



# STAY TUNED

BOOSTING THE FREQUENCY OF QUALIFICATION

## Solution Story // Implementation Journey Ampelokipi-Menemeni

The municipality of Ampelokipi-Menemeni, within the city of Thessaloniki, Greece, has had a focus on working with a specific community in the city as part of the Stay Tuned project. This is a Roma community, with a high level of very early school drop-out coupled with a range of social and economic problems, including poverty and health challenges.



## 01. WHAT WAS THE STARTING POINT?

Magda Roussetti is responsible for the education department of the municipality of Ampelokipi-Menemeni. One of the priorities for the municipality (and for the national government in Greece) is the reduction of school drop-outs and Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET).

But as with all Greek municipalities, Magda's role does not include the remit to get involved in school teaching and the curriculum. The content and structure of the school day is effectively "off-limits" for the municipality and they must not interfere with these aspects or do work within the school.

As a result, officials in corresponding positions have typically discounted their being able to influence ELET and have left this exclusively to the schools. However, ELET negatively affects

many areas that are within a municipality's concern and that are their responsibility to address, from unemployment to poverty to the local economy.

The particular challenge for Ampelokipi-Menemeni in terms of ELET is the high level of school drop-out within one of the city's Roma communities, Aghios Nektarios, within the Menemeni district.

This is one of the areas within the Stay Tuned network where a city is truly dealing with early "drop-out" from school, rather than just a failure to attain upper secondary level qualifications – children in this community (girls in particular) will often drop out from school in their very early teenage years or earlier.

## 02. WHAT WERE THEY WORKING TO IMPLEMENT?

A team from across the municipality, was working on the subject including Magda Roussetti (Director of Social Protection, Education, Athletics & Culture), Katerina Paschalidou (Director of the Department for Social Policy), Athanasios Papageorgiou (General Secretariat), Anastasia Dimoka and Fotini Pantoulari (from the Department for developing, organization, programming and European programmes).

The team were working on a range of actions to address the challenges within the Aghios Nektarios community in relation to reducing

school drop-out and improving educational success.

The team were also establishing a new Community Centre within the Ag. Nektarios community. The community centre function is part of a national network and programme, co-funded by the EU.

However, the team had an opportunity to define precisely what expertise they wanted to have within this service and to make a bid for specific additional functions to be included. They took this opportunity to tailor the support offer to the needs of the specific community within Ag. Nektarios.

### **Key Policy Themes for Ampelokipi-Menemeni:**

Target Groups

Career Guidance

Informal Learning and Schools as Communities

### 03. WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION?

The biggest barriers the team have always faced with implementing the measures to support this particular community is that, whilst they can offer the right services for supporting Roma people, the specific culture within the Roma community means that there can be resistance to real engagement: a lack of participation at an individual level and a relatively low view of education in general. Education is not a priority, so the support on offer is very often not taken up.

Another challenge was that much of the support on offer has typically been provided well outside the local area. The “second chance school” for example was several kilometres away, with limited public transport options for potential students to reach the school. If they did enrol, the distance and the cost of daily travel were an ongoing disincentive to continue attending. Students required ongoing support to remain in the education system. This wasn't a sustainable situation.

So, whilst a lot of support was theoretically available, it wasn't well targeted and not always very accessible to those in the community who needed it.

The municipality have never been able to employ people within the community structures and hence have always relied on the school directors and school functions to provide intelligence and understanding about

what is really going on within the district and what the specific problems are.

Overall, the fact that the municipality doesn't have jurisdiction over the educational and schooling activities themselves (and is not allowed to interfere) they are restricted to working outside the classroom. Education policy and curriculum, teaching etc. is the domain of the national Ministry.

This presents a challenge on local level – the team need to provide activities and support that fits in with the local school context, but whilst only being able to adjust one side of that equation. This requires close collaboration with schools and school directors, who often have different priorities and pressures placed on them.

Consequently, the municipality staff are often seen as outsiders, particularly in the district of Aghios Nektarios. This in turn means those in the community are less trusting and therefore less likely to engage positively with the support on offer. This completes a cycle of challenging circumstances, whereby the root of the social challenges are essentially the same issues as the implementation challenges: the difficulties in getting the community to engage are the cause of the initial problems and also make implementation of (good) interventions much more difficult.

