

Building narratives on migration and integration in Athens

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Athens – a capital under immense pressure

- ▶ Following the outbreak of the refugee crisis in the summer of 2015, the City of Athens has found itself in the forefront of an unprecedented crisis for both Greece and Europe.
- ▶ Athens became the biggest European city of transit and has seen the greatest influx of refugees. Extreme pressure ever since to provide fast and practical solutions.



The need: to improve the response of the City to the complex needs of migrants & refugees





City of Athens: The main pillars of the City's strategy for reception & integration

1. UNDERSTAND & RECORD THE SITUATION

Refugee numbers & profiles, mapping of stakeholders active in service provision, mapping of structures that need empowerment, funding opportunities

2. UNDERSTAND WHAT IS FEASIBLE FROM AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Vice Mayor for migrant & refugee affairs, Integration Directorate, UNHCR ESTIA programme

3. IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS FOR PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATION AND ADVOCACY

ACCMR, European Cities Networks, Cities Integration Network, co-funding partnerships

4. DEVELOP NEW SERVICES & STRUCTURES, SUPPORT EXISTING STRUCTURES WITH NEW TOOLS

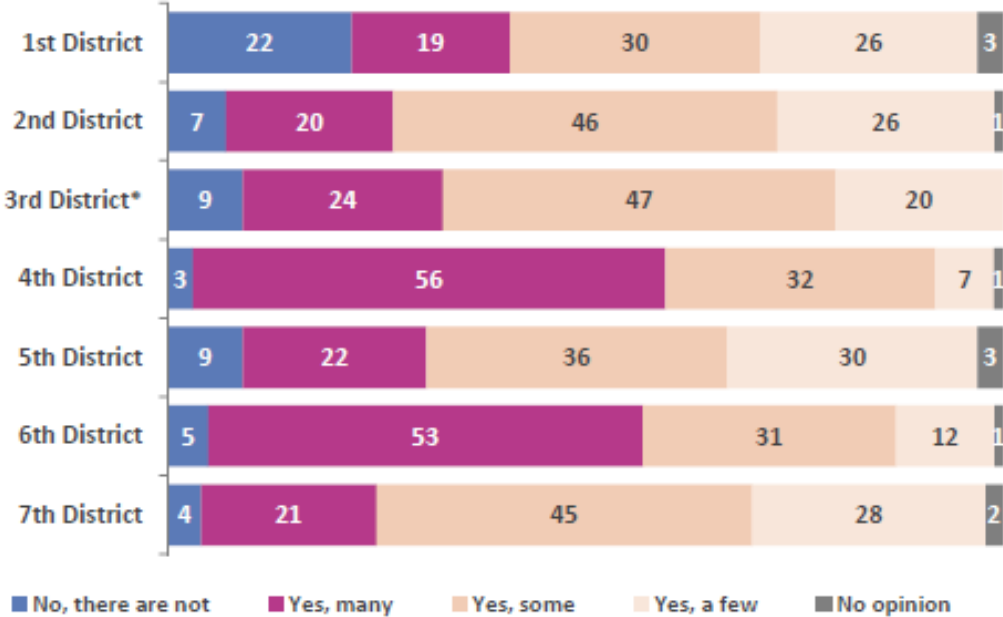
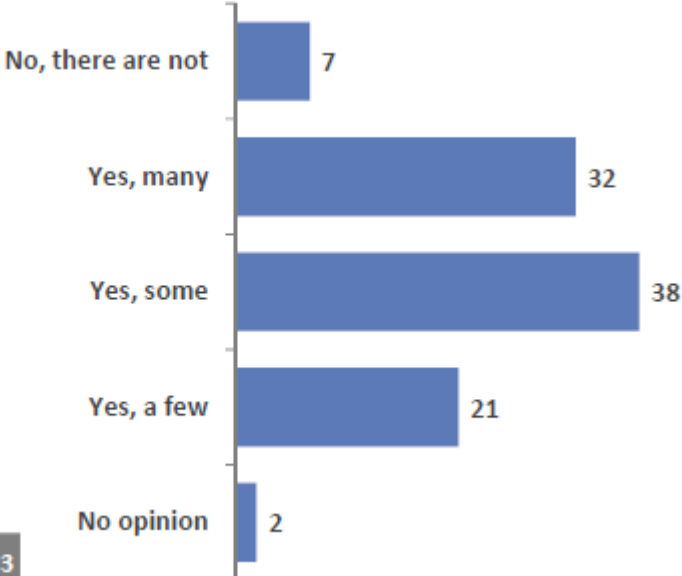
Centres for Migrant Integration, language courses, vocational support, integration strategy, plan contingency plan

