded. Moreover, according to one journalist, there are many Greek software engineers, and while a significant number of them leave, many would prefer to live in Greece, even if paid less. This presents an opportunity for Greece to become a hub for software engineering by attracting international investors, thus creating employment opportunities. Such a hub could not only help prevent the country’s current brain drain but also draw talent from other countries.²⁵ As noted by one Greek economist, however, “No single project can lift the economy.” Economic recovery has to be multilayered and multi-sectoral.

²² ManpowerGroup, “2016/2017 Talent Shortage Survey,” available at www.manpowergroup.com/talent-shortage-explorer/#.WSbwFdy1uUk.

²³ Interview with Panos Moraitis, Athens, Greece, February 21, 2017.

²⁴ Interview with Sotiris Laganopoulos, managing director of Bodossaki Foundation, Athens, Greece, February 22, 2017.

²⁵ Interview with Daniel Howden, Athens, Greece, February 22, 2017.

Moreover, more foreign investment and entrepreneurship are only possible with a conducive policy environment, and it is challenging for Greece to make the necessary reforms when its resources are so constrained. The austerity measures prescribed by the EU, International Monetary Fund, and European Central Bank are highly controversial in Greece. Some believe it was not the austerity measures but the lack of timely implementation by the government that plunged the country into economic crisis. Others believe that the measures “imposed” by these three institutions were impossible to meet.²⁶

Regardless, the SDGs may become an important counterbalance to the austerity measures. The SDGs present a timely opportunity to address both the short- and long-term needs of the population and aspirations to take a more sustainable and balanced approach to development. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda, if correctly financed, can complement the current austerity measures, including by stimulating investment. According to one Greek professor, “Implementing the SDGs does not divert attention away from the current [economic] adjustment program but can in fact even facilitate the program’s achievement, provided that the SDGs do not incur net new expenditures.”²⁷ However, others were of the view that that the SDGs require up-front financial investments but believe that these costs can be reduced or shared across implementing entities. Since the SDGs are intentionally interconnected, a project focused on gender equality and women’s empowerment (Goal 5), for example, can be connected with a number of other goals such as reducing poverty (SDG 1), increasing job employment (SDG 8), and improving health (SDG 3). If policies are designed with such an interconnected mindset then the costs can be shared across ministries and supported by a variety of stakeholders. Moreover, in the long-term, such up-front investments could result in net savings and returns both in the medium and long term, further minimizing the costs associated with the 2030 Agenda.

Box 1. Sustainable tourism and community development: Target 8.9

One of the most resilient sectors that has managed to survive through the recession has been tourism. Tourism is responsible for around one-fifth of Greece’s annual GDP and has a large number of associated industries such as the wine industry. Target 8.9 aims to “devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.”

However, Greece’s peak tourist season lasts only about five months out of the year. Such a short tourist season constrains local business owners from making investments that could improve service quality and increase income. Rather than limiting tourism to the summer months, Greece could create a year-round tourism industry. Greece could tap into its multitude of natural resources: hiking and wine tasting trips can take place in the spring and fall and even through the mild winters, high mountains could host ski resorts with stunning views; and island olive orchards could make for quiet retreats outside of the summer months. To make Greece a year-round vacation destination, the government could consider offering financial incentives to encourage businesses in the tourism industry to invest in such strategies or could build infrastructure to improve service delivery. Greater marketing of religious tourism packages could also become a very important attraction for many orthodox

²⁶ Interview with professor at the American College of Greece, Athens, Greece, February 21, 2017.

²⁷ Ibid.

Catholics from Balkan countries and Russia.

For this type of scheme to work, however, the government would need to increase transparency and build trust between the public and private sectors. It would also have to adjust the legal framework to incentivize businesses investment.

Partnering for the SDGs: Goal 17

Goal 17 (“Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”) is critical to Greece’s ability to achieve the SDGs. Partnerships under this goal include intra-governmental partnerships, partnerships between the national and municipal governments (see next section), public-private partnerships, and cooperation between the government and civil society.

