



INTERNATIONAL  
**RESCUE**  
COMMITTEE

HELLAS



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# ACTIVITY REPORT 2022

APRIL 2023

# About IRC Hellas

**International Rescue Committee (IRC) Hellas** was established in Greece in 2015. It focuses on assisting refugees, asylum seekers, migrants with reception and integration as well as on supporting people with particular vulnerabilities, like unaccompanied children, survivors of gender-based violence, people with mental health concerns and people in need of employment and/or employment related skills.

In IRC Hellas, we measure success against the number of people who see improvement in the following focus areas:

- ✘ *Economic well-being;*
- ✘ *Education;*
- ✘ *Reduced risk of ill 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.*



Photo Credits © Louisa Gouliamaki/IRC Hellas

# Our Work



## Child Protection

In 2022, IRC Hellas operated 12 **Supported-Independent Living (SIL) apartments for unaccompanied asylum-seeking adolescents in Athens**. Each apartment hosts up to four adolescents, supported by a team of experienced professionals, such as social workers, caretakers, interpreters, lawyers and an educator. Throughout 2022, out of the 104 children supported in the IRC SIL apartments, 24% were girls. We provide shelter, psychosocial support, legal counseling, non-formal education, and a variety of creative and skills-building activities. At the same time, we support activities that promote the adolescents' interaction and integration in 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 of the programme 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 approach for children 16-18 years old, which promotes 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 2022, the SIL support team consisted of five social workers, six caretakers, six interpreters, two lawyers, one educator, three coordinators, a SIL senior officer and a programme manager.



*"This was the first time in my life that I went to watch a theatrical play. I felt like traveling with my soul, to other happier places"*

*B., 17 years old unaccompanied teen boy (that used to reside in an IRC SIL apartment)*

# Our Work



## Child Protection

In April 2021, IRC Hellas initiated the process of establishing the pilot "**Semi-Independent Living (SIL) model of care for children above 15 years old and young adults who live under institutional care**", supporting the efforts towards deinstitutionalization in Greece. The project is implemented in the context of **Child Guarantee**, in partnership with **UNICEF** and in close collaboration with the **Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) and the Institute of Child Health (ICH)**. The aim of the project is to establish three apartments in Athens, with the capacity to accommodate up to twelve children and young adults. In addition to safe housing, the residents would receive personalized psychosocial, educational and employability support, including recreational activities and career guidance. The IRC conducted a review of relevant child protection legislation, and the context of child protection structures through desk research, as well as a well-rounded needs assessment through interviews and Focus Group Discussions with possible beneficiaries and child protection specialists, in order to better understand the needs of children with institutional experience. The study's results and recommendations were compiled in a comprehensive report, which was taken into account during the design of the pilot programme and its future implementation at national level. A dedicated Task Force, composed of representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UNICEF and IRC, worked intensively on the writing of the SIL Joint Ministerial Decision (JMD). A Ministerial Decision (MD) was published in May 2022, to provide for the implementation of the SIL pilot, while the JMD was published in early 2023, before the launch of the implementation at a national level. Additionally, IRC established a formal collaboration with Social Welfare Center of Attica Region (KKPA) and "Chatzikirgiakeio" Child Care Institution through memorandum of understanding, outlining the role of each actor and the specific terms of collaboration in the framework of the pilot SIL programme.

In October 2022, the first SIL apartment hosting four young adult women was launched, while two more apartments, one for adolescent girls and one for young adult women, will be launched in early 2023. Following a strengths-based approach, and through targeted skills building activities and psychosocial support, all beneficiaries will be supported to act, learn, feel secure and gradually achieve independence.

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# Our Work



## Child Protection

The IRC Child Protection programme operating in the Reception and Identification Centre on Lesbos (Mavrovouni RIC) ceased its operations in April 2022. The programme was part of a consortium led by the IRC, along with **Diotima – Centre for Gender Rights & Equality** and **Caritas Hellas** as partners, funded by **UNICEF**. The Child protection component of the programme offered case management, mental health and psychosocial support to 120 children and 47 parents, following needs assessments.