Insights from AORI's Public opinion survey

The perceptions of the residents of Athens

Visibility of 'the other'

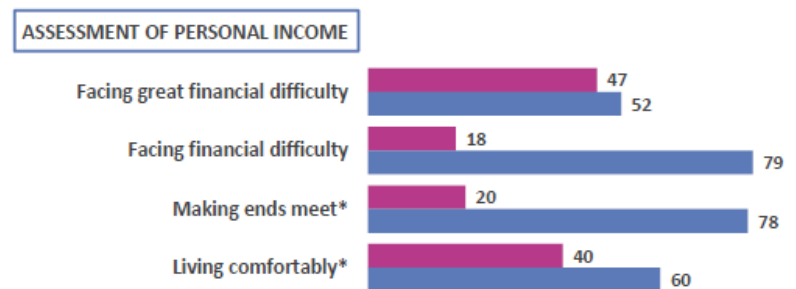
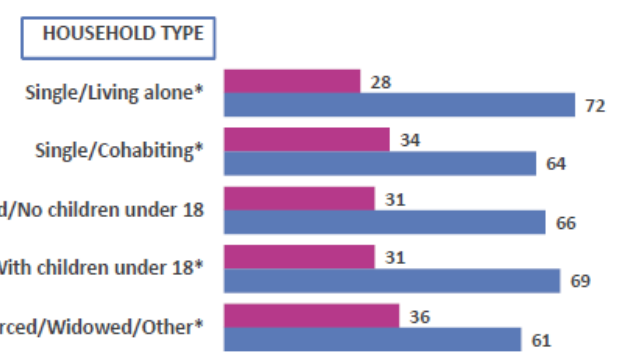
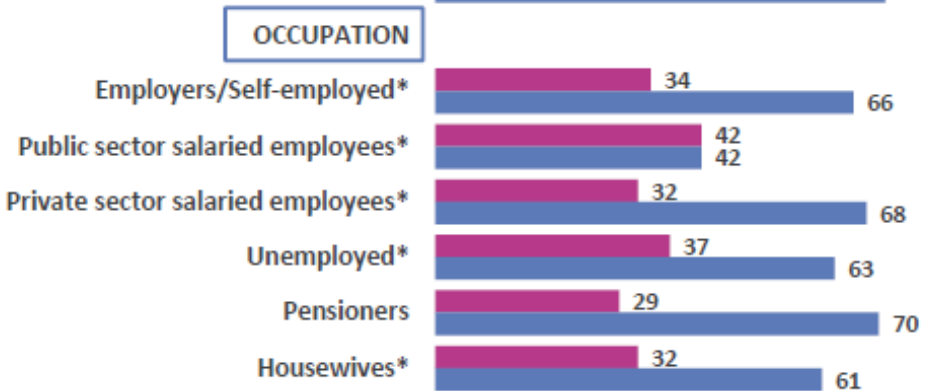
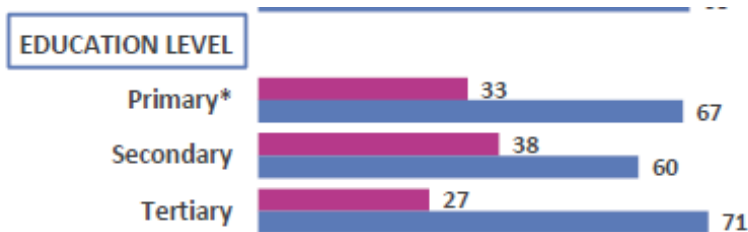
'In your neighbourhood are there people of other nationalities (religion)'



What do Athenians think?

