

Refugee crisis in Greece: The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens paves the way to meet the challenge

Demetrios Moris, Evika Karamagioli, Ioannis Karavokyros, Anastasios Angelou, Emmanouil Pikoulis

International Medicine/Health Crisis Management, School of Medicine, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece

Correspondence to: Demetrios Moris, MD, PhD. Agiou Thoma 17, 11527, Athens, Greece. Email: dimmoris@yahoo.com.

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By its statute, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUoA)—the oldest and more prestigious Institution of Higher Education in Greece—supports education at the highest level and promotes social cohesion (1). During this refugee crisis of enormous magnitude (2), NKUoA actively supports these vulnerable populations with a variety of immediate actions including healthcare services and integration actions (*Figure 1*). Moreover, it supports collaborations among Institutional volunteer programs, local authorities, private non-profit foundations, NGOs, social partners and General State Administration (Ministry of Health). To ensure the transparency of the actions and inform public opinion about refugee crisis, a bulletin including updates on policies about refugees, with special interest in Greece, is released weekly under the auspice of NKUoA. NKUoA has also established an Action Watch-Solidarity Network for the refugees with the participation of more than 100 doctors and scientific bodies in order to offer immediate and coordinated volunteer actions, including administrative support, healthcare services and supplies.

The rectorate of NKUoA supported the initiative for pediatric healthcare and vaccination as well as supervised the Transcultural Psychiatry and Dental Clinic. As far as the education of refugees is concerned, special actions about the creativity of women and children were supported, mainly focusing on musical, theatrical and painting activities and the acquisition of Greek language (e-Learning platform). Finally, directions and local actions for the smoother refugee integration were made to local societies. More than 100 lectures had been arranged on a variety of subjects from members of an established expert committee. These lectures were open to public. Their primary purpose is to examine

the long-term consequences of high immigration on society and to look at efficient integration measures for immigrants and refugees. Moreover, by offering thorough information about the refugees, not only in Academic and Healthcare personnel, but also to society, they will further boost the human capital and generosity of Greek spirit which seems amply capable of helping the refugees (3).

The School of Medicine (SoM) demonstrated a manifold plan of actions to support the refugees. Its principal contribution is the healthcare service on the field, in terms of limited resource medicine, offered by certified physicians and nurses (4). At the same time, numerous national and international seminars, dealing with the healthcare needs of immigrating and displaced populations, have taken place under the auspice of the SoM. Also, a migrant health project that became operational at refugee centers focusing on sensitizing the local authorities on the prevention and management of communicable and non-communicable diseases has also been launched. Finally, certified SoM tutors were sent to train local authorities and healthcare personnel in emergency medical evacuation of populations at risk (*Table 1*).

Universities have a duty to hark the social needs. NKUoA paved the way to meet the healthcare and integration challenge in the era of refugee crisis acting as a pioneer in an effort to advance a new participatory model of pedagogy that not only treats education as a fundamental human right but also paths the way for policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and capacity building for those in need, according the UNESCO standards. The next step should be the preparation for the forthcoming “higher education emergency” (5) that these people will face inevitably.

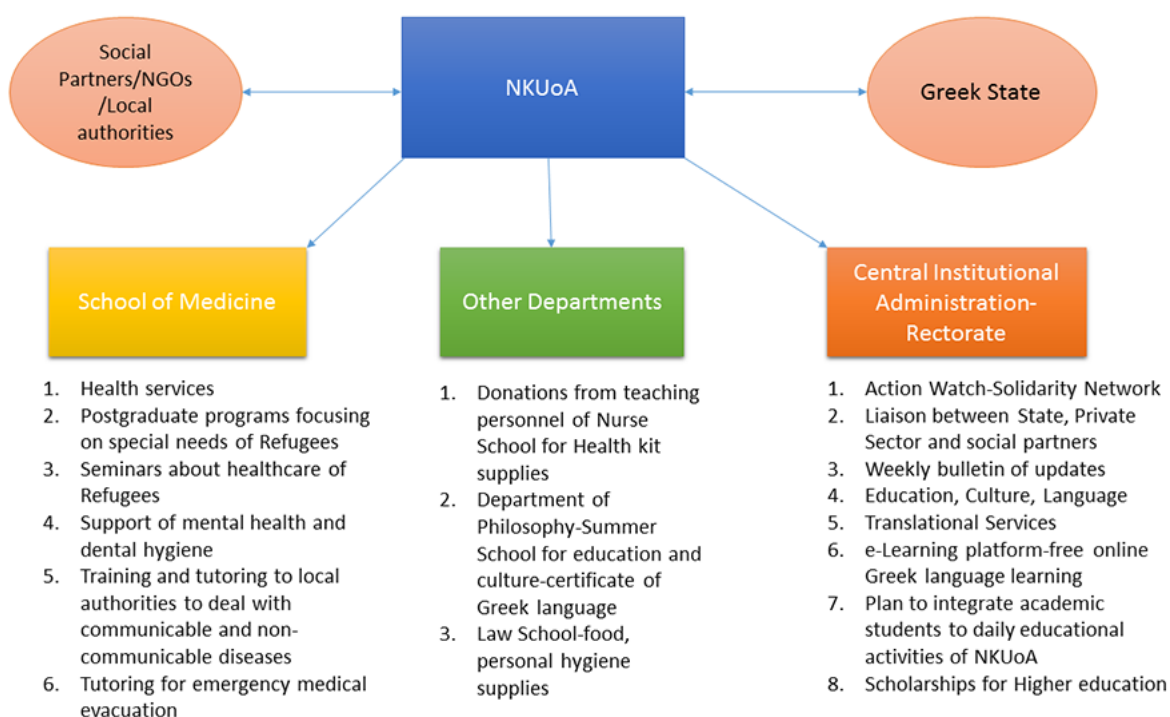


Figure 1 Illustration of the actions of NKUoA during the refugee crisis. NKUoA, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

Table 1 Categories of actions of School of Medicine during the refugee crisis

(I) Healthcare services

- (i) Prevention (vaccinations, mammography, Pap Test, HBV, HCV, HIV)
- (ii) Disease control (antibiotics, insulin etc.)
- (iii) Limited resources (street) medicine
- (iv) Psychological support-specialists of mental health and clinic of transcultural psychiatry
- (v) Dental hygiene
- (vi) Equality in accessing health services

(II) Support and tutoring of local societies

- (i) Interventions at “hot spots”
- (ii) Seminars and education for local authorities in areas of interest
- (iii) Training of local healthcare personnel
- (iv) Registry of medical records

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Footnote:

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to declare.

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