

About IRC Hellas

International Rescue Committee (IRC) Hellas was established in Greece in 2015. It focuses on assisting refugees and asylum seekers as well as vulnerable people from other communities in Greece.

Since the start of programming in Greece, the IRC has provided support and protection services to people living in camps and urban settings. Directly, or in collaboration with partners, in 2023 we have provided mental health, psychosocial and legal support in Lesvos and Athens, employability and labour market integration services in Thessaloniki and Athens, and child protection, women empowerment, and gender equality and inclusion services in Athens. Nationwide, we support people with vital, reliable, and up-to-date information via **Refugee.Info**, as well as through advocacy activities.

In IRC Hellas, we measure success of our programming against the number of people who see improvement in their lives in the following areas:

- Economic recovery and development;
- Education:
- Mental health and better chances of recovery from ill mental health;
- Power to influence decisions that affect their lives;
- Safety from physical, sexual and psychological harm.

Child Protection

Case Management for Unaccompanied Children in urban Athens

In 2023, IRC Hellas, in partnership with the **Network for Children's Rights (NCR)**, provided support to **435** unaccompanied refugee children living in precarious conditions for a period of 10 months. NCR is a member of the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) for unaccompanied children, which provides an alternative to protective custody and homelessness. The mechanism offers tracing services, assessment of vulnerabilities, rapid evaluation of the best interests of each child, and support of newly identified unaccompanied children (UAC) across the country. Key areas of intervention include immediate referral of UAC to the 24/7 Tracing Line of the NERM, their transfer for identification to the Hellenic Police, and emergency accommodation based on SOP's shared by the General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection. With the support from IRC, NCR was able to enhance its capacity and effectively meet the increasing need for assistance. The team, funded by the IRC consisted of two (2) psychologists and one (1) social worker, who were coordinated by the project manager of the program "Protection for All Minors" funded by Intersos Hellas.

Supported Independent Living (SIL) apartments for Unaccompanied Children

In 2023, IRC Hellas operated **10 SIL** apartments for unaccompanied asylum-seeking adolescents in Athens. Each apartment hosts up to four (4) adolescents, supported by a team of experienced professionals, social workers, caretakers, interpreters, lawyers and an educator. Throughout 2023, out of the **60 children** supported in the IRC SIL apartments, **50%** were girls. We provide safe shelter, psychosocial support, legal counseling, case management and representation, nonformal education, and a variety of creative and skills-building activities.





LEFT: A group of unaccompanied asylum-seeking adolescent boys, supported by the SIL framework, on a trip to Athens's south suburbs in December 2023. Photo: IRC; **RIGHT:** An unaccompanied adolescent girl, supported by the SIL model, on a morning walk in the area of Kypseli, in May 2023. Photo: IRC.

At the same time, we support activities that promote the adolescents' interaction and integration into the Greek society, such as visits to cultural events, museums and participation in sports activities, while the children are enrolled in local high schools. The social workers are in regular communication with the teachers and headmasters of the schools and are kept informed of the children's progress and their adaptation to the school environment.

The **SIL framework** is considered a quality, alternative care arrangement for children 16-18 years old, which promotes individualized, one-to-one support and is centered around the best interest of each child. It offers holistic care that aims to prepare adolescents for adulthood. In 2023, **the SIL support team for UAC** consisted of four (4) social workers, seven (7) caretakers, five (5) interpreters, two (2) lawyers, one (1) educator, two (2) coordinators, a SIL senior officer and a program manager. Unfortunately, due to finding constraints, as of the end of 2023 IRC Hellas operated three out of the 10 apartments.

Semi-Independent Living (SIL) model of care for people 15 years old and above living under institutional care

In April 2021, IRC Hellas adapted and replicated the SIL approach to another vulnerable population, the children and young adults who have been living under institutional care, and thus initiated a pilot "Semi-Independent Living (SIL)" model of care. This model aims to provide support to children above the age of 15 and young adults who reside in institutional care in Greece and help towards the country's deinstitutionalization efforts. The project was carried out in partnership with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MoLSS) and the Institute of Child Health (ICH) under the European Child Guarantee program. The implementation of the pilot project informed the design of the upcoming National program of Supported Independent Living for children and young adults living in institutional care.