Within the Greek government, the 2030 Agenda is providing new opportunities for interministerial and cross-sectoral collaboration in designing more coherent policies on sustainable development. According to Greek officials interviewed, a new culture of interministerial collaboration is developing, and there is greater political will to work together toward the SDG targets than there had been for the MDGs. For example, several ministries are discussing links between the environment and education by promoting educational programs on sustainable development in schools. Other ministries are looking at the impact of pollution and climate change on the health of vulnerable populations and how environmental policies can reduce this impact. Municipalities have also become important centers of activity for raising awareness of and implementing the SDGs. In 2016, for example, the historic Athens Marathon was divided into seventeen segments, each representing one of the SDGs, in order to raise awareness of their importance.²⁸

Since the implementation of the SDGs transcends the responsibilities of the government, the government has sought to build strong partnerships with all relevant stakeholders since the start of the implementation process, including with the Parliament, the public administration, local authorities, civil society, and the private sector. The General Secretariat of the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Environment and Energy, in cooperation with the private sector and civil society, launched a series of multi-stakeholder meetings since May 2016 to exchange ideas and best practices. As national efforts enter the “operational” phase, a concrete mechanism for consulting with stakeholders will be designed to ensure regularity of structured consultations, transparency, awareness at all levels, partnerships, and accountability. However, interviewees highlighted that this effort needs to be expanded to wider networks and stakeholders beyond traditional partners.

The SDGs are changing the way the government, civil society, academia, and private sector engage. Maria Alexiou, President of the Corporate Social Responsibility Network (CSRN), has been pleasantly surprised by the reaction of the business community on the SDGs. CSRN organized an event for business and the SDGs in March 2017, and they “never expected to have more than 500 registered, mostly by the business community in Greece”. Despite most of them facing severe financial constraints in the current economic climate, they still participated. However, Alexiou stressed that “to maximize synergies and match resources, governments, civil society, the private sector needs to have the maturity and readiness to co-plan and co-operate.”

²⁸ Interview with official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, Greece, February 20, 2017.

Goal 17 is also critical to rebalancing the heavy burden of service delivery away from the public sector. Civil society organizations and private corporations have continued to provide safety nets in Greece, even as austerity measures cut back government services. In Athens, for example, food banks managed by the Red Cross, soup kitchens run by the Orthodox Church, and community churches help to cover people’s basic needs. A volunteer-run mobile laundry van in Ithaca provides the homeless with a place to clean up.

However, the potential for partnerships is undermined by the lack of trust in the government, particularly on the part of the private sector. According to one businesswoman, “big gaps of trust” exist due to the slow judicial system and unclear legal framework for investing in Greece, which creates “uncertainty not only for investors but also for citizens Maria Alexiou also noted that this lack of legal clarity undermines the fight against corruption by making it “easy not to be in compliance with the law.”²⁹ The SDGs can, if successfully leveraged through public-private partnerships, become a vehicle to rebuild trust in the government.³⁰

Box 2. A new approach to partnerships: Goals 2 and 17

The Act4Greece platform is one example of how the public and private sectors are working together to achieve the SDGs. Despite Greece’s increasing poverty rate, there were legal barriers to using food waste and to crowdfunding. In order to address this challenge, parliament changed a 1920s-era law to allow crowdfunding, and a bank introduced Act4Greece as a new platform to crowdfund for programs like the distribution of lunch boxes to underprivileged school children.³¹

Empowering Local Leadership: Goal 11

“The real energy is at the municipality level,” according to one journalist in Greece.³² While the central government has been primarily focused on debt relief, municipalities have become important centers of transformative activities connected with people’s needs. These include a range of activities related to many of the SDGs, including climate action, youth employment, poverty reduction, and sustainable investment. At the same time, many municipalities in the eastern Aegean islands have been called upon to address the influx of refugees and migrants at the local level.

