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## **Self-Advocacy Team (SAT) - Activity Report 2020-2021**

by

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### Introduction

The Greek Forum of Refugees' **Self-Advocacy Team (SAT)** was created in March 2019 in advance of the local-national-EU election period (May-July 2019), as an outcome of the need expressed by several communities to be included in all matters related to society, under the main argument that political inclusion was a key element of social inclusion. Inspired by the pre-election period it was a strategic move aiming to create the awareness of us being here and caring about the political future of the country.

The priorities of the SAT adjusted, however, to the rapid turn of the State's approach on migration following the elections and focused on raising awareness on policy changes, advocating for inclusion, the rights and obligations of refugees and migrants and promoting the good practise of cooperation between all relevant actors; Communities, State Authorities and NGOs.

It is under this prism that the SAT launched a series of webinars and online live discussions regarding the inclusion of refugees and migrants in the Greek society. This endeavour was supported either financially and/or expertise wise by the wider European network of the Greek Forum of Refugees, specifically from institutions and foundations such as the **Rosa Luxemburg** department of Greece, the European Council of Refugees & Exiles (**ECRE**) and the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (**PICUM**) among others.

### Advocacy Strategy



The SATs advocacy strategy is to bring up important issues that hinder the inclusion process derived from the experience of the team members and of their wider Communities and, most importantly, enhance the communication between the Communities and the State Authorities. In order to materialize this action the SAT held five (5) online discussions so far regarding two topics; the issue of **Unregistered Labour** and the functionality of the **Municipalities' Migrant & Refugee Integration Councils (MRICs)**. In addition the SAT, through Greek Forum of Refugees, is participating in Erasmus+ projects that are related to advocacy for refugee & migrant inclusion in society as well as their rights and obligations. An example of this engagement can be derived from the **Isave** and the **Training Kit for Empowering Refugee-Led Community Organizations** Erasmus+ projects that we are currently working on, led by the Gaiety School of Acting and the Aditus foundation respectively.

### Unregistered Labour

The right to employment is a fundamental right and one that should be protected with the same vigor as other rights. Employment guarantees a salary and allows people to live their lives and tend to their families. Although in Greece asylum seekers and refugees do have the right to work (after 6 months for the former), it is only on paper since the country does not possess a solid integration program that would facilitate the beneficiaries to find a job. The latter combined with the benefit cuts provided by various actors, leave people with little more to choose but undeclared labour. Above all, it affects undocumented individuals that struggle to survive on a daily basis and see unregistered labour as the only way out. At this point we have to state that lacking documents is not a crime, rather an administrative process yet to be concluded.

Unregistered labour is a reality well known in Greece by locals and third country nationals alike and is a phenomenon that can be found in every member state of the



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EU. It is related with trafficking for the purposes of labour, modern slavery, racism even deportations. On this subject the SAT held two (2) online discussions; one with community members and leaders (was not published for reasons of security) and a second one with state officials that can be viewed by following this [link](#). Both online discussions brought up several aspects on the phenomenon of unregistered labour, made clear particular shady aspects and, moreover, provided certain tangible solutions. One can find the report on both seminars regarding unregistered labour by following this [link](#).

### The MRICs

Establishing an official communication between the Communities and the State is the most prominent objective of the Greek Forum of Refugees and of the SAT consequently. The GFR since its beginnings seeks to establish a communication channel between these two entities and it is one of the reasons for the creation of the Self-Advocacy Team.

It is natural that the Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils of the Municipalities that host a considerable population of refugees and migrants throughout Greece are of particular interest for us. Not only because the MRICs provide an official State platform for refugees and migrants to express their concerns, problems and obstacles they face on a daily basis and propose solutions, but also because this platform could potentially become an advisory tool for future practises and be involved directly on policy making regarding migration issues.

In order to inform and empower people to participate in MRIC meetings and also become familiar with the activities of the team, the SAT hosted a series of online discussions on the matter. So far three (3) of these online discussions have been materialized and facilitated by the SAT. The first one involved members of the wider refugee & migrant Communities along with community leaders in which the



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participants were informed of the existence of the MRICs as well as of their role and purpose. This online discussion was also not published to the wider public again due to security reasons it did achieve its purpose, nevertheless, providing the necessary information to the participants as well as good practises and ideas on how to enhance refugee & migrant participation to the Councils' meetings.

The second online discussion, materialized on the 18th of December 2020, involved advocacy officers from prominent NGOs on the same subject. One can find the video of the discussion in the [SATs Facebook page](#). It will be also published on the SATs website shortly.