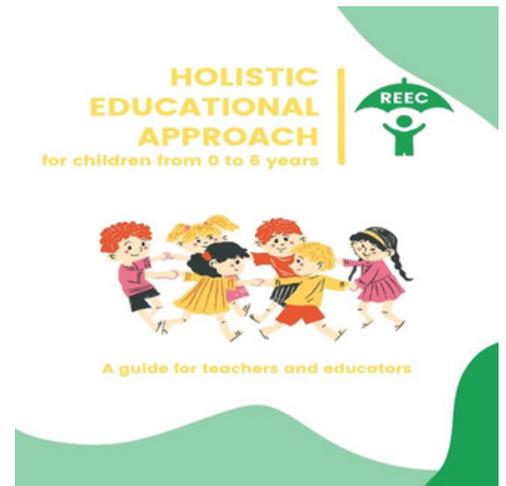
Photo Credits © Louisa Gouliamaki/IRC Hellas

# Our Work



## Child Protection

In 2021, IRC Hellas launched the “**REEC: Reinforce Educators, Empower Children**” project, under the coordination of Terre des hommes Hellas, in partnership with the Municipality of Milan and under the auspices of the Municipality of Athens. The overall objective was to protect children of pre-school and primary school age from any kind of abuse and promote their positive development in a protective environment fostered through synergies among schools, parents/caregivers and community child protection services. The IRC conducted a baseline assessment through exploratory qualitative research, to better comprehend and depict current practices in Greece, conducting Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews and consultative workshops with 33 professionals and children. This feedback resulted in a detailed guide, named “Holistic Educational Approach for children 3-11 years old”. The guide consisted of general methodological steps to be followed, detailed good practices and techniques for the promotion of Social and Emotional Learning and child well-being, along with a bank of 70 interactive activities, outlining in user-friendly manner all information and tips to facilitate their implementation by the educators. Listening to the Early Childhood Development educators’ needs, the IRC developed a further tailor-made handbook, “Holistic Educational Approach for children 0-6 years old”, providing concrete theory, palpable recommendations, and a bank of 20 activities. In total, 577 educators were trained in the abovementioned methodologies, while 48 educators attended the customized coaching sessions.



*“The “Holistic Educational Approach” has been promoted by our kindergarten for some time now because we want the children who attend our school to feel joy and love and their families to trust us”.*

*“It was like the educators woke up after this training”.*

*“We all started to truly observe the children again”.*

*“I would like to express my sincere congratulations. It was a very useful and interesting seminar which the trainer made it even more interesting. Simple and fully comprehensible with experiential exercises. Congratulations once more”.*

# Our Work



## Women Protection and Empowerment

From August 2022, the IRC has been operating two 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 are provided with housing, non-food items, psychosocial and legal support, interpretation, as well as assistance in building their life capacity and job skills and accessing the labor market, always taking into account their individual needs, wishes and characteristics. Additionally, the professionals ensure that the women supported have 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 is the overall protection and empowerment of the women and their children, not only for the time they stay in the apartments, but also to enable them to continue their lives independently after the completion of their stay. Three women and six children were supported in IRC WIL apartments in 2022.

In the context of the IRC-led, UNICEF-funded consortium, interventions to address the needs of vulnerable women and children residing in Mavrovouni RIC in Lesvos, GBV response and prevention activities were implemented by IRC's partners, Caritas Hellas and Diotima, until March 2022. During this period, Caritas Hellas operated a Women and Girls' Safe Space, offering psychosocial support, case management, recreational activities and information sessions for women and girls and the provision of non-formal education activities for 214 adult women and 7 adolescent girls. Additionally, Diotima offered case management, psychosocial support, psychological first aid (PFA) and legal services to Gender Based Violence (GBV) survivors and women at high risk of experiencing GBV on the island of Lesvos. A total of 54 unique individuals benefited from Diotima's services.