The mayors of the two largest municipalities in Greece, Athens and Thessaloniki, have demonstrated strong leadership in addressing the most pressing challenges with clear and ambitious vision. The economic crisis has driven both cities to forge new cross-sector partnerships. It has also generated new thinking and new approaches to city development. For example, both cities are part of the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities network.³³ Before 2012, sustainability was mostly equated with environmental protection and action to address climate change and was the responsibility of the ministry of environment. The 100

²⁹ Interview with representative of the Corporate Social Responsibility Network, Athens, Greece, February 28, 2017.

³⁰ Concordia Roundtable, Athens, Greece, June 7, 2017.

³¹ Interview with Maria Alexiou, president of the Corporate Social Responsibility Network, Athens, Greece, February 28, 2017.

³² Interview with journalist, Athens, Greece, February 22, 2017.

³³ See www.100resilientcities.org/#/-/.

Resilient Cities Network advocates a holistic approach to sustainability, encompassing a wide range of issues such as education, health, sustainable human settlements, and employment. The network has brought the SDGs to the foreground in city planning.

In Athens and Thessaloniki, this approach is reflected in increased consultation with citizens as part of the spatial and urban planning process, leading to more open, democratic, and inclusive decision making and reducing mistrust between civil society and the public sector. For example, the chief resilience officer in Athens conducted a survey asking residents what makes their city resilient. The answers pointed to the need to overcome threats such as the impact of earthquakes, heatwaves, and flashfloods, as well as the eruption of violence in the city since the economic crisis. The municipality distilled the survey results into thirty-five priorities, which are the basis for the city's resilience plans.³⁴

The biggest challenge for both municipalities is governance. One official in Thessaloniki mentioned that “to build something [in the municipality] we have to take a thousand steps to do it.”³⁵ Greece does not have metropolitan authorities above the level of local municipalities, and there is no coordinating body between the municipal level and the regional authorities that control funding allocation. This can lead to competing interests and an inability to scale up projects. Decentralizing governance and empowering local leaders could allow municipalities to address multiple challenges in an integrated manner. For example, mayors could address poverty by ensuring access to renewable energy (Goal 7), which in turn could create jobs (Goal 8) and address climate change (Goal 13).

Athens and Thessaloniki are also seeking to make themselves more peaceful and inclusive (Goal 16). For example, one of the priorities for the mayor of Thessaloniki is to create a network with neighboring countries such as Albania, Bulgaria, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to strengthen the multicultural identity of the city, thereby reducing tensions. This makes Athens and Thessaloniki early implementers of Goal 16 (“Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies”). This transformation is due to the strategic vision and leadership of the mayors and buy-in from the communities.

Box 3. The “Anavra miracle”: A local recipe for sustainable development and peace

In contrast to the rest of the country, residents of Anavra, a village in central Greece, enjoy high income and no unemployment or crime. The village has the infrastructure needed to provide for its community, including roads, a wind farm, and schools. Just ten years ago, however, Anavra was disconnected from the rest of the country. The town had no access to running water, and its population lived in very poor conditions. It took the leadership of Dimitris Tsoukalas, who was elected mayor in 2010, to transform the village into what it is today. With a vision to improve the quality of life in the community, he charted a plan to leverage the comparative advantages of Anavra. Along with the trust and involvement of the local community, Tsoukalas secured the investments needed to shift the town's economy, including significant EU subsidies incentivizing sustainable development. While this story cannot simply be replicated in more populated areas, it illustrates that leadership is a key ingredient in lifting local communities out of recession.³⁶

³⁴ Interview with Eleni Myrivili, Athens, Greece, February DATE 2017.

³⁵ Interview with representative of Thessaloniki municipality, Thessaloniki, Greece, February 23, 2017.

³⁶ Clark Boyd, “Small Mountain Village Is a Greek Success Story,” Public Radio International, available at www.pri.org/stories/2011-10-20/small-mountain-village-greek-success-story .