#### **Key Implementation Challenges for Ampelokipi-Menemeni:**

**IC2 – Stakeholder Engagement**

**IC1 – Maintaining an Integrated Approach**

## 04. WHAT WAS THEIR DELIVERY APPROACH? HOW DID THEY TACKLE THE BARRIERS?

When the team managed to get the community centre established within the Ag. Nektarios community, this provided a major opportunity to take a different approach to engaging with those most at risk (or those with most potential to gain from being supported).

Suddenly, they had people working day-to-day in the community, on the ground. They were interacting directly with people from within the community, rather than going through proxies (where messages may get distorted or watered-down). Prior to that point, there was much less first-hand evidence of the challenges: the team had been aware of the general problems, but they didn't have specific data or hands-on observations to back that up. It was largely anecdotal.

Soon, Vasso Vatali (the educational specialist who had meanwhile joined the team) and colleagues were working directly with the community. A much more nuanced picture of the local people and the problems they experienced was starting to build. The team could therefore start to create a better idea of exactly what support might be needed and what would work best.

Gaining an understanding of the people they were trying to support was crucial. The team were able to collect more data about the situation and the challenges that existed within the community. The employees of the Community Centre were able to start to use their knowledge of their local situations and context to help encourage and support them to take steps to support themselves.

As the Roma Department of the Community Centre is based within the district, the staff was seen less and less as "outsiders". This helped them gain the trust of the community. From that point, it was much easier to approach them. That was a great advantage as the educational specialist could start to work with them and "nudge" them towards (re)engaging with education.

One lever used by the team was that of the "Social Solidarity Allowance" – the state support money received by those on a low (or no) income. However, in Greece there is a condition that people can only receive this allowance if they have completed compulsory school. Close working with the community made it obvious that being able to get this allowance was important to many of them – so this was used as an incentive ; a "carrot"... Stay engaged in education and you can secure your future allowance.

Re-engaging with education was a big step for many in this community. But the reward of accessing the Allowance was clear and tangible and, most importantly, did not require a change of mindset to be an incentive.

Because many of the community don't value education, encouraging them to stay in education just to become better educated is not a motivation. But encouraging them to stay in education and complete compulsory school to access the Allowance... that was a motivation for them. This was without them having to become inherently interested in education in its own right.

Then, having engaged someone with education, going to the second chance school to gradually became more normal for them, more routine. After that, it was easier to gently encourage the next step: “have you thought beyond school? What job might you like? What about higher school or vocational school? Have you thought what you could do?” etc.

Once back in the education system, talking about their future (and the place of education in that future) became easier. They were studying with others who were in the education system. They were amongst peers, some of whom were also thinking about their future. That sounds obvious, but at home in their community, thinking about education and their future was not normal and not encouraged.

There were few people to discuss that with. But now it seemed more possible for them. It is a small thing, but significant on the path to changing their future for themselves.

This re-engagement with education normally went via three actions. First, the remedial teaching programme for students; second, cooperation with the “second chance school” and Night School for adults; and third,

through the (pre-existing) adults education programme for the retrospective acquisition of Primary School Certification.

However, the team also realised that to be successful in their studies, the children needed support from their parents. Very often the parents could not do this because the parents themselves could not read and write. They had never completed their own education. The opportunity for parents to engage with the “second chance school” or remedial education programmes and to gain their own primary school certificate was a way to help a family to re-engage with education *together*.

As we know that parental engagement and support is one of the biggest predeterminants of educational success, this approach was an obvious response in some ways, but challenging to implement in the Roma context.

However, the relationship the staff of the community centre were building within the community enabled them to start engaging people in this process – to convince them and to help them enrol in the second chance school and to gain their compulsory education accreditation.

**Key Implementation Themes for Ampelokipi-Menemeni:**  
Open Working and Stakeholder Involvement  
Conditions for Implementation  
Leadership of change

## 05. WHAT WORKED? AND WHAT DIDN'T?

During the implementation process the team noticed that they finally achieved a good level of cooperation with the general population and the local stakeholder team. Working from “within” the community was essential to success in this area.