As part of the pilot two (2) apartments were established in Athens through the project, and they have the capacity to accommodate up to 12 children and young adults. In 2023, six (6) beneficiaries were accommodated in the SIL apartments. In addition to accessing safe housing, personalized psychosocial, educational, skills building activities and employability support including skills assessment and job counselling were also provided.

After the end of the EU Child Guarantee program and the funding from UNICEF in mid-2023, the IRC co-signed an MoU with UNICEF and the Regional Development Fund of Attica, to ensure the continuation of the project until the publication of the National call by the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family, with a duration until September 2023.

Women's Protection and Empowerment

Between August 2022 and July 2023, the IRC operated four (4) functional and fully equipped **WIL** (**Women's Independent Living**) apartments for asylum-seeking and refugee women with their children (single-parent families) in the city center of Athens. The women supported by the programme were provided with housing, non-food items, psychosocial and legal support, interpretation, as well as assistance in building their life, job skills and support accessing the labor market, always taking into account their individual needs, wishes and characteristics. Additionally, the professionals ensured that the women supported had access to health, social, and specialized legal services, Greek and English language courses, as well as creative activities, seminars, women's empowerment groups etc., through referrals to other organizations.

The main goal of the programme was the overall protection and empowerment of the women and their children, not only for the time they stayed in the apartments, but also to enable them to continue their lives independently after the completion of their stay. **Eleven women and 14 children were supported in IRC WIL apartments in 2023**. The program ended in August 2023 and IRC Hellas faced many challenges in supporting families in finding independent accommodation, as available spaces in shelters are scarce. All women managed to exit the program and find independent accommodation, with the support of the IRC staff and the women's support networks.

In February 2023, IRC Hellas commenced Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention programming under the project "CARE: Community-Based Primary Prevention of Gender-based Violence in Greece and Italy" co-funded by the European Union [European Commission's Citizens, Equality, Right and Values (CERV) program], leading a binational consortium consisting of Caritas Hellas, Global Girl Media Greece, and Centro Penc.

CARE aims to contribute towards the **prevention of gender-based violence against women and girls**, with a focus on intimate partner violence. This happens through community-based interventions that engage women, men, and their children, as well as women-led media dissemination activities for the general public. The project offers psychosocial support peer-to-peer groups, physical and recreational activities, media and film workshops to women to build empowerment, capacity, and peer networks to support other women and lead change in their lives. Additionally, selected women will be trained to become GBV Focal Points for prevention in their communities.

Men will be engaged in a transformative process to foster accountability, encourage change of harmful gender norms, shift in attitudes, and likelihood of bystander intervention. It's in this context that the IRC is adapting and piloting, for the first time in Europe, the Women Rise, a GBV-centered psychosocial support framework, and Engaging Men in Accountable Practices (EMAP), a framework of transformational, accountability work for men, guided by the voices of women.

In 2023, **23** women participated in three psychosocial support groups in Greece (11) and Italy (12), following through 8-10 sessions of the Women Rise intervention. **165** women participated in physical and recreational activities, including pilates, yoga, and art therapy in Greece (91) and Italy (74), and **95** children in the Child Friendly Spaces (42 in Greece and 53 in Italy). The project reached 15,737 people in 2023 through online dissemination activities (e.g. social media posts, webpages).

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

In 2023, IRC continued to provide MHPSS services to the hosted community but also to the asylum seekers and the refugees residing in the Closed Controlled Access Center (CCAC) on Lesvos island. In Athens, IRC continued the cooperation with the organization **One Happy Family** in the "Victoria Community



Female participants attending the Women Rise psychosocial support groups in the framework of CARE project in October 2023. Photo: IRC.