▶ Attitudes towards co-existence with refugees

66% of respondents stated that the presence of refugees in their neighbourhood has not created a problem (32% said it did).

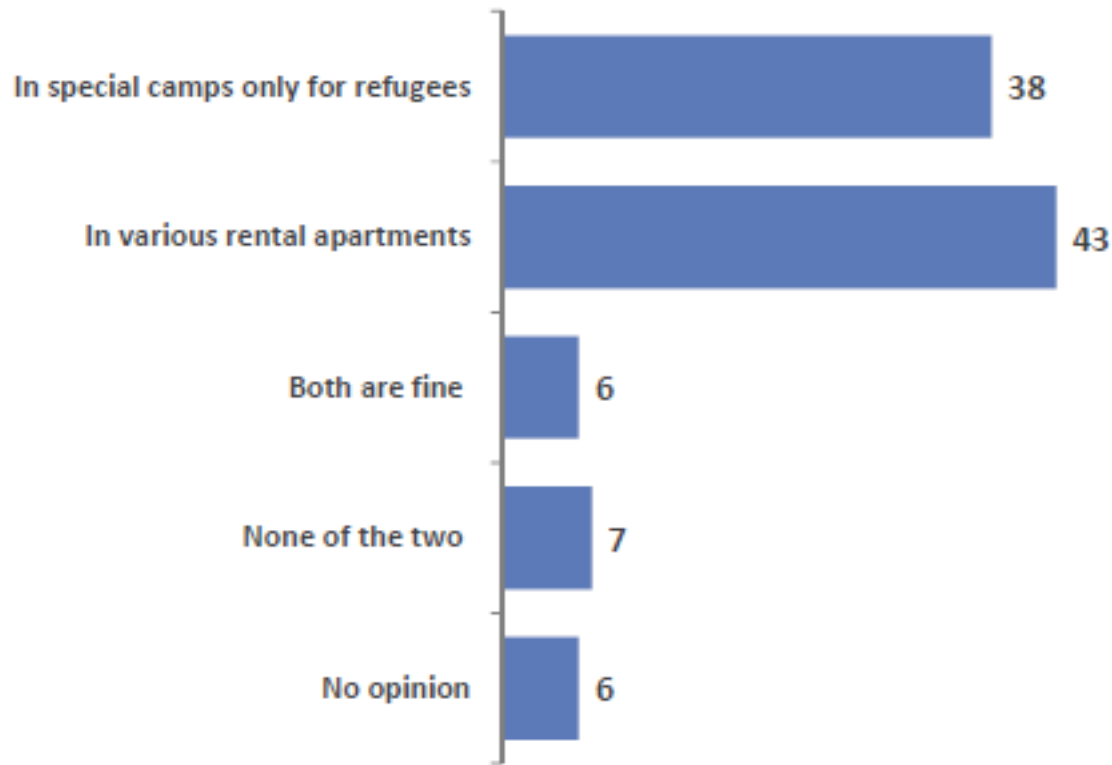


■ Has created a problem
■ Has not created a problem



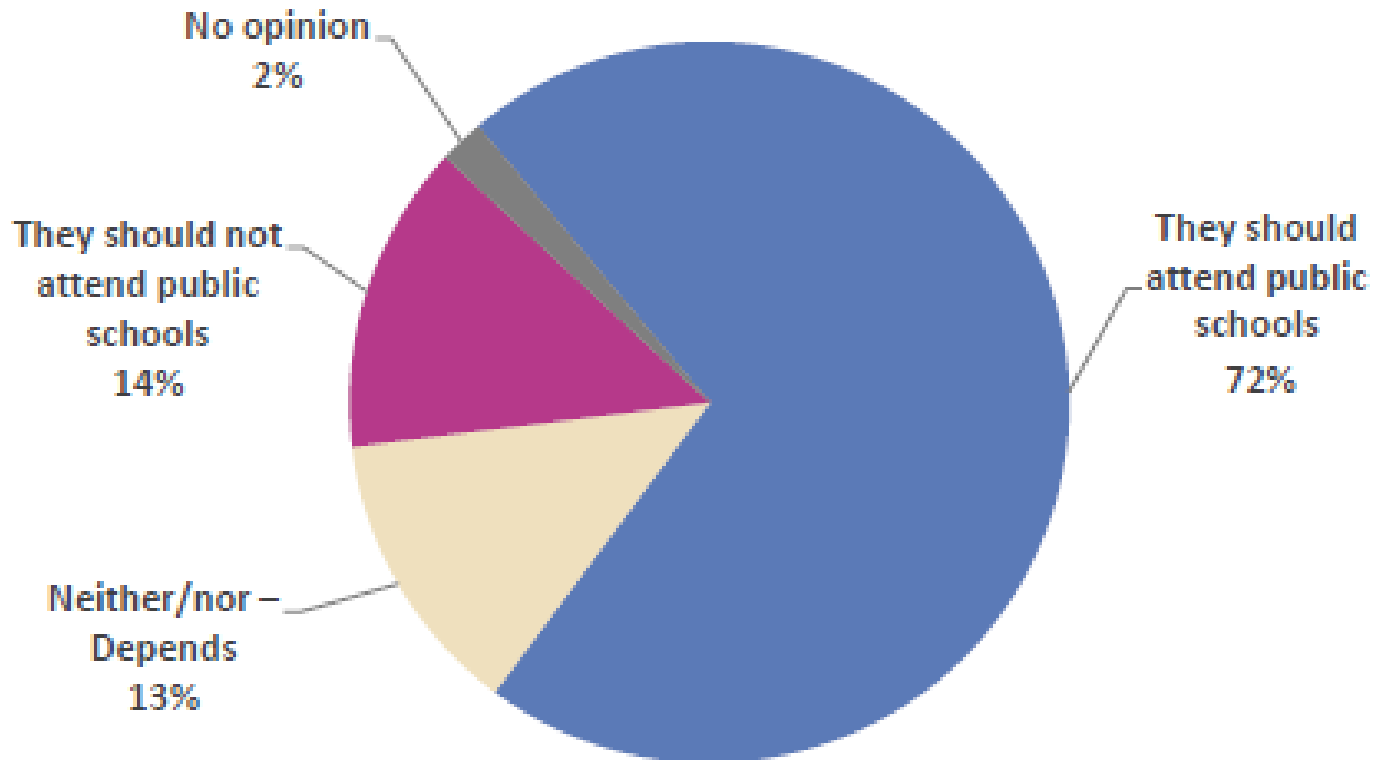
What do Athenians think?

