

JOURNAL

PROJECT

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

📍 Athens, Greece

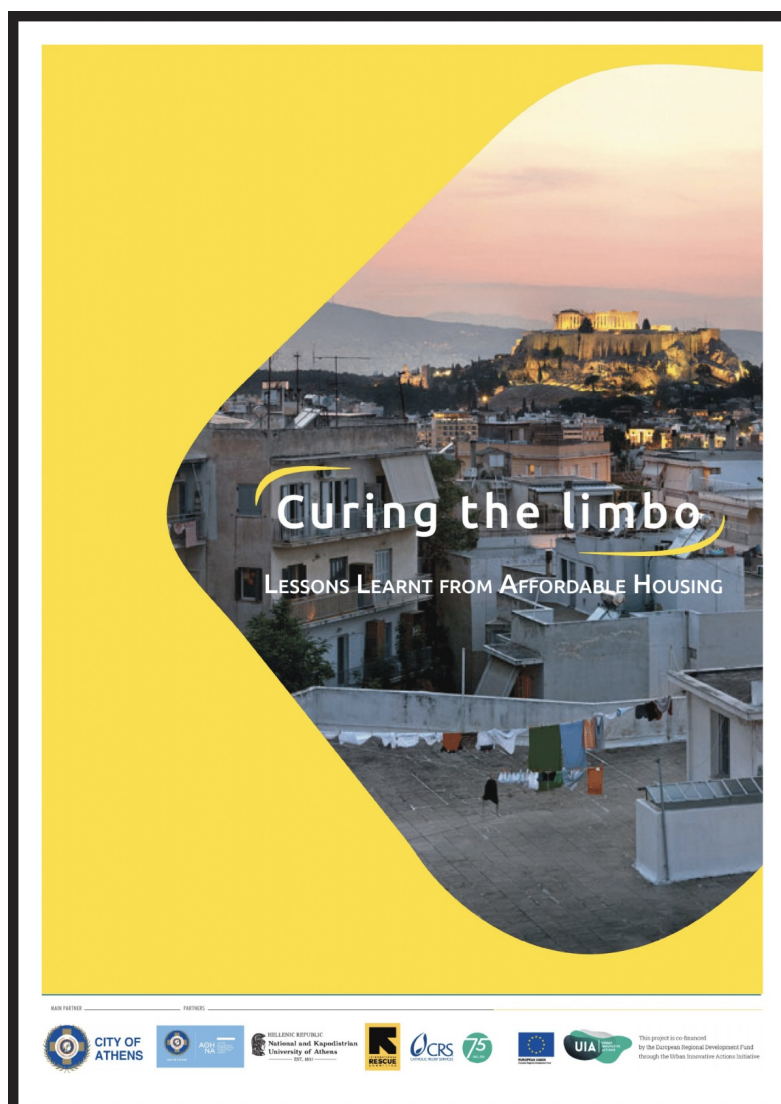
TOPIC

Integration of migrants and refugees

EDIT 10 DECEMBER 2022
BY LEVENTE POLYAK

Curing the Limbo Journal #6: Legacies

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website



Curing the Limbo was an Urban Innovative Actions-funded pilot to develop a trajectory for refugees to find their new home through education, employment and access to housing. The project brought together the aspects of education, employment, housing and community involvement, by developing synergies between these – otherwise often disconnected – fields. Curing the Limbo offered the programme's beneficiaries a trajectory to go through different stages of integration: by learning the language, acquiring skills to get a job, developing a know-how of finding and inhabiting an apartment, and getting involved in community initiatives in the neighbourhood they live in, refugees had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the most important elements of Athenian society. In this sixth and last journal, UIA expert Levente Polyák looks at the impact, sustainability and legacy of Curing the Limbo.

Contents

- 1 Executive summary
- 2 Progress
 - 2.1 Organisation and partnerships
 - 2.2 Trajectories
 - 2.3 Education
 - 2.4 Employment
 - 2.5 Housing
 - 2.6 Community and active citizenship
 - 2.7 Communication
- 3 Challenges
- 4 Project outcomes
 - 4.1 Results
 - 4.2 Sustainability
 - 4.3 Legacy
- 5 Take away points

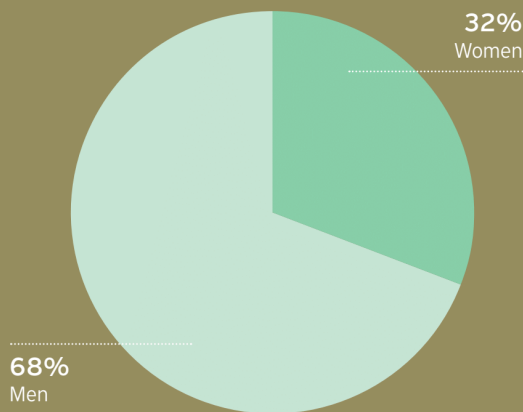
1 Executive Summary

Curing the Limbo was an Urban Innovative Actions-funded pilot to develop a trajectory for refugees to find their new home through education, employment and access to housing. The project brought together the aspects of education, employment, housing and community involvement, by developing synergies between these – otherwise often disconnected – fields. Curing the Limbo offered the programme's beneficiaries a trajectory to go through different stages of integration: by learning the language, acquiring skills to get a job, developing a know-how of finding and inhabiting an apartment, and getting involved in community initiatives in the neighbourhood they live in, refugees had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the most important elements of Athenian society. In this sixth and last journal, UIA expert Levente Polyák looks at the impact, sustainability and legacy of Curing the Limbo.