Center" and cooperated closely with Ukrainian Diaspora, the Ukrainian community in Vari but also with multiple other Non-Governmental Organizations. In addition, the IRC MHPSS program developed a partnership with <u>Irida Women's Center</u> in Thessaloniki, Northern Greece, aiming to reach more people in need, in areas in which available services are limited. Through the partnership with Irida Women's Center, refugees, asylum seekers, and local women have access to mental health and psychosocial support services, protection, and legal services. Moreover, children have access to the child safe space in which a child early development program is taking place.

Through the comprehensive Mental Health and Psychosocial support approach IRC was able to provide free specialized mental health services to refugees, asylum seekers but also vulnerable people from the host community with severe mental health disorders and mental health problems. Through the multidisciplinary team consisting of psychologists, case workers and psychiatrists, IRC was able to meet the multiple needs of the clients. The services included individual counseling sessions provided by trained psychologists, psychiatric assessment and follow up but also comprehensive case management, including referrals to other organizations when needed. Coverage of medication to the people who do not have access to the relevant national Greek social security documentation to acquire medicine for free or at low cost and transportation to IRC services was also provided. The MHPSS team also conducted a series of psychosocial support and recreational activities, as well as psychoeducation sessions, to raise awareness among the communities regarding mental health and reduce stigma. In Lesvos, IRC cooperated closely with the local kindergartens and provided parental psychoeducation sessions to parents/caregivers. Furthermore, in 2023, the MHPSS program offered capacity-building activities to professionals and volunteers of other organizations working in the humanitarian field, in an effort to improve staff well-being and ultimately improve the quality of care provided to vulnerable people.

During 2023, the IRC Hellas MHPSS program in Athens and Lesvos supported **176 people** through 1363 individual and group sessions, **147 people** through 12 psychoeducation sessions, **687 people**, **including 363 children**, through 129 psychosocial support sessions. Regarding capacity building, the IRC MHPSS program offered 25 internal and external trainings on mental health topics, with 268 professionals and volunteers benefitting from them. Moreover, 18 professionals benefited from the support groups through 12 sessions.





RIGHT and LEFT: IRC clients participating in psychoeducation sessions conducted in Lesvos. Photo: IRC.

In Northern Greece, in Thessaloniki, from February 2023, IRC through the partnership with the Irida Women's Center supported in total **235 women**. 47 women received individual counseling sessions and 141 women participated in psychosocial support activities. In addition, **125 women received legal support**. Finally, **161 children** participated in the child-friendly space activities.

Economic Recovery and Development (ERD)

In 2023, through its Economic Recovery and Development programs, the IRC provided employment and self-employment services and skills development directly and in collaboration with partners.

Employability

Employability services include individual career counseling, help with job search, and job readiness workshops that develop crucial employability skills, as well as info sessions for specific topics of interest such as labour rights and familiarisation with the Greek work culture. In 2023, the IRC provided employment services to 237 vulnerable youth and adults.

Throughout 2023, IRC Hellas continued providing support to newly arrived displaced refugees from Ukraine through the provision of employability and skills building services. In particular, the IRC ERD program in Athens, focuses on supporting Ukrainian refugees with cultural orientation information sessions, individual job counseling and job readiness trainings, as well as with intensive two-month Greek and English language courses. Lastly, **87 students were registered in Greek and English language courses**.

To accommodate the needs of Ukrainian refugees in Thessaloniki in a sustainable and holistic way, the IRC established a partnership with Irida Women's Center. Irida Women's Center with the support of a sub-award from IRC Hellas, implemented a skills-building project which includes Greek and English language courses focused on cultivating communication skills and competencies for successful employment as well as soft skills courses focused on facilitating the integration into the Greek society and labor market. Additionally, IRC Hellas ensured access of Ukrainian refugees to integration services by supporting Irida Women's Center with a Livelihoods Officer who developed and established an economic empowerment service based on IRC's expertise and preexisting tools. In particular, the Livelihoods Officer provided individual job counseling sessions, group Job Readiness Trainings and Information Sessions on topics such as Labor Rights, CV and Cover Letter, Interview Preparation, Workplace Culture in Greece etc. In Thessaloniki 106 women were supported through this project.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship services are also provided by the IRC to refugees, migrants, and vulnerable Greeks in both individual and group levels. About 76 people received entrepreneurship support in 2023 and over 614 since the initiation of the Economic Recovery and Development program in 2017.