Refugees and Migrants: Crisis or Opportunity?

Some of the core principles in the 2030 Agenda are leaving no one behind, reaching the furthest behind first, and making every life count.³⁷ These principles apply to everyone everywhere, particularly people on the move fleeing violence and persecution and those seeing better economic opportunities. In 2015—the year the 2030 Agenda was adopted—the world experienced a sharp increase in the number of people on the move. 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced, 21.3 million of whom are refugees.³⁸ The 2030 Agenda’s strong commitment to resolving the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century through multilateralism can serve as a platform to support refugees and migrants in transit and host countries. Moreover, target 10.7 calls for facilitating “orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.”³⁹

Greece and Italy have been the main points of entry for migrants and refugees into Europe. Since 2015, more than 1 million refugees and migrants have crossed into Greece, many of them Syrians, but also Iraqis, Afghans, Pakistanis, and Africans.⁴⁰ In 2016 around 37 percent of arrivals in Greece were children, and 21 percent were women.⁴¹

The scale and rhythm of this migration to Greece has added pressure to a system already under stress from the economic recession. Despite the difficulties of hosting these arrivals, Greece never closed its borders. Greece’s experience with previous influxes of refugees and migrants, like those following World War II and the collapse of the Soviet Union, has built its capacity to absorb people seeking refuge and work. Moreover, the public system was greatly supported by a surge of volunteers, both locally and from all over the world, who offered to help on the shoreline, in the reception centers, or by offering food and clothing.

However, Greece, just like any other country, could not cope with the scale of arrivals on its own. As recognized in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which the UN General Assembly adopted in September 2016, this is not a Greek issue, or even a European issue, but a global one. According to an official from the Greek government, “The management of the refugee and migration crisis is the responsibility of the international community as a whole, which recognizes that the challenges related to large movements of refugees and migrants can only be addressed through effective cooperation among countries of origin, transit, and destination.”⁴²

Greek officials noted that there are officially about 560,000 migrants legally residing in Greece. Of refugees arriving since 2015, about 62,000 remain in Greece, about 9,600 of whom are

³⁷ UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (October 21, 2015), UN Doc.A/RES/70/1.

³⁸ Data from UN High Commissioner for Refugees, available at www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html.

³⁹ UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (October 21, 2015), UN Doc.A/RES/70/1.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Clayton, “More Than One Million Refugees Travel to Greece since 2015,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees, March 16, 2016, available at www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/3/56e9821b6/million-refugees-travel-greece-since-2015.html?query=global%20figures%20on%20refugees.

⁴¹ UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM, “Refugee and Migrant Children—Including Unaccompanied and Separated Children—in the EU: Overview of Trends in 2016,” April 2017, available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/55971>.

⁴² Interview with official from Ministry of Migration, Athens, Greece, February 28, 2017.

beneficiaries of international protection.⁴³ The situation on the mainland and in the islands is drastically different. Refugees on the mainland are receiving support and being relocated from camps to apartments to help stabilize and integrate them; those on the islands lack similar support infrastructure, and their next steps are subject to the EU-Turkey agreement on refugees. Under this agreement, they can apply for asylum and await the relevant decision, return to their country of origin, or return to Turkey. The procedures for obtaining asylum under the current system are extremely complex, which is a challenge for refugees and implementers alike.

Greece is facing a “crisis within a crisis”—economic recession on top of the uncertain future of thousands of refugees stranded in the country. While the EU has provided Greece with resources to manage the refugee crisis, funding is not always used efficiently and effectively. Public institutions in Greece lack the capacity to absorb the significant funding necessary to provide adequate reception centers.⁴⁴ This has led to situations that could have been avoided, such as lack of preparation for the winter months and insufficient protection for unaccompanied minors. Moreover, while migrants and refugees used to stay in Greece only for a few days before continuing their journey to Europe, border closures and longer processing times in neighboring countries have caused them to remain in Greece longer, often as long as two years.⁴⁵ This has further strained semi-temporary shelters not equipped for long-term stays.