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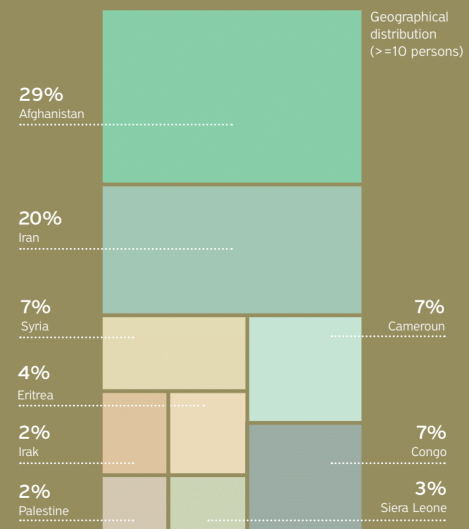
Key Figures

The program supported a total of 376 participants, 1/3 of each were women and 2/3 of which men.



18

Participant's countries of origin vary, with the majority coming from Afghanistan (29%), Iran (20%), Syria (7%) and African countries such as Cameroun and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (7% each).



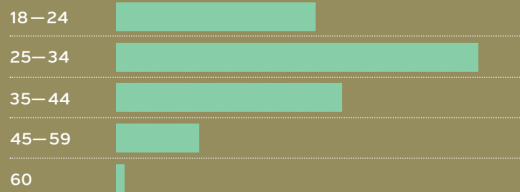
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Curing the Limbo, in its three years, resulted in impressive numbers. The program supported a total of 376 participants, 1/3 of which were women and 2/3 of which men, with 29% from Afghanistan, 20% from Iran, 7% from Syria and 7-7% from Cameroun and the Democratic Republic of Congo. A total of 116 households, and approximately 298 individual beneficiaries received housing-related services, including subsidised housing in the first twelve months of their stay.

Apart from beneficiaries, 103 landlords participated in Curing the Limbo, offering their apartments for rent via the project's housing pilot. Additionally, 33 companies joined the employer network as employers of refugees, while 64 participants found a job through the program. 43 participants received Greek or English language certifications after completing their respective courses.

208 participants took part in 579 city activities, encountering more than 1.000 Athenians in these programme activities. 180 citizen groups interacted with program participants, mostly while developing proposals together. Some of these initiatives were later implemented using funding provided by the municipality.

Participant age distribution



Ideal integration conditions require collaboration between all stakeholders, including refugees, *Curing the Limbo* project team, landlords, employers and active citizen groups.

Integration
process
social
partners

376 **Refugees**
participated in the program

103 **Landlords**
rented their apartments
to program participants

33 **Employers**
companies are part of
the programs employer network

180 **Citizen groups**
interacted with program participants

Progress towards integration
drawn from participants' testimonies.

ONE
OUT OF THREE



Improved their capacity to make acquaintances.
Improved their ability to move in the city.
Has enhanced their sense of belonging to the city.
Feels more accepted in their neighborhood.

TWO
OUT OF THREE



Improved their ability to manage residence issues.
Improved their ability for communication with
services and stores.

ONE
IN TWO



Improved their ability to seek for a job
Improved their ability to manage household
expenses.

- 43 participants received Greek or English language certifications.
- 64 participants found a job while in the program.
- 298 participants found affordable housing with the support of the housing services.
- 208 participants took part in 579 city activities.
- More than 1.000 citizens took part in program activities.

While these results are impressive, they also had a high cost. In order to reach sustainability for some elements of Curing the Limbo, the partnership looked at the financial sustainability of the programme from a variety of angles. The social rental agency model, developed in the last phase of the project, involves a set of well-defined financial models. There were also discussions about establishing different kinds of revolving funds to turn subsidies into investments that generate a return in the long term to maintain the social aspect of the housing and employment mechanisms. Nevertheless, investment from public resources or with help of international NGOs or private foundations remains inevitable.

Curing the Limbo was successful in establishing and running a pilot model of refugee integration in Athens with tangible results invaluable lessons learnt during the process. Countless resources have been generated concerning each sub-field of the programme on housing, education, employment and community engagement. Curing the Limbo has successfully experimented in customising language and photography courses, for example, by situating them in the context of community groups and civic initiatives. Based on the conclusions of the housing pilot and research work assembled in the Housing Symposium, the consortium drafted and proposed a detailed **housing policy framework** for the Municipality of Athens to adapt. **Community activities** implemented within the Co-Athens framework have created a long-lasting legacy: they represent a new culture of co-creation and collaboration and inspired many other programmes across the city.