The IRC together with its partner, the <u>Alba Graduate Business School</u> of the American College of Greece, implemented "Craft your Business", a project where people received business training and coaching and had the opportunity to apply for start-up grants and further mentorship.

Holistic support for UAC reaching adulthood

The IRC, in collaboration with the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) offers empowerment and self-reliance support to youth 18-23 in the form of a holistic program that provides psychosocial support, Greek language lessons, career counselling, housing navigation support and educational opportunities, such as vocational trainings and scholarships. In 2023 the program supported 92 young people with 384 hours of psychosocial support, 394 career counseling sessions and 176 hours of Greek classes.

16 participants of the program managed to secure a full-time **job** during or after the completion of the program.



Khrystyna teaches a yoga class after building her yoga business with support through IRC and the CITI Foundation. Photo: IRC.

Skills4Work

In 2023, the IRC, offered to individuals interested in working in the sector of Tourism & Hospitality the opportunity to participate in a skills development program that included Greek language lessons, job counseling and scholarships for vocational training in the sector.

61 people participated in the program with 21 of them securing scholarships in vocational trainings for Barista, Bartender, Food & Beverage and Tour guide.



IRC Hellas ERD Networking Event at Impact Hub Athens in November 2023, featuring our guests from Kora Bakery and Wecook. Photo: IRC.

National Integration Project "HELIOS"

Since 2019, IRC Hellas collaborates with METAdrasi in the implementation of the national integration project HELIOS – Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection. In the framework of the HELIOS project, the IRC supported **80 refugees with soft skills training in Athens, through 330 hours of classes**.

Promoting Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

IRC Hellas is also leading "PROGEDI: Promoting Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace", a 16-month project with two (2) partners, <u>KEAN</u> and <u>Generation 2.0 RED</u>, co-funded by the European Union <u>[European Commission's' Citizens, Equality, Right and Values (CERV) program].</u>

The main objectives of the project are: (1) To foster a sustainable culture of inclusion in Greece, by raising awareness and strengthening the capacity in multi-dimensional diversity in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and selected public sector agencies and creating dialogue platforms between civil society, academia, underrepresented communities and businesses, and (2) to strengthen national and transnational cooperation on diversity management and inclusion practices through the sharing of best practices, resources and tools in Greece and Europe.

In 2023, IRC's partner, Generation 2.0 RED, produced the **Baseline Assessment Report**, which assessed the perspectives on the added value and benefits of Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI), better understood existing DEI practices of targeted SMEs, explored priorities and plans for further DEI measures, and assessed HR, managerial and organization needs. Additionally, IRC Hellas hosted two (2) Stakeholder Workshops and five (5) Dialogue Sessions with the **participation of more than 50 professionals working in various positions in the private sector and CSOs**. Lastly, KEAN organized the **first transnational webinar** between representatives of Diversity Charters from other EU countries, as well as professionals and stakeholders interested in diversity management and inclusion in the workplace.

Information

Born in 2015 as a mobile website, **Refugee.Info** provides critical information to thousands of asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece and traveling across Europe. It has since evolved into a unique multi-channel platform with 115,618 followers on **Facebook**, while 80,472 new users accessed the Refugee.Info website in 2023. Picking up from its collaboration from 2022 with **Mobile Info Team (MIT)**, Refugee.Info continued working together with MIT until the end of June 2023 when the partnership concluded.

Throughout 2023, Refugee.Info has been following news and developments to keep its website and social media content up to date, in order to capture changes in asylum procedures, bureaucratic policies or practices, and administrative changes while it shared information in six languages (Arabic, Farsi, French, Urdu, Ukrainian and English). In September 2023, the Somali language was added to its roster ensuring that all content on the website and social media is available in Somali while also Somali users can reach out to the helplines of Refugee.Info to ask a question in their mother tongue. Additionally, in November 2023 Refugee.Info Greece launched seven (7) Telegram announcement channels (one for each language it supports) and currently 567 people have subscribed to these channels.