*"The first time that i saw children from African countries returning home from school, and talking to each other in Greek language..oh..it was one of the best and most moving moments of my life".*



# Our Work



## Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

In 2022, the IRC continued implementing a comprehensive **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programme** aiming to ensure that vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers in Greece receive the support they need to heal from past violence and persecution and cope with the ongoing stress of displacement. The programme focuses on providing services to asylum seekers that reside in the Reception and Identification Centers (RICs), now called Closed Controlled Access Centers (CCACs). The programme terminated on the islands of Chios (February 2022) and Samos (June 2022), while it continued on Lesbos, where members of the host community were also included in the target population, responding to the lack of mental health support services on the island. Moreover, a pilot project was launched in Athens in February 2022, following the increased transfers of people from the islands to the mainland. IRC programme in Athens is operating in collaboration with **One Happy Family Community Center**. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Athens MHPSS programme was prepared to respond to the newly arrived Ukrainian refugees.

*“Please continue helping people like me”.*

*“I have found comfort speaking with my psychologist”.*

*“I face some problems like most refugees do and your organization helped me to deal with them”.*

*“When I came to you, I had no expectations but after receiving mental health support I have improved a lot in a very short period”.*

*“I was hopeless when I started seeing a psychologist but now, I feel much more relaxed and know how to control my issues”.*



# Our Work



## Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Support

The IRC's MHPSS programmes include the **identification of needs and, where necessary, referrals to private psychiatrists, the local hospitals, and other NGOs for legal support and for other services** based on the identified needs. The IRC collaborates with private psychiatrists when needed and covers the costs of psychiatric medication for people who do not have access to the relevant national Greek social security documentation to acquire medicine for free or at low cost. Caseworkers provide individual escort to appointments and ensure appropriate case management.

The IRC MHPSS teams further provide **individual and group counselling**, to improve the mental health wellbeing and to decrease the stress and suffering of the people we serve. Additionally, in order to reduce stigma, to strengthen the support network and raise awareness, the IRC provides psychoeducation sessions on various mental health topics but also psychosocial group activities. In late 2021, the IRC started implementing activities with community volunteers, aiming to empower the community and raise awareness about prevention and identification of mental health needs. In mid 2022, the project was developed into a Psychosocial Support (PSS) project through community PSS workers, who ran activities in the camp for women, men and children; similar activities took place in Athens as well. In addition, the IRC MHPSS teams ensure accessibility to their services by providing transportation to people with particular vulnerabilities, as well as top up mobile phone cards. Finally, in 2022, the IRC MHPSS programme both in Lesvos and in Athens provided capacity building and support groups for professionals and volunteers from other NGOs to increase the quality of care that is provided.

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# Our Work



## Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

During 2022, the IRC Hellas MHPSS programme supported 254 people through 1,842 individual and group sessions, 160 people through 41 psychoeducation sessions, 435 people through 109 psychosocial activities sessions, and 141 internal and external professionals and volunteers in the area of mental health, through trainings. Moreover, the PSS workers of Lesvos MHPSS team reached 443 people through outreach activities.



*“Living in Athens is not easy, you have to deal with tough situations everyday and people treat you with disrespect. I feel that I cannot trust anyone except for the psychologist and that feels great. It's always nice to have somebody to talk to”.*

*“When I started getting mental health support I had no goals, no expectations from myself generally. Now, day by day I feel much better. The advice the psychologist has given me helps me face world with a more optimistic perspective”.*

# Our Work



## Economic Recovery and Development

In 2022, the IRC provided employment and self-employment services and skills development directly and in collaboration with partners. The focus of IRC's Economic Recovery and Development team is to support refugees, migrants, and vulnerable host populations with integration - especially into the labour market.