2 Progress

2.1 Organisation and partnerships

By the last period of the Curing the Limbo project, the consortium had a streamlined, well-established model of cooperation. Despite the important achievements in coordinating the partnership, cooperation between partners was further complicated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the changes it brought into Athens. Consecutive lockdowns heavily restricted all aspects of the

project that required physical meetings between participants, trainers, educators and NGOs. Furthermore, the constant change in Covid cases and lockdown rules made planning encounters, events or processes difficult. Nevertheless, the Curing the Limbo consortium has quickly adapted to the circumstances and developed a set of online modalities to continue the project's activities. Partners managed to maintain smooth communication with each other and most beneficiaries throughout the project. Yet, the diversity of the consortium brought about its own challenges.

“Institutions with more hierarchical structures have a different approach to a project like Curing the Limbo than NGOs. We needed to put a lot of work into making people feel to be part of a team and have a common goal which has not changed throughout the project's three years.”

Antigone Kotanidi

2.2 Trajectories

Curing the Limbo was designed with a trajectory in mind that would lead beneficiaries through stages of integration: finding a home, learning the language, participating in civil society activities, obtaining a job. According to the original plan of the project, these elements of beneficiaries' trajectories were conceived as a circular exchange, meaning that some services would be provided by the city of Athens, and beneficiaries would contribute back to the city through civic engagement. However, the pandemic heavily restricted activities foreseen in the project and confined beneficiaries to their homes for long periods of time. Additionally, uncertainties and precarious employment prospects also hindered the exchange component of the project, leading to the abandonment of this circular concept of exchange.

One of the key challenge in the programme and in the trajectories of beneficiaries were dropouts. Significant dropout rates were observed throughout the entire project. The most important reasons for dropping out were the participants' transfer to another country or positive developments and better opportunities in their lives, such as finding a job. In the case of other beneficiaries, a variety of negative factors hindered their active participation in the programme, such as problems with housing, work, health or family, or simply the lack of time and energy due to daily challenges. Dropouts can be handled if an integration programme adapts to the needs of its beneficiaries and maintains a pool of prospective candidates who are ready to fill vacancies that arise over the course of the programme.

Hardships experienced by refugees were particularly prevalent in the sphere of housing. Many individual trajectories were interrupted by housing-related issues, partly experienced on an individual basis, but often also deriving from systematic failures of the Greek (and Athenian) asylum system.

Refugees Toolkit

Moreover, curingthelimbo.gr includes the section *Refugees Toolkit*, a series of useful tools for migrant and refugee communities living in Greece, available in Greek, English, French, Arabic and Farsi:

Refugees Rights

A digital info point on human rights in Greece, about topics mainly pertaining to everyday life of refugees and migrants.

Helpful Videos

DIY videos offering useful guidelines on bureaucratic issues, questions on housing, transport & connection with public services

Psycho-Social Service Autonomy Guide

Detailed guidelines, referrals and answers to important everyday life issues submitted to the project's psycho-social service

Employability Guide

Useful information on how to find a job

Athens Urban Living

How to Guide about living in Athens

Dictionary of Terms

Dictionary of terms on IT and Communication, created for the needs of the project's courses

2.3 Education

A crucial component of successful integration is language. Curing the Limbo addressed this need through providing English and Greek language courses. The aim of language education was to enrich the vocabulary of refugees and encourage them to use it for effective communication on a personal, social and professional level, preparing them for better navigation in Athenian life. The language course served also as a basis for other (thematic) courses to build upon.

The educational pillar of Curing the Limbo also provided audio-visual expression and creativity workshops to beneficiaries. The photography, video and music workshops gave programme participants the opportunity to develop new skills, express themselves, build social and professional networks, and visit cultural sites, museums, galleries and experience Athens and city life. In essence, they were used as a means to mobilise, empower and encourage participation and social inclusion. The photography courses were also a way to overcome the feeling of confinement during the Covid lockdowns because they continued online throughout the periods of heavy restrictions, providing participants with the opportunity to explore photography while at home and share their experiences and work with others via online workshops.

A hands-on programme was created to foster the development of digital skills and provide knowledge to both beginner and advanced information and communication technology learners. The ICT courses were conceived with the aim of providing refugees with access to the information society, and improving the employability of beneficiaries by providing them with essential IT knowledge and skills leverageable on the labour market. The courses were designed using methodologies specifically designed to cater for the educational needs of displaced populations. However, delays with hiring ICT teachers forced the programme to postpone the ICT courses, discouraging many beneficiaries and failing to deliver the desired impact.

In addition to courses that were aimed at providing hard skills and competencies, the soft skills of beneficiaries were also developed via dedicated courses. Most importantly, refugees were helped

by cultural mediators to develop the skills needed to navigate cross-cultural situations and to operate better in environments foreign to them.

A number of beneficiaries dropped out of the programme before they reached the end of their courses which caused some headache for teachers and the consortium. Even though there was an attempt to replace early leavers, bringing aboard new students mid-course was not as successful as expected.

“By the end of the programme, classes had about six students on average – half or third of earlier classes. So we opened the program to new registrations, we circulated messages, we asked organisations to disseminate the news, but people who registered after November (during the second wave lockdown) weren't as involved in the program as the others because they didn't know us, they never met us. They just followed some classes that did not come with an access to housing.” Antigone Kotanidi

2.4 Employment

The employment pillar of Curing the Limbo, coordinated by the International Rescue Committee, offered a job counselling service aimed to support program participants by providing them with the skills required to enter the labour market. IRC's work is organised around employability: most of the activities organised in Curing the Limbo's "employment pillar" focus on soft skills necessary to find employment, including trainings, information sessions, coaching, counselling and language courses.