The team also successfully strengthened existing relationships with the school directors. This facilitated the communication and thus became essential for the municipality to plan and set up support activities and programmes that fitted around the main school day and curriculum, without interfering with them. By working closely with schools, the team found it gradually became easier to develop a more productive relationship, one that helped to remove some of the structural barriers and enable a dialogue with the schools to seek mutually beneficial solutions.

Another strength was the creation of a strong team inside the municipality, with good political support. The team developed a strong working relationship that made it quicker and easier to respond to challenges and connect with the other stakeholders. Unfortunately, the team still feel they didn't get good participation by Roma in general in the remedial teaching – improvements have been made but still it's not the level of change they were hoping for. More needs to be done. As one of the team states, “maybe we expected too much; maybe starting with just a few people engaging is enough to begin with...”. This is an important point, as lasting change, especially with this kind of topic, does not happen overnight. There are generational behaviours to shift and that takes times.

In that way, the team's approach is a strong example of understanding and working with the conditions for implementation when trying to get new projects and policies working effectively. The same measures

implemented elsewhere might work better or differently, but in the specific conditions present in the Ag. Nektarios district, a different approach to implementation is required.

A specific example of this is the remedial teaching at high school level. The team set up two programmes for this – one within Ag. Nektarios and one at a different location in the wider Menemeni district. The offer and the structure of the two programmes were essentially the same. The subjects and content would be tailored to the enrolled students in both cases. The same teachers were employed in both schools. The difference was the context.

When invited to the first meeting about enrolment in the Mememeni school, over 20 students attended, all accompanied by their parents. There was a very positive atmosphere and the parents were appreciative that this support was being offered to their children. By contrast, at the same meeting for the Ag. Nektarios school, only two students turned up. Neither were with their parents. This is a simple but stark example of how the team needed to adapt their approach to the delivery of their projects, based on the context. Or, where possible, also adjust the local conditions to be more favourable. The community centre was a mechanism for doing both of these things.

On the one hand, for the example of remedial teaching, it enabled the programme to be offered in a different way, being presented as something that is part of the community; on the other hand, the work of the community centre was changing the local conditions, making the offer of remedial teaching more interesting and acceptable to the local people. Understanding the conditions requires insights and data. Adjusting the conditions requires local collaboration with stakeholders.

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## 06. WHAT DID THEY LEARN?

The team knew beforehand that working from within the community was a key element, but now they have a clear idea of what that means in practice. It's easy enough to say, “we will work in a bottom-up, community-led way” but the practicalities of how you do that are not always so straightforward.

The team have used the community centre to engage more directly with the local citizens and develop a different credibility with them. The team are not viewed with suspicion or as outsiders and this put them in a different position, where they could now support and influence people much more effectively.

The power of this direct contact also wasn't fully understood beforehand. People in the Ag. Nektarios community had previously always worked through their community leaders to make contact with the municipality. City staff rarely had much direct contact with the specific people they were supporting as this was often brokered by community leaders.

Now, the team understand the local people much better as well as their needs, challenges and their priorities, hopes and dreams. This improved understanding is critical for designing and implementing future support programmes.

The importance of the role of parents is also now much clearer to them. Particularly, that the parents being involved with education too also helps children to be more involved. There is better mutual support and understanding and a shift in values to be more positive towards education.

Consequently, the team realised that supporting parents to access remedial adult education and the second chance school will mean that they are being active in the education system and more likely to support their own children to stay or re-enrol in school.

As the team observed, the new generation of parents have slightly different views on education to their parents. They are not as hostile towards it as the previous generation. That, combined with now having key education support services available within the community means that these newer families can be engaged more easily through the community centre and are more likely to participate in school, because it is less abnormal to them and the facilities for remedial school being nearby makes it much easier for them to attend. There are fewer barriers and challenges that might make them drop-out again.

The team realise they need to harness this slight softening of attitudes to help further nudging of behaviour.