**Employability services** include individual career counseling, help with job search, and job readiness workshops that develop crucial employability skills, as well as an introduction to labour rights and familiarisation with the Greek work culture. In 2022, the IRC provided employment services to 311 vulnerable youth and adults.

In February 2022, the IRC participated in the organizing committee of the **Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR)** annual **Job Fair** for tourism and hospitality. In the event, more than 150 participants were interviewed in Athens by representatives of 23 hotels. In addition, in May 2022, the IRC organized a **Career Day** in collaboration with **Workathlon Human Resources agency**, with 20 people supported, attending interviews for jobs in various hotels around Greece.

In August 2022, IRC Hellas initiated a small internship programme in collaboration with the supermarket chain **AB Vassilopoulos**, named "**AB Academy**". Out of 100 applicants, 15 people were selected and trained for a week by IRC staff in our premises. Eleven of them were then hired by AB Vassilopoulos as trainees for two months. Nine of them renewed their contracts with the supermarket after the completion of the internships.



# Our Work



## Economic Recovery and Development

### Entrepreneurship

The IRC provides extensive **self-employment support to refugees, migrants, and vulnerable Greeks**. About 70 people received entrepreneurship support in 2022 and over 500 since the initiation of the Economic Recovery and Development programme in 2017. The IRC together with its partner, the **Alba Graduate Business School 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.

The IRC also supported the **early integration and cultural orientation of refugees and asylum seekers on Lesbos** through (a) support in navigating public services and accessing relevant national Greek documentation (b) provision of survival Greek and English language courses, basic computer literacy and other cultural orientation and skills building and (c) referrals to other formal or non-formal adult educational opportunities aiming at skills improvement and empowerment. In 2022, 149 people received basic language and digital skills training and 130 were supported through the provision of cultural orientation sessions and soft skills. In addition, three community engagement and sensitization events were organized on Lesbos island in which 20 members of the local community actively participated along with refugees, asylum seekers and IRC staff.

### Education and Cultural Orientation Support



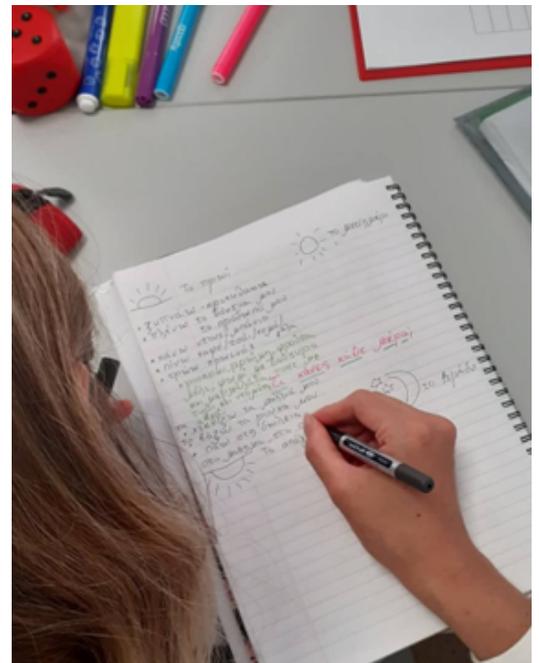
# Our Work



## Economic Recovery and Development

Since June 2022, IRC Hellas started providing **support to newly arrived displaced refugees from Ukraine through the provision of employability and skills building services.** In particular, the IRC ERD programme 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 language training. In the period June-November 2022, the IRC provided six online information sessions on the topics of labor rights, degree recognition, entrepreneurship, using social media such as LinkedIn to search for a job, and educational opportunities in Greece, with a total of 105 participants. Greek language lessons were held in three different cycles with 51 students enrolling.