A GUIDE TO FINDING A JOB IN GREECE

JOB READINESS HANDBOOK

MAY 2021



Employment was one of the areas most impacted by the pandemic. While some of the employability services and job readiness courses of IRC could be moved online, the employment prospects of beneficiaries have been degraded by the successive lockdowns.

The rate of job placement among refugees was 18% in October 2020, a proportion comparable with the success rate of other employability companies. However, many refugees that had already had jobs before the pandemic, saw their working hours reduced and their revenues decreasing. During the first lockdown of the pandemic, only 1% of the beneficiaries managed to find a new job,

mainly in logistics. Many jobs in the service sector (tourism, restaurants etc.) previously accessible to refugees have disappeared, some partially, others completely. This void potentially could be filled with agricultural vacancies, but whether or not they can provide an alternative avenue of employment depends on whether refugees are willing to leave Athens and relocate to the countryside.

IRC continued employability counselling until the end of May 2021 and while it followed up on the beneficiaries achievements on the job market, the project ended before the full return of tourism and many jobs suitable for refugees. Therefore we cannot have a precise assessment of the employment situation of those trained through Curing the Limbo.

2.5 Housing

The project provided a number of services to both refugees seeking housing and to homeowners looking to rent out their apartments. Services to refugees included (1) access to a pool of available, and suitable apartments for rent; (2) provision of a reference person to facilitate communication between tenants and property owners for the duration of the programme, (3) special housing-related group training sessions (finding an apartment, legal rights and obligations, costs and household finance management, proper maintenance, apartment building by-laws, etc.) aimed at preparing programme participants for independent living; (4) monthly financial support (conditional) for a maximum period of twelve months to cover rent costs based on contracts signed by the participants themselves; (5) personalised assistance for subsidised tenants through one-on-one meetings on household finances management, legal advice and neighbourhood integration. Landlords were given financial incentives to eliminate some of the risks involved with renting to lower-income tenants in precarious life circumstances.

Athens Urban Living

A Guide for current
and prospective
tenants living in
the city of Athens

Curing
the
limbo



Overall, the housing component of Curing the Limbo was a success with a total of 116 households rented to refugees through the programme, with approximately 298 individual beneficiaries – more than what was anticipated at the beginning of the project. Furthermore, the housing pilot allowed the Curing the Limbo partnership to envision a model for future use in Athens and elsewhere.

“It's cheap, it's scalable in the terms that it can be applied in different contexts. And it's suitable for both local governments or NGOs to adopt it. But it is not an affordable housing model as it doesn't intervene in the market to create an affordable housing stock. This aspect needs to be incorporated in future configurations.” - Stefania Gyftopoulou

An important initiative of Curing the Limbo's housing component was the organisation of a Housing Symposium in Athens. Initially planned to take place earlier to help in the conceptualisation phase of the housing model developed throughout the project, the symposium was delayed and organised during the final stage of the project. Due to the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the symposium had to be organised online and it took place on April 15th-16th, 2021.

According to some accounts, it has proven to be useful to organise the symposium at the end of the project, for two reasons. Firstly, building on the experience, evidence and knowledge generated through the housing pilot in Curing the Limbo, the symposium could support the further development of the social rental agency model by incorporating the lessons learned from other similar initiatives across Europe. It also allowed for the better understanding of context-specific and context-independent factors of developing such housing models. Secondly, because the symposium took place approximately a year after the first Covid-19 lockdown, experiences as to how the pandemic affected housing were already better analysed and understood. A large part of the conference was dedicated to explaining recent developments in housing as well as how social housing models applied across Europe can function and be adapted to tackle contemporary issues around housing, in particular, in relation to marginalised groups, such as refugees.

One of the outputs of the symposium and Curing the Limbo's housing component was a social rental agency model, conceived by the Catholic Relief Services with the aim of mediating between prospective tenants and property owners, granting them incentives and providing services. Despite a series of studies and documents to underline the model's suitability to the Athens context, the model has not been picked up by the municipality and the social rental agency idea has been discontinued.

2.6 Community and active citizenship

Throughout its duration, Curing the Limbo built on the municipality's mechanisms of cooperation with civil society organisations and initiatives. The relevant actions were structured around three main axes: activation, participation, and connection with the city and local residents. Scheduled actions providing refugees access to a number of citizen initiatives was the first step to connect refugees with active citizen groups. The programme included a series of empowerment workshops to assist refugees and familiarise them with the culture of active participation. Beneficiaries participating in these activities worked together with citizen groups, were acquainted with the people that organise city actions, and tried implementing ideas with immediate impacts locally.