B. 'In your opinion is it better that refugees live in **special camps** only for refugees or in **rental apartments**?'



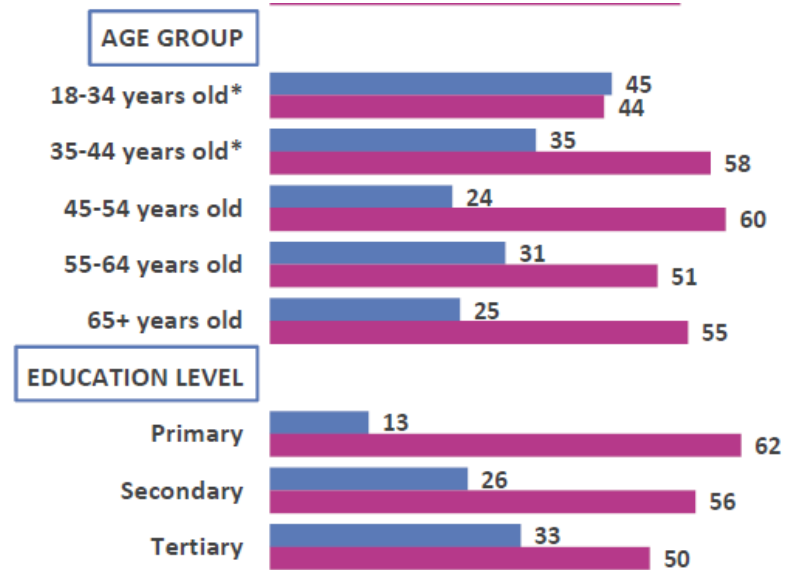
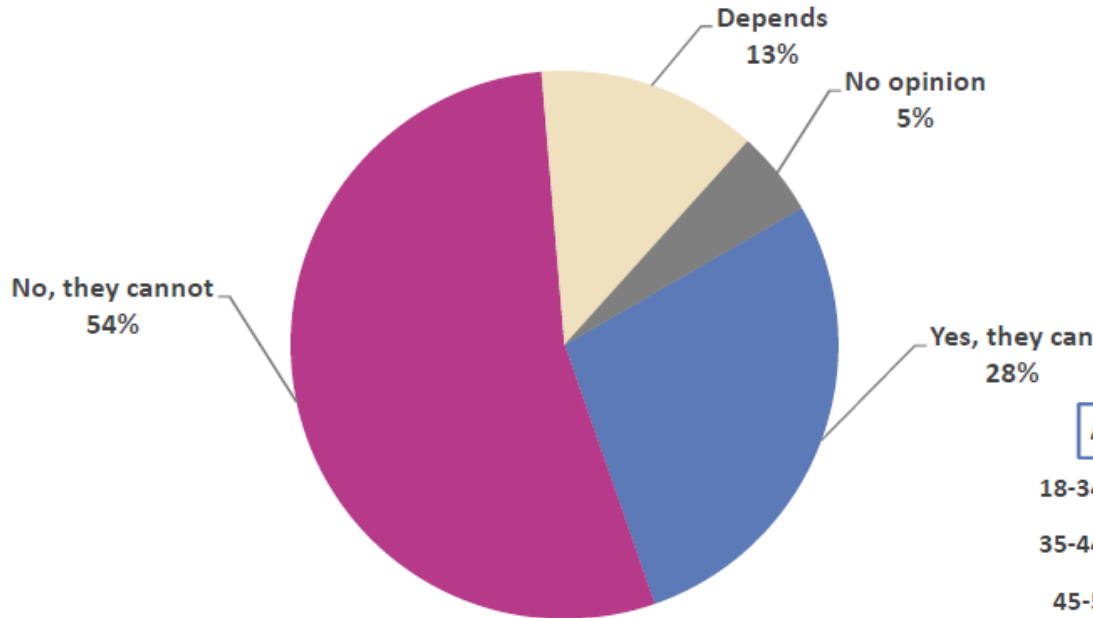
What do Athenians think?