### Ukrainian Crisis Response



*“I was familiar only with some words. Now I can read texts, speak, understand”.*

*“While I was doing my homework, my sister’s husband saw my progress and was astonished”.*

# Our Work



## Economic Recovery and Development

### Ukrainian Crisis Response

#### Voucher Distribution

In the framework of the Ukraine crisis response, IRC Hellas provided **emergency support, in the form of vouchers**, to vulnerable families displaced by the war in Ukraine. With the support of the “**United Ukrainian Diaspora**”, the “**Center for Support and Development of Cultural Heritage Trembita**”, and “**Opora**” in Athens, and with the support of the “**Ukrainian – Greek Initiative**” and the “**Union of Ukrainian Greeks in Greece**” in Thessaloniki, the IRC distributed vouchers to 1,635 families (3,847 family members) until the end of December 2022.

### National Integration Project “HELIOS”

Since 2019, IRC Hellas collaborates with METAdrasi in the implementation of “**HELIOS – Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection**” project. In the framework of the HELIOS project, the IRC supported 117 refugees with soft skills training in Athens, through 469 hours of classes.



# Our Work



## 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 116,500 followers on Facebook, while 25,353 new users accessed the Refugee.Info website in 2022. In mid 2022, IRC Hellas partnered with the **Mobile Info Team (MIT)** and with the **Greek Forum for Refugees (GFR)**, to join forces and reach more people through collaborative implementation. Throughout 2022, the IRC has kept Refugee.Info up to date, in order to capture changes in asylum procedures, bureaucratic policies or practices that might be impacted by COVID-19 measures or administrative changes and shared information in six languages (Arabic, Farsi, French, Urdu, Ukrainian and English). The Refugee.Info website hosted 96 articles covering the above topics and more. It also provided a service mapping across Greece (over 450 services regularly updated), produced content for the Facebook page across these six languages and provided through the collaboration of its partner Mobile Info Team two-way communication support through helpdesk services (4,148 responses on Messenger, WhatsApp and through email).

Apart from its online presence, Refugee.Info also provided much-needed information to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in person. Through Refugee.Info and along with its two partners, IRC Hellas conducted 94 in-person info sessions, with 560 participants, in Athens, Thessaloniki and other cities across Greece. Part of these info sessions aimed at supporting members of formal and informal refugee and migrant communities to strengthen their capacity of formal representation in Refugee and Migrants Integration Councils.

*“It is convenient for me to use the search on the Refugee.Info site, because it finds the material I need by services provided. This helps a lot, because even I, who have been here for a long time, if I have not encountered such situations, I will search for information on the Internet for a long time. The fact that the information is systematized helps in not getting lost in the maelstrom of articles. I often consult it when they ask me about some day-to-day tasks in Greece, or I immediately send an article from the site.”*

*D.R., Ukrainian volunteer/human rights activist*

# Our Work

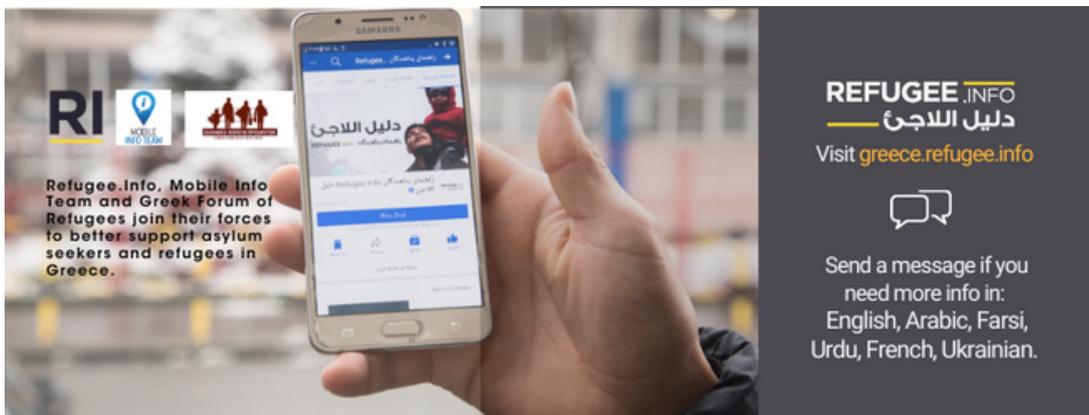


## Information

Lastly, Refugee.Info Greece with its partner Mobile Info Team supported the implementation of a research project on trafficking and exploitation prevention designed and undertaken by the University College of London and the Immigration Policy Lab at ETH Zurich.