An autonomy guide for refugees

Useful instructions for basic administrative procedures



ΒΑΣΙΚΟΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΟΣ

ΕΤΑΙΡΟΙ



ΔΗΜΟΣ
ΑΘΗΝΑΙΩΝ



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
Εθνική και Καποδιστριακή
Πανεπιστημιακή Αθήνα
— ΣΤΡΩΣΗ ΤΩ ΣΗΤ —



Το πρόγραμμα συγχρηματοδοτείται από το
Ευρωπαϊκό Ταμείο Περιφερειακής Ανάπτυξης
μέσω της Πρωτοβουλίας Αστικής Καινοτομίας Δράσης

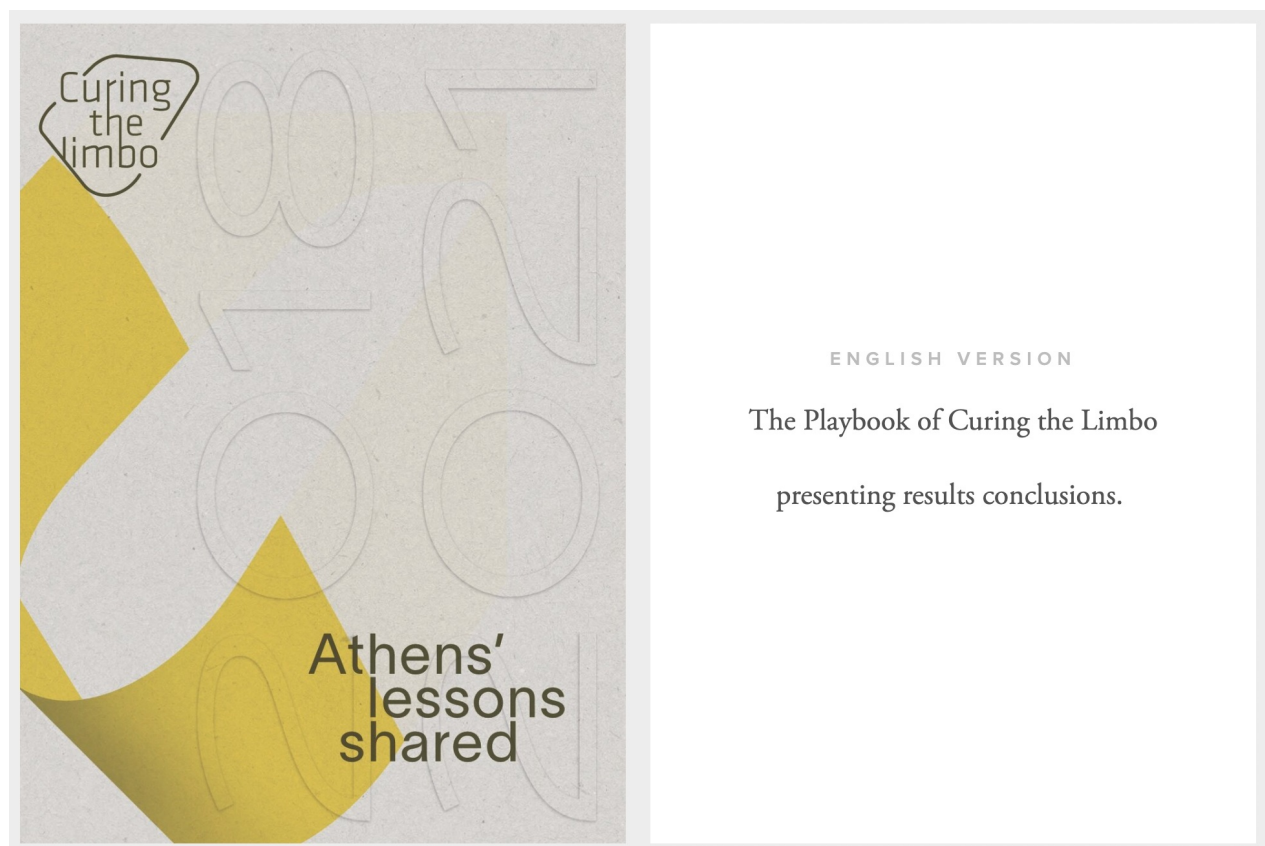
Drafting, proposing and implementing citizen initiatives was done by mixed groups of local active citizens and refugees through funded action programmes promoted by the Co-Athens programme, conceived in the frame of Curing the Limbo. A number of local initiatives focusing on various Athens neighbourhoods were selected following an open public call. The participants had the opportunity to work with citizen groups in developing actions beneficial to the city and its neighbourhoods. Some projects only received counselling to help the development of ideas, while

some were selected to receive funding for implementation.

These selected projects were developed and implemented towards the final stage of the programme as pilot collaborative actions by refugees and locals. More specifically, the Curing the Limbo initiative selected, funded, and supported nine partnership schemes. The funded schemes included cultural groups focused on collecting oral tales about the city, the reanimation of neglected public spaces, the organisation of sports activities, the establishment of business activities related to renewable energy, manufacturing activities and public facility construction, as well as an intercultural cooking platform. The development and implementation of these projects, apart from creating tangible socio-economic benefits locally, supported the inclusion and integration of refugees into given neighbourhoods of Athens and helped them establish connections and friendships with native residents.