▶ C. Attending public schools & municipal kindergartens



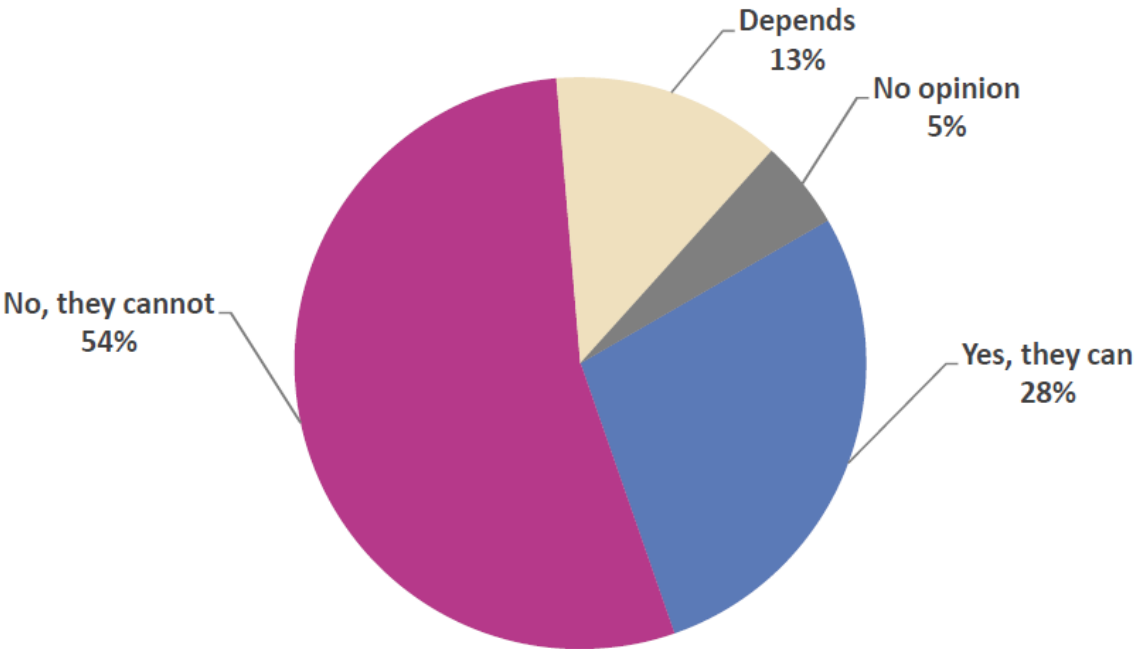
What do Athenians think?

► D. Work permits

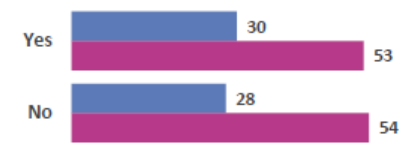


What do Athenians think?

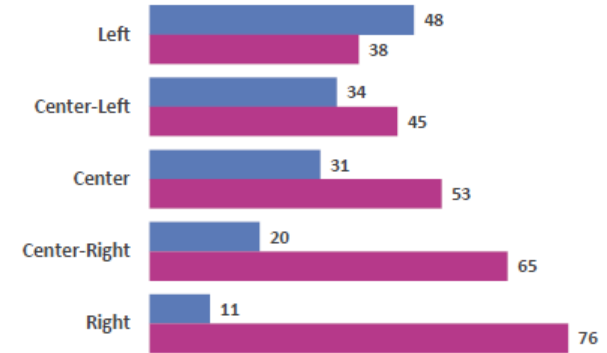
- ▶ **E. Integration** *'If refugees remain in Greece do you think they can or they cannot integrate in the Greek society?'*



REFUGEE ORIGIN



POLITICAL SELF-PLACEMENT



Athens: A low-profile, albeit proactive approach

- ▶ Overall, Athens pioneered a *paradigm shift* for local authorities in Greece
 - ▶ However, the City kept a *low profile* from a communications perspective
- ▶ Many *ad hoc* initiatives to reach out, raise awareness, inform and bring together migrant & refugee communities with Athenians
 - ▶ *ESTIA (ADDMA, UNHCR) : Human Library - Listen to my story*
 - ▶ *ACCMR: The Bahar project*
 - ▶ *Athens Open Schools*
 - ▶ More recently: *Curing the Limbo* pilot programme

Thoughts on current narratives

- ▶ **After almost four years...**
 - ▶ Human tragedy narrative 'fatigue'
 - ▶ Success story 'fatigue'
- ▶ **Failure to 'speak' to/engage with a wider audience**
 - ▶ Often a problematic dichotomy when building narratives: US (the *good* guys) vs THEM (the *bad* guys)
 - ▶ Need of *human interest*, evidence-based narrative, with accessible content
- ▶ **Engagement with migrant communities on narrative development**

The elephant in the room

- ▶ In the absence of political will and positive narratives on migration at the national level of government, combined with the absence of concrete national reception & integration systems, local governments have – to an extent – their hands tied.