*“Thank you for sharing the link to Refugee.Info website with me. I received a question on higher education and shared the website with people and they were very grateful for it!”*

*M.I., Head of the Ukrainian Humanitarian Aid Center in Thessaloniki*



Scan this QR code, to visit our website



# Our Work

## Advocacy

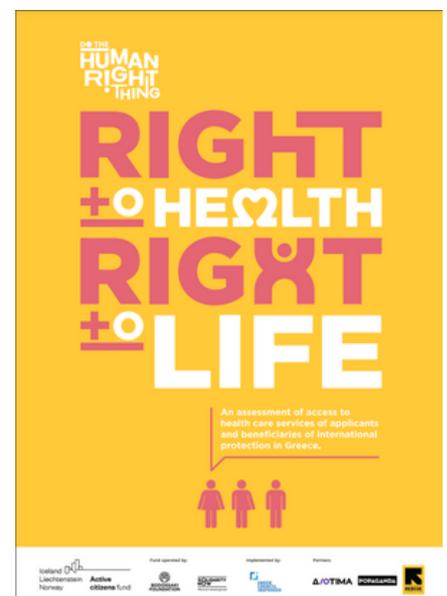
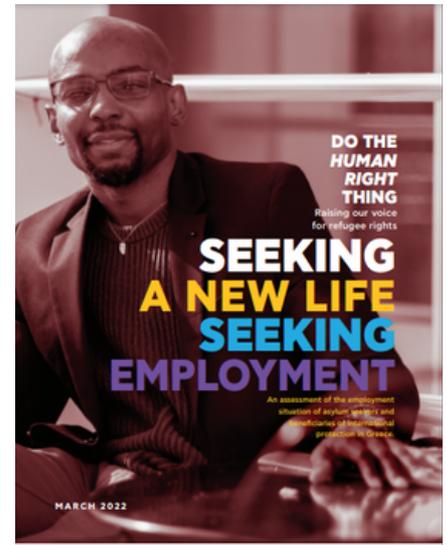
IRC Hellas **advocates in Greece and the EU for the protection of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees** regarding access to territory, asylum procedures, reception conditions, protection services, access to information and integration. Working in close cooperation with the IRC programmes in Greece, the advocacy team conducts research and compiles reports, briefings and letters, addressed to decision makers to keep them aware of the reality on the ground, possible breaches of legislation and policies and provide recommendations. 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 2022, the team organized seven events, five workshops and participated in twenty meetings with stakeholders from EU institutions and the Greek government to raise various issues refugees and asylum seekers face in Greece. In addition, the IRC, often in joint initiatives, sent four letters, drafted eighteen advocacy briefings and published eighteen press releases.



# Our Work

## Advocacy

In 2022, the advocacy team implemented two different projects. IRC Hellas joined efforts with the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Diotima-Centre for Gender Rights and Equality and the media outlet Popaganda in the project **“Do the *human right* thing – Raising our Voice for Refugee Rights”**, implemented under the EEA Active citizens fund in Greece, to flag the barriers that refugees and asylum seekers face in Greece, to access housing, employment and health services. To achieve this, three policy reports were published: **“Seeking a new life - seeking employment: An assessment of the employment situation of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in Greece”**, **“Homeless and hopeless”** and **“Right to health - Right to life”**, As part of this project, the IRC published four articles by IRC staff and a story of a refugee supported by the IRC on Popaganda, organised five advocacy workshops attended by 21 unaccompanied children and, in cooperation with Global Girl Media Greece, created two multilingual videos in five languages (ENG, FR, FA, AR, URDU) on how to **find a job** and how to **access health services** in Greece.