2.7 Communication

Throughout the duration of the project, Curing the Limbo maintained a strong presence in Athens media. In the project's three years, and particularly in the last phase, a rich body of resources have been generated, available for further use. The booklet "Athens' lessons shared", produced at the closure of the project, made available the key outcomes of the project as well as a set of findings. The publication was accompanied by a toolkit, covering various themes of Curing the Limbo, ranging from refugee rights, public services, psycho-social services, employability and urban living. Furthermore the studies and analyses based on the project's experiences, disseminated via more academic and institutional channels, helped to pave the way for a further implementation of some of the principles elaborated in Curing the Limbo.



3 Challenges

TABLE 1: MAPPING CURING THE LIMBO AGAINST THE ESTABLISHED UIA CHALLENGES

Challenge	Assessment of risk in hindsight	Observations
1. Leadership for implementation	Medium	Curing the Limbo was conceived in a specific moment with support from political leaders. In this sense, it was rooted in a particular municipal administration and connected to its leadership. The political transformation following municipal elections was therefore a risk for the project. After initial fears of the incoming municipal administration and its relationship to refugee integration as a whole and the Curing the Limbo project in particular, cooperation with the municipality has been evolving positively. The appointed counsellor to the Mayor, responsible for refugee and migrant issues, became very involved in Curing the Limbo, bringing about a better prospective of working with the municipality. This involvement helped the project regain a favourable place within the municipal administration. However, despite its support to the project during its implementation period, the municipal administration had no interest in continuing Curing the Limbo and building on its results, particularly in the domain of subsidised housing and the proposed social rental agency.
2. Public procurement	High	Public procurement was one of the key challenges of Curing the limbo. The constant delays in hiring personnel for the various training programmes, the original concept of Curing the Limbo's educational component was repeatedly compromised and had to be altered. For example, with a significant delay with hiring ICT teachers, for instance, it was difficult to synchronise student expectations and teacher availabilities and some ICT courses began with very few students. With little time left of the project, this issue could not be solved, therefore the impact of procurement difficulties is long-lasting.

4

Project

3.Integrated cross-departmental working	Medium	<p>Curing the Limbo brought together a great diversity of partners, with their different backgrounds, organisational structures, working logics and languages. In the early periods of the project, a significant amount of energy was invested in co-designing collaboration and streamlining communication between partners, in order to develop more synchronised workstreams, a better distribution of tasks and more complementarity. While these training occasions significantly improved the partnership dynamic, their impact remained limited due to delays in hiring some segments of the project staff. The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns gave another layer to internal communication between partners and the municipality. Forced to adapt to the lockdown situation, Curing the Limbo teams were quick to move their meetings online and this gave the consortium additional space to exchange ideas and suggestions. The digitalisation of communication has paradoxically helped cooperation between partners as they had more time available for coordinating actions. The relationship with the municipality has moved forward with a counsellor to the Mayor who got very involved in the project, thus helping the embeddedness of the project in the public administration. While the counsellor's involvement helped the project's situation and acceptance, Curing the Limbo still remained rather foreign to municipal services, due to its initiation by a previous vice-mayor and the repositioning of the theme within municipal priorities.</p>
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4. Adopting a participative approach	Low	<p>Curing the Limbo has largely built on the participatory experience of synAthina, an office of the municipality focusing on citizen and community involvement. The pre-existing logic of supporting active communities and creating synergies between different citizen initiatives helped in conceiving Co-Athens, the community involvement element of Curing the Limbo. The participation of beneficiaries and partners in co-designing various processes remained at the core of the Curing the Limbo project even in the period marked by Covid-19. With the elimination of possibilities to meet in person, participatory mechanisms also had to be moved online. This transition was not equally easy for all beneficiaries or partners, not everyone having the same access to internet and digital tools. However, new digital communication channels between teachers and students, for example, opened new possibilities for participation. In some cases, digitalisation even created access to the project's services for people who earlier could not access them, thus broadening the outreach of Curing the Limbo.</p>
5. Monitoring and evaluation	Medium	<p>Monitoring was a demanding task for the Curing the Limbo partnership. It took a long time to develop a monitoring and evaluation methodology and priorities of focus have changed during the project's timeframe. According to many accounts, it would have been more efficient to hire external evaluators from the beginning on and establish the key indicators early enough in the programme, in order to collect data and records accordingly.</p>
6. Financial Sustainability	Medium	<p>The question of financial sustainability was looming over the project from the early phase on. While it was a crucial part of Curing the Limbo's ambition, the importance of sustainability only gained recognition in the second part of the project. At a later stage, it was established that some of the education, employment and community involvement elements of Curing the Limbo could be implemented addressing other marginal and disadvantaged groups, depending on available funding from different sources, ranging from EU subsidies for refugees, climate adaptation or else, as well as from local or national budgets.</p> <p>Furthermore, with its work on developing a social rental agency, CRS has been consciously designing a sustainable financial model for the continuation of Curing the limbo's housing programme that would still depend on public support from the Athens municipality or the Greek state.</p>