The team have also realised the different role that the municipality can take in supporting education success – becoming a broker in the process; linking together all the aspects that

affect educational success (but not necessarily being the people who intervene directly in all cases). They are seeing other opportunities for combating ELET more generally. Working on their projects alongside the Stay Tuned network of cities has given them new ideas and new insights into how they could work locally.

## 07. WHAT DID THEY CHANGE AS A RESULT?

The community centre being established in the municipality, along with a physical Roma department based in the area, has helped the team to change the whole dynamic of the work of the municipality in the community. For the first time, people from the community are dealing directly with people from the municipality; they are accessing help and support for themselves.

Previously, such contact with the municipality was channelled through community leaders, meaning communication was more constricted. The community centre being part of the community is making support more accessible and empowering local citizens.

One of the team members points out, “We had some employees in the neighbourhood years ago, but without a strong relationship with the community. Now we have eight people working there; there’s an immediate connection with the community – we can relate much more to them (and they to us). They can state their problems and needs and we have a much more clear understanding of these.”

Another team member adds that, “we are becoming a stronger broker in the whole education process. Before that we didn’t have that strength. We are becoming facilitators.

We are improving the methodology and tools so we can implement stronger actions in the future.”

The team say that the community now feel that more included in the whole policy of the municipality. It’s not just the number of employees and the roles, but also who they are; they understand the full range of needs of the people they are working with and have the skills and experience to support them.

Testament to this are the local second chance schools. Having applied to Ministry to get the second chance schools established in the within community itself, this is now set up and running in the afternoon in the local school buildings.

Having community centre support within the municipality fundamentally changes the conditions for implementing future measures. The attitudes of the population are changing – they see the community centre as a team who are there to help them and more and more they are going to the team to seek out that support for themselves.





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## 08. WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS IT MADE?

The new Department of the second chance school was established in the community in the 2017/2018 academic year. They now have 45 students from the district enrolled for the current academic year, compared to just 15 two years ago. 65 parents are studying to get primary level accreditation and people the community centre has supported are now securing jobs. All these people, in themselves, act as role models and champions for staying in education and for enabling a new path for their lives.

Having the second chance school now on site within the community also makes it much easier for the team to lay out a potential path for people – from obtaining primary education as an adult, through to a local second chance

school and high school, and on to getting a job. The fact the educational offer is now within the community, in the local schools makes a huge difference. Take-up is better as a result. Greater prospects come with that. Activating a few people starts to set a different tone for the community and their expectations. They are small steps, but significant.

In terms of the teams, their approach to implementation is also developing. Using the Community Centre as a key enabler, they are taking new approaches to working with the community and making their projects a success. Again, these are early stages but the path ahead looks promising.

## 09. WHAT DO THEY PLAN TO CHANGE IN THE FUTURE?

For the future, they are hoping to get the second chance school made permanent. It was set up as a pilot by the education ministry, but the evidence is now building a strong case to have it formally established.

The community centre served to build the engagement with the community and set different expectations for the future. There is already a gradual shift in mindset and culture, helped by the growing trust in the community centre staff.

The team plans to deepen even more the working relationships with the schools, talking more directly with teachers, not just the school directors. Like the community centre staff, the teachers are more connected to the people and the challenges and therefore are in the best position to influence and support people.

There is still an ongoing challenge around the levels of engagement of the community. When comparing the response to the remedial school offer to children and families in the wider Menemeni district, the engagement, enrolment and continuation rate was much better outside the Roma district of Ag. Nektarios. But while the team were disappointed with initial the take-up from the Roma community, their reflections were also that maybe their expectations were in fact too high. They did get engagement, and

maybe that is the first step to build on, not a reason to stop the programme. Real and lasting change takes time. It is rarely a 'quick win'.

The project in general, working on the challenges in a network of other cities, has helped them to see that it is possible to influence the wider ELET problems. Prior to Stay Tuned, the municipality only focussed on under 18 school drop-outs. Now they are seeing for the first time that they have potential ways to influence the 18-25 age group as well – not just tackling primary and secondary school drop-outs. This is pretty unique for a Greek municipality.

The team are leading the way by looking to tackle true ELET in their city, boosting the frequency of qualification in all young people in Ampelokipi-Menemeni.