Part of the communication material created under the Refugee.Info. Photo: IRC.

The Refugee.Info website hosts 103 articles covering the above topics and more. It also provides service mapping across Greece (over 469 services regularly updated), produces content for the Facebook page across these six languages and provided through the collaboration with its partner Mobile Info Team (January to June 2023) two-way communication support through helpdesk services (2,133 users on Messenger, WhatsApp and through email).

Lastly, since 2022 Refugee.Info Greece during its partnership with Mobile Info Team has been supporting the implementation of a research project on trafficking and exploitation prevention designed and undertaken by the <u>Immigration Policy Lab</u> at <u>ETH Zurich</u> and <u>University College London</u>. This year the research concluded that the online information provision along with the reach out to a moderator that responds to specific questions, empowers people to understand what trafficking is and how to seek support. At a later stage, the research will be published in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

Advocacy

IRC Hellas advocates in Greece and the EU for the protection of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees regarding access to territory, asylum procedures, reception conditions, protection services, access to information and integration. Working in close cooperation with the IRC programmes in Greece, the advocacy team seeks positive change for our clients' lives through research and reports, briefings and letters to decision makers to keep them aware of the reality on the ground and possible breaches of legislation.

The advocacy team also organizes meetings and events to bring policy makers together and push for the full respect of asylum seekers and refugees' rights. In 2023, four (4) events were coorganized by the IRC and other NGOs, and fourteen meetings with stakeholders from the Greek government and EU institutions were held to raise various issues refugees and asylum seekers face in Greece. In addition, the IRC, often in joint initiatives, sent six (6) letters, drafted two (2) advocacy briefings and published nine (9) press releases.



Illustration supporting our Advocacy work commissioned by Sahar Ghorishi/IRC.

In June 2023, the advocacy project "SafeR Children: Safeguarding the Rights of Children at Europe's Borders" was initiated. The aim of the project is to assess the extent to which children's rights, as enshrined in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), are respected in Europe's border policies and practices, in particular at the Greek and Bulgarian external borders. The desired outcome is that unaccompanied children are safe while trying to cross EU external borders, from Türkiye to Bulgaria and Greece.

In Greece, the project is implemented by the IRC and in Bulgaria, by our partner, the **Foundation for Access to Rights** (FAR).

Legal Support

The Afghan Legal Support project, initiated in October 2021 in response to the humanitarian crisis and the gradually deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, ensured the continuation of legal services' delivery to the target population until the end of September 2023. IRC Hellas' implementing partners in Greece and Albania successfully addressed the legal needs of Afghan evacuees by conducting legal awareness sessions and by providing specialized legal information related to the resettlement schemes in the E.U., U.S. or Canada, as well as targeted ad hoc legal counseling and legal representation.

At the same time, IRC's partners in Greece, HIAS and European Lawyers In Lesvos (ELIL), supported a significant number of asylum seekers who lacked access to appropriate and dignified reception conditions, either due to the substandard living conditions in refugee camps and Closed Control Access Centers (CCACs) or because of their cases falling under the "Safe Third Country" concept, rendering them in a legal limbo situation.

During the second cycle of the Afghan Legal Support project's implementation in Greece (from October 2022 until September 2023), IRC's partners in Greece, operating both in Lesvos Island and the mainland, provided immediate legal assistance to **186** persons seeking protection by carrying out legal counseling sessions and furthermore provided legal representation services before national, regional courts and administrative authorities to **76** asylum seekers. In the course of 2023, IRC remained committed to provide tailored technical expertise to all partners through monitoring visits, regular meetings, case consultations, and multi-thematic training sessions, ensuring the harmonious and consistent progress of the

project and the effective achievement of the project objectives. Furthermore, during the respective period, **60,615** users acquired access to accurate, vetted and timely information in their mother tongues through the **Refugee.Info** Greece website.