# Our Work

## Advocacy

The second project started in 2021 as a response to the crisis in Afghanistan, to support Afghan asylum seekers and refugees, but also asylum seekers and refugees of other nationalities in Greece. In this context, IRC Hellas published two visual reports: **“EU-Turkey Statement: Six years of undermining refugee protection”**, jointly with another seven NGOs in March 2022, and the report **“Afghans in Greece: A story of strength, resilience and survival”** in September 2022, a year after the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (commonly known as ‘the Taliban’), took control of the country, to shed light on the difficulties Afghan asylum seekers and refugees face in Greece. As part of this project, in June 2022, IRC Hellas organized four story-telling workshops (**Under one sky – Tales from home**) in collaboration with Arkista, a local art center and The Boat Collective, a refugee-led theater group. The workshops were created to bring together Farsi/Dari and Greek speaking women and their children, to promote peaceful coexistence and social inclusion, through intercultural dialogue and the sharing of common experiences. In total, 57 people participated, 18 Farsi/Dari speaking women with 27 children and 7 Greek speaking women with 5 children.



Photo Credits © Elfi Studio/IRC Hellas

# Our Work

## Legal Support

In January 2022, IRC Hellas and its implementing partners in Greece, Serbia and Albania started a **Legal Support** project. Through legal awareness sessions, targeted legal counseling and legal representation, the project aims to meet the **legal needs of people who have fled Afghanistan**, in the aftermath of the Taliban's seizure of power in August 2021, which led to a rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the country. Afghan evacuees in Europe have pending applications to resettle in the US or Canada, while a considerable number of them remain in legal limbo.

During the first cycle of the project's implementation in Greece (from January until September 2022), IRC's partners on Lesbos island, **HIAS** and **Legal Center Lesbos**, provided legal support to 177 persons, 123 of whom received immediate legal assistance through legal counseling and 54 through fully-fledged legal representation before national and regional courts and administrative authorities.

At the same time, IRC's partners have supported a significant number of people that do not have access to appropriate reception conditions, either due to their situation of legal limbo or because of the substandard living conditions in refugee camps. Among these cases, several were identified as vulnerable asylum seekers who should, according to the Greek and the EU law, be able to exercise their right to special procedural guarantees.

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# Our Work

## Legal Support

In the course of the ongoing second cycle of the Legal Support Project's implementation as of October 2022, IRC's current implementing partners, **HIAS** and **European Lawyers In Lesvos (ELIL)** continue to provide legal assistance to a significantly increased number of Afghan nationals who arrive on the island of Lesvos. Between October and December 2022, HIAS provided direct legal aid to 10 asylum seekers while ELIL supported 32 legal cases, out of which 11 received legal representation during their asylum procedure and 21 individual legal counseling. IRC remains committed to provide tailored technical expertise to all partners, through monitoring visits, case consultations as well as through online and in-person training to ensure the harmonious and consistent implementation of the project.

## Facilities Maintenance and Environmental Health in site of Megala Therma, Lesvos

During the first three months of 2022 the IRC was responsible for the **shelter and facilities maintenance in the new quarantine site for new arrivals, Megala Therma**, located in northern Lesvos, while we also delivered basic hygiene items to residents of the site. These activities carried on from the previous year (March 2021), with funding from UNHCR. In 2022, 32 people who arrived at Megala Therma received **Shelter, Non-Food Items** (416) and **Hygiene Promotion** messaging.

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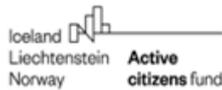
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# Partnerships and Collaborations

Aligned with global IRC strategy, IRC Hellas has been actively investing in collaborative relations with local partners with the goal of enhancing programme quality and scale and enabling more durable outcomes for the communities we serve. In 2022, the IRC engaged with a significant number of local civil society, government and private sector actors, either through sub-awarding funds or participating in common project consortia and collaboration agreements.





**HELLAS**