It is clear that Greece cannot find a lasting solution to the refugee crisis on its own; any solution needs to be part of a global effort. Local capacities in Greece should be supported and scaled up, conditions in reception centers must be improved, legal pathways for entry to Europe need to be expanded, and family reunification cases need to be expedited.

Greece also needs to create clear policies and partnerships that focus on integration. This ties in to Goal 16, which emphasizes the importance of inclusion. Such policies and partnerships need to benefit both local communities and refugees. For example, the refugees that are being relocated from the temporary camps to apartments or empty hotels are generating income for the owners. Moreover, many NGOs are hiring both refugees and locals for positions such as language teachers.

Municipalities are playing an important role in facilitating social and economic inclusion of refugees. For example, Thessaloniki has been one of the centers for the reception of refugees. According to a municipal official there, “You cannot talk about integration if you don’t have a job. It doesn’t matter if you speak the language or not, you have to feel useful.”⁴⁶ With that principle in mind, Thessaloniki helps both disadvantaged Greeks and refugees by training them in new skills, creating employment opportunities, and providing food. Such integration schemes can help weave a rich and vibrant social fabric.

The private sector and civil society also play a significant role in helping refugees and fostering integration. These initiatives include Elpida (a public-private partnership providing shelter for vulnerable families in Thessaloniki), Pikpa (a volunteer organization on Lesbos island), and the Melissa Network (a civil society organization working to empower women refugees

⁴³ Interview with Greek official, Athens, Greece, February 28, 2017.

⁴⁵ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, “UNHCR Calls for Stronger EU Action on Refugees,” December 5, 2016, available at www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2016/12/58453b614/unhcr-calls-stronger-eu-action-refugees.html ; “UNHCR Recommendations for Greece in 2017,” February, 2017, available at www.unhcr.org/en-us/58d8e8e64 .

⁴⁶ Interview with representative of Thessaloniki municipality, Thessaloniki, Greece, February 23, 2017.

economically). These and other organizations that connect the refugee response to societal and economic growth need to be scaled up and supported.

Box 4. The Home Project

The HOME Project (Help, Overcome, Motivate, Empower) is a private initiative of the Libra Group. Among other things, it works to protect unaccompanied minors. It provides a holistic network of services such as food, shelter, material support, psychosocial support, medical support, legal support, and immediate access to education. The HOME project plans to open five more shelters for around 100 minors, including pregnant girls, many of whom were subject to child prostitution, child trafficking, and organized crime. The HOME Project’s staff is made up of a combination of Greeks, refugees, and migrants. According to the project’s executive director, these shelters “become a platform for social integration, but an organic one—not imposed but rather implemented from the bottom up.”⁴⁷

Recommendations: A Recipe Made and Owned by Greeks

Government officials are engaging with a broad set of stakeholders to address complex challenges in Greece, such as migration and refugee flows and increasing employment opportunities for youth. However, greater efforts are needed to reach a wider audience. Before the 2030 Agenda, this was viewed primarily as a government responsibility, but now there seems to be greater understanding that addressing these challenges requires a “whole-of-society” approach to maximize synergies and match resources. Making progress toward the SDGs requires a new “recipe” centered on local engagement and increased cross-sector collaboration. This would ensure not only inclusive economic growth, but also would contribute to continuously building an inclusive and peaceful society. The following recommendations emerged from extensive interviews with senior government officials, private sector leaders, academics, and civil society actors.