7. Communicating with target beneficiaries	Medium	<p>Curing the Limbo organised its activities around the Serafio complex, aiming at organising a one-stop-shop for refugees, easy to reach and lacking the formality of classic municipal buildings. The services of Curing the Limbo were also publicised at a variety of channels, thus reaching a great variety of potential beneficiaries. The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns have seriously challenged this connection. With no more physical gatherings possible, the programme lost its direct physical relationship both with the beneficiaries of its services and trainings, and with the participants of its citizen initiatives. Similarly, the Serafio complex ceased to be the centre of all activities, thus interrupting the personal connections formed between beneficiaries and members of the Curing the limbo team. However, with the transition to new communication channels, some of these links have been re-established and other ones were created, reaching beneficiaries who were previously not capable of attending trainings and events in person. Therefore, the pandemic had an ambiguous impact on communication with beneficiaries, re-structuring relationships.</p>
8. Upscaling	Low	<p>As All UIA projects, Curing the Limbo was conceived with transferability and upscaling in mind. Accordingly, the partnership produced a series of guidebooks and materials to support other initiatives inspired by the Athens experiment. Such materials included completely unplanned outputs that proved to be very helpful like a guide to living in Athens and in Athenian buildings. Besides these guides, a variety of studies and analyses were published. As explored in scientific papers, the curricula developed for the educational and employment pillars of the project can be used in relation with other marginalised groups (low-income majority groups, people with long unemployment history, etc.) as well as in other contexts where a strong civil society and active entrepreneurial tissue makes it possible to create strong links between education, employment, community activism and entrepreneurship. The collaborative approach of synAthina can be transferred to other policy areas like climate emergency, where civic initiatives can be encouraged to come up with solutions to emerging challenges. The social rental agency conceived by CRS and external experts, but not yet implemented, can establish a long-term housing model for the larger Athens region, inspired by Curing the Limbo's accommodation pillar.</p>

outcomes

4.1 Results

The program supported a total of 376 participants, 1/3 of which were women and 2/3 of which men. The countries' of origin of beneficiaries varied, with the majority coming from Afghanistan (29%), Iran (20%), Syria (7%) and African countries such as Cameroun and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (7%, respectively). Apart from beneficiaries, 103 landlords participated in Curing the Limbo, offering their apartments for rent via the project's housing pilot. Additionally, 33 companies joined the employer network as employers of refugees – mostly located in Athens but some located outside the city. 180 citizen groups interacted with program participants, most of them coming into contact with them while working on the drafting of local civic initiatives. Some of these initiatives were later implemented using funding provided by the municipality.

From the perspective of housing, a total of 116 households, and approximately 298 individual beneficiaries received housing-related services, including subsidised housing in the first twelve months of their stay. Other pillars of the programme also had considerable impacts: 43 participants received Greek or English language certifications after completing their respective courses. 64 participants found a job while in the program. 208 participants took part in 579 city activities. More than 1.000 citizens took part in programme activities.

4.2 Sustainability

Thanks to significant financial means received through the Urban Innovative Actions programme, Curing the Limbo managed to assemble a complex programme to help the integration of refugees though aiding them in housing, education, employment and social/civic engagement. This proved to be an effective way to facilitate the inclusion and integration of refugees into Athenian life, yet unsurprisingly, offering such a wide variety of services is very costly, to put it mildly.

“Consultants working on the social rental agency model pointed out that the financial model of the pilot integration programme was unsustainable. I think what they found was a ratio of one staff member towards eight beneficiaries, which is very high.” Rania Dimitriou

Acknowledging the high costs of the pilot action, the Curing the Limbo partnership has looked at the financial sustainability of the programme from a variety of angles. The social rental agency model involves a set of well-defined financial models and there were discussions about establishing different kinds of revolving funds to turn subsidies into investments that generate a return in the long term to maintain the social aspect of the housing and employment mechanisms. Nevertheless, investment from public resources or with help of international NGOs or private foundations remains inevitable.

4.3 Legacy

Curing the Limbo was successful in establishing and running a pilot model of refugee integration in Athens with tangible results invaluable lessons learnt during the process. Countless resources have been generated concerning each sub-field of the programme on housing, education, employment and community engagement. Some elements proved to be successful initiatives, while others didn't quite yield the results as set out at the beginning. Overall, methodologies were identified, and toolkits were developed to address both integration issues and, generally, the implementation of multi-dimensional programs, such as Curing the Limbo.

Although many of the tools and services of integration were set out in the initial phase of the project, **complementary services** were added later to complement existing tools. For example,

legal counselling services were added to the programme over the course of its implementation phase. It quickly became evident that such services would enhance the holistic nature of the programme's services and would become a central and necessary part of the effort to integrate refugees into Greek society. Additionally, a legal services online platform was created to aid people (not only refugees) in need of assistance in areas such as equal protection against discrimination, citizenship, protection from the law and fair trial; freedom of thought, conscience, religion and expression; work and leave of absence; education, life, liberty and safety; prohibition of torture, slavery, arbitrary arrest and detention; private life and marriage; asylum and free movement; access to state benefits and a decent standard of living. The platform is currently available in Greek, English, French, Farsi, and Arabic.

Courses (language, hard and soft skill courses) and employment training, as well as connecting beneficiaries with employers, were an integral part of Curing the Limbo and had significant impacts. While many integration programmes offer similar services, Curing the Limbo has successfully experimented in customising language and photography courses, for example, by situating them in the context of community groups and civic initiatives.