In Albania, IRC's implementing partner **Nisma ARSIS** remained the only legal services provider in the accommodation site of Shengjin and kept up their effective collaboration with the local stakeholders. Throughout the duration of the project, concrete legal assistance was provided to Afghan citizens, in accordance with their needs, through group information sessions and individual counseling. In total, **83 people received individual legal counseling**, while Nisma ARSIS legal team provided **18** information sessions, in which **264** individuals raised their awareness of Albanian and International legal frameworks and became acquainted with the EU, U.S. and Canadian legal pathways.

As of October 2023, the legal protection component has been integrated, as a supportive service, into IRC Hellas' programs to address the immediate needs of IRC clients for personalized legal advice and information. The legal component, through the provision of legal counseling to IRC clients and group legal info sessions to IRC clients and staff, aims to enhance access to individualized legal information for refugees from Ukraine and asylum seekers regardless of their country of origin, to familiarize them with their rights, and assert their legal protection and broader entitlements under the law.

Memberships

IRC Hellas is registered in the Register of Greek and Foreign Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) dealing with international protection, migration and social integration issues.

IRC Hellas is a member of the **Racist Violence Recording Network**, which was created in October 2011 to monitor the escalation of hate crimes.

IRC Hellas is a member of the **Greek Housing Network**, which was created in 2010 by civil society organizations that contribute to the fight against homelessness in Greece, support socially excluded groups and homeless people and advocate for the right to quality housing for all citizens.

IRC Hellas is a member of the **Recording Mechanism of Informal Forced Returns**, a synergy between the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) and civil society organizations active in the field, offering legal, medical, psychosocial, or other services to third country nationals, to monitor, record and report informal forced return incidents of third country nationals from Greece to other countries; to promote and consolidate respect of the principle of non-refoulement as well as to safeguard guarantees and compliance with legal procedures, and to boost accountability for reported human rights violations alleged to have occurred during informal forced returns of third country nationals from Greece to other countries.

IRC Hellas is a member of the National Referral Mechanism for the Protection of Human Trafficking Victims (NRM), which launched its operations in 2018 under the management of the National Centre for Social Solidarity and under the supervision and coordination of the National Rapporteur on Combatting Human Trafficking (ONR). NRM is a coordinating mechanism, which monitors all the stages of a victim's inclusion in the country's protection system, beginning with its initial detection and identification, followed by the provision of protection and support services during the legal process, up to its voluntary assisted return to its country of origin or integration in the country of arrival.

IRC Hellas, as per the respective ministerial decisions, received a Special Certification as a Provider of Primary Social Care Services (Decision Number Δ14/53720/791, Government Gazette B' 141/21.01.2021), as well as a Special Certification as a Provider of Secondary Social Care Services (Decision Number 78021, Government Gazette B' 4577/30.08.2022).

Donors and Supporters

Ampney Brook Foundation • Bessemer Trust • Breakthrough Prize Foundation • Charles Anteokounmpo Family Foundation • CITI Foundation • European Commission (DG HOME, DG JUST) • EEA/Norway Grants ("Asylum and Migration" programme) • Goldman Sachs Gives • Heritage Fund of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union for the 21st Century (ILGWU) • Huang Chen Foundation • Human Rights 360 • Malcolm Hewitt Wiener Foundation • METAdrasi - Action for Migration and Development • SOL Crowe • Regional Development Fund of Attica • European Union, Special Service of Coordination and Management (Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum) under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) • Starbucks Foundation • Tereska Foundation • Trip Advisor • United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) • United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) • University College London.

















































Partnerships

Alba Graduate Business School • Centro Penc • Network for Children's Rights • European Lawyers in Lesvos (ELIL) • Foundation for Access to Rights (FAR) • Generation 2.0 RED • Global Girl Media Greece • HIAS • Irida Women's Center • Caritas Hellas • Cell for Alternative Youth Activities (KEAN) • Mobile Info Team • NISMA Arsis.



























Financial Statement:

The total budget of the organization for the period January - December 2023 was 4.796.139 €.

Human Resources:

The number of employees occupied with the above-mentioned activities at any one time in 2023 reached 144.

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