Last but not least, the online discussion materialized on the 4th of March 2021 involving local Authorities' officials with members of the European Council for Refugees & Exiles (ECRE). Specifically, Mr. Yakoub Kibeida, Executive Director of the organization "Mosaico Azioni per i Rifugiati" in Italy and a member of the Board of Director of ECRE and Ms. Hala Akari, currently working as a project coordinator in the city of Mariestad in Sweden to support asylum seekers into social inclusion and integration in the labour market and a member of ECRE, both participated in our online meeting. The discussion once again regarded the functionality of the MRICs and the formal State platform it provides for the Communities, only this time the SAT connected Greek officials with members of our European network. The reason is twofold; first to provide information on what is happening on a national level on this subject and on the other hand what is happening in other E.U. countries (Existence of MRICs in other countries, good practises etc.). The GFR and the SAT will continue to facilitate these kinds of interactions by connecting Greek officials with representatives of our wider E.U. network since we believe that it is through this interaction that good practises can be known and sought after and that common goals can be achieved. Knowledge should be shared and should aim at providing solutions, connecting everyone under the cause of the inclusion of refugees and migrants in European societies.



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## Isave & Training Kit for Empowering Refugee-Led Community Organizations Erasmus+ projects

Erasmus+ projects like the Isave and the Training Kit gives us hope for the future since it covers many aspects of what the SAT and the GFR are working on. Not only its objective is in line with our advocacy strategy but it also offers sustainability, something that several previous projects were in lack of.

The Isave project aims to create Youth Advocate Committees in four (4) different countries (Turkey, Greece, Germany and Ireland) that would go through workshops regarding Human Rights with a specific focus on violations. The Youth Committees will have an advisory role in the creation of an advocacy video that will include eight (8) different stories of refugees and asylum seekers (two from each country) that would create a map of human rights violations throughout the involved countries. However, the role of the Youth Committees does not finish here and this is how this specific project provides sustainability; the Youth Committees of each country will have the opportunity to cooperate with one another and engage in future advocacy campaigns and activities or projects, even establish Youth Committees in other countries under common causes.

The Aditus led Erasmus+ project aims to see a dramatic improvement in the quality of enjoyment of human rights by refugees and is based on the idea of supporting the active inclusion of marginalised, vulnerable or excluded communities. With this, the project seeks to strengthen refugee inclusion by supporting the empowerment of those refugees who want to play an active role in their communities and at the EU level. Through the project, community needs, strengths and trends will be identified, and we will seek to produce an educational package that will tackle these challenges and provide improved skills to overcome them.



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Part of our project will be a training programme which will be geared at supporting the mobilisation of refugees into organised and effective communities that will be active in various spheres such as peer-to-peer support, provision of information or other community-based services, advocacy with national governmental stakeholders in order to bring the voice of excluded groups to the attention of policy-makers, engagement in public awareness-raising, talking directly from the heart of their represented communities.

This will be the Training Kit, our ultimate deliverable which will address the challenges faced by refugees in integrating effectively in their host countries and that will provide a content addressing Refugee-led Community Organisations (RCOs) who wish to be active at a national level, together with training content addressing RCOs who wish to be active at a European level and will then be available to the public and thoroughly disseminated throughout the Partners' networks. The latter consists of organizations from five (5) different countries that have already concluded their national reports and are currently working on the toolkit. More information about this project can be found by clicking on this [link](#).

## Epilogue

The Self-Advocacy Team will continue its course of advocating for the inclusion of refugees and migrants in society. In our future actions we will address the mainstream media in a final online discussion regarding the functionality of the MRICs. This event will take place late in May 2021 and will bring together all of our previous online discussions and conclusions. Following the final event a full report will be published in the SATs website.

At this point we have to mention that the GFR and the SAT is actively involved in the formation of MRICs in Municipalities throughout Greece. So far we have been



cooperating with the Municipalities of Ioannina, Larissa and Agios Dimitrios (Attica) among others. The establishment of MRICs in Municipalities that host a migrant and refugee population is of utmost importance for us since they provide an official communication channel between the Communities and local authorities but can also become so much more. It is up to the refugee and migrant led organizations, the Communities and the wider refugee and migrant populace to strengthen this institutional tool and provide much needed solutions through their participation.

We will keep on publishing our campaigns, projects and activities and empower communities and individuals to step up for their rights and their inclusion in the Greek society. A noble cause in a hostile system.