Community activities implemented within the Co-Athens framework have created a long-lasting legacy. The importance of Co-Athens projects goes beyond the immediate impact of funded and implemented initiatives: they represent a new culture of co-creation and collaboration and inspired many other programmes across the city. Out of the nine implemented Co-Athens initiatives two remains active after the end of Curing the Limbo: a football academy organised at a public property and an energy cooperative now exploring its legal and economic possibilities.

Housing-related services (including subsidised housing) are often left out of integration programmes due to their expensive nature. The housing pilot scheme of Curing the Limbo was both innovative in introducing tools and services related to housing but it was also successful in doing it on a scale that had a considerable impact. By serving up to nearly 300 people and connecting them to nearly 120 homeowners, the housing pillar of the project managed to test its model on a good sample of people, leading to insightful results and inferences.

“By now all the stakeholders acknowledge that there is a large vacant housing stock that we need to leverage and dedicate to social housing.” Stefania Gyftopoulou

At the beginning of Curing the Limbo, the proposal counted with a significant vacant housing stock. In the following years, due to the relative touristification and gentrification of Athens, this housing stock was diminished and Athens witnessed the first **housing crisis** in its modern history. This transformation of the city's housing system limited the latitudes of Curing the Limbo to find available housing for refugees, on the one hand, but also strengthened the concept of subsidised and social housing as relevant not only for refugees but a broader part of Athenian society, including youth and the elderly. The scarcity of housing, despite being interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, re-emerged with the return of tourism and was aggravated by the emerging energy crisis. In this context, public investment in affordable housing is a key building block of a well-functioning city. It is therefore important to find a model of social or subsidised housing that is efficient in both the allocation of housing for those in need and is also able to incorporate financial efficiency and resourcefulness.



Strategic framework towards housing solutions in Athens

Reflections and ways forward from
Curing the Limbo initiative

ΒΑΣΙΚΟΙ ΕΤΑΙΡΟΙ

ΕΤΑΙΡΟΙ



ΔΗΜΟΣ
ΑΘΗΝΑΙΩΝ



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΚΑΤΟΙΚΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ
ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗΣ ΑΣΤΥΝΟΜΙΑΣ
ΛΕΥΤΕΡΗ ΤΟ ΚΕΙ



Το πρόγραμμα συγχρηματοδοτείται από το
Ευρωπαϊκό Ταμείο Περιφερειακής Ανάπτυξης
μέσω της Πρωτοβουλίας Αστικής Καινοτομίας Αθήνας

Based on the conclusions of the housing pilot and research work assembled in the Housing Symposium, the consortium drafted and proposed a detailed **housing policy framework** for the Municipality of Athens to adapt. This, based on the Social Rental Agency model, was a more dynamic model of social housing, where different aspects can be detached, used as separate tools or services, and be applied in different contexts. This report/proposal was drafted with the help of consultants and was not meant to only inform and propose policies to the Municipality of Athens, but also other Greek municipalities and cities all around Europe. The lessons learnt from the housing pillar of the programme are not context-specific for the most part and are generalisable

and applicable to other environments.

“Curing the Limbo was an interesting social innovation project, definitely useful for Athens Municipality to understand what is working and what is not in refugees and migrants integration. Furthermore it helped us to design, propose to the national government and implement larger scaled horizontal social projects, especially of social housing, vocational guidance, and various lessons, including naturalisation seminars.” Melina Daskalaki, President of the Reception & Solidarity Centre of the Municipality of Athens

5 Take away points

- a) Joint activities:** create activities that are the joint responsibility of different partners. They can help partners understand better each other's' working logic and build more organic connections.
- b) Collaboration:** build on the collective intelligence of your partnership or community to come up with new ways of working together during a crisis.
- c) Ecosystems:** work on strengthening the programme's position within the local ecosystem: partnering with a variety of organisations will increase both the projects acceptance and rootedness in the territory, as well as its resilience.
- d) Beneficiary trajectories:** build flexible trajectories that are able to accommodate newcomers and give space for beneficiaries to develop their skills according to their needs and the city's possibilities
- e) Inclusion:** think about the weakest link of an activity or the weakest member of a communication chain, and strengthen these elements of the system.
- f) Space for innovation:** allow the development of spin-off programmes that are based on learnings within the project. Such spin-offs will be able to focus on some elements of the programme and have a good chance of gaining additional visibility and resilience beyond the project in general.
- g) A venue that gives identity:** in a project with the complexity of Curing the Limbo, it is important to start from a venue that accumulates action and offers a secure institutional space before spreading activities in the city
- h) Accommodate change in the context:** use the flexible project methodology to adapt to changing circumstances, whether a new political reality or a housing market in transformation
- i) Adaptation:** rethink services in the light of changing conditions, turning challenges into advantages.
- j) Learning:** let students teach the teachers when new circumstances necessitate new tools and approaches.
- k) Highlight innovative aspect to secure political support:** explore the values of the project that are compatible with the new leadership and secure continuous support through highlighting innovative aspects that make the project attractive across the political spectrum
- l) Legacy:** Start thinking about the project's legacy early on, returning to this issue regularly.

See on UIA website