Use the 2030 Agenda to complement austerity measures: Austerity measures need to be implemented side-by-side with the SDGs. The SDGs provide a counterbalance both to cuts in spending on social services and to rising tax rates, which have disproportionately impacted lower- and middle-income Greeks. Investing in the SDGs does not divert attention from the adjustment program, but rather can facilitate the achievement of the program in a sustainable manner. Activities such as restructuring university curricula could deliver direct economic benefits at shared costs. Further upfront investments in sustainable development and inclusive economic growth in tandem with austerity measures are needed, and in the medium- and long-term could lead to cost savings and greater returns.

Leverage relative strengths to grow the GDP pie: Greece has unique comparative advantages that have yet to be fully harnessed. Goals 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) were highlighted as key priorities. Greece needs to put together an economic strategy focusing on its relative strengths and available resources. This strategy can include the following activities:

⁴⁷ Interview with Sofia Kouvelaki, executive director of the HOME Project, February 2017.

- Invest in innovation hubs: These hubs, particularly for tech startups and software engineering, can attract both Greeks who have left the country and international investors.
- Extend the tourism season: Greece can further develop its tourism industry by making it year-round and offering a wider range of activities for tourists not only in the southern islands but also in northern and central Greece.
- Market Greece as a center for higher learning: Greece's universities can be marketed to attract a greater number of students seeking quality education in an attractive location by adding courses that fit international students' needs.
- Expand education programs to match market demands: Greece can expand curricula beyond traditional professions such as law and medicine to also focus on sales and skilled trade vocations (e.g., chefs, electricians, mechanics, and computer scientists).
- Focus on the "brain gain": Greece can tap the talent pool of skilled refugees to fill vacant positions, as well as create sustainable employment to stop the "brain drain" of young professionals who opt to work abroad because of the lack of job opportunities.

Empower local leadership: The Athens and Thessaloniki municipalities as well as the small village of Anavra highlight the importance of leadership and strategic vision. In these three examples, leadership is rooted in greater community engagement and participation. In order to overcome challenges and increase confidence in Greece's future, leaders from all sectors need to invest in initiatives that lift the country upward together.

Build and strengthen partnerships for the SDGs: The SDGs provide a new platform for partnerships. However, in order to scale up partnerships and build trust among different stakeholders, the following areas need more attention:

- Take a collaborative approach to planning: The SDGs need to be planned and implemented jointly by a wide range of stakeholders. Such collaboration will increase ownership by different stakeholders and lead to greater impact. The mapping exercise conducted by the government needs to be more widely disseminated and its implementation needs to be incorporate more bottom-up feedback and participation, expanding beyond the traditional partners and the greater Athens area. Continued opportunities for engagement need to be built into the implementation strategy.
- Update the legal framework for investments: Laws and regulations need to be clear and updated in order to incentivize investments and build trust between the public and private sectors.
- Build state capacity for partnerships: Greece would benefit from the establishment of national-level state institutions to support public-private partnerships aimed at promoting investment in sustainable and inclusive development and increasing transparency in financial management.
- Speed up court cases: In order to increase confidence in the public sector, the justice system needs to run more efficiently to reduce roadblocks to investments.
- Start an anticorruption campaign: As called for in Goal 16, Greece should increase transparency in state institutions. Reducing corruption can significantly increase trust between different sectors and contribute to building a peaceful and inclusive society and transparent and effective institutions. It would also create a more favorable business environment.

Take a multilateral approach to refugees and migrants: Greece is carrying a disproportionate amount of responsibility for the migration crisis. This responsibility needs to be

shared by the international community. It is important that Greece and Europe as a whole continue their efforts to save lives, fight migrant smuggling, enhance cooperation on border management, and counter the incentives for irregular migration by addressing its root causes.

Focus on inclusive integration: At the national level, all of the SDGs apply to Greeks and asylum seekers alike. Greece should implement policies such as employment opportunities that foster integration while benefiting both the local and refugee populations. Greece provides an opportunity to put in action the spirit of inclusiveness embedded in the 2030 Agenda. The principle of “leaving no one behind” needs to be further operationalized, particularly for unaccompanied children and those in vulnerable situations that need urgent attention.