



IRC Hellas

Activity Report 2019

BACKGROUND

The International Rescue Committee Greece branch (IRC Hellas) started operating in 2015 on the island of Lesbos, in response to the unprecedented number of refugees arriving on the island at the time. IRC Hellas is part of the international humanitarian organization IRC, which, since 1933, has been supporting refugees, displaced people and victims of violent conflict across the globe.

Since the start of programming in Greece, IRC Hellas has provided support and protection services to asylum seekers and refugees in both camps and urban settings across the country. Directly, or in collaboration with partners, we have provided shelter, emergency supplies, safe transportation, access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, vital, reliable and up-to-date information, protection for vulnerable groups (including 24/7 care for unaccompanied children), mental health and psychosocial support, as well as employability services to refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable individuals.

Activities in 2019

1. Child Protection



The IRC team helps children accommodated in supported-independent living apartments, with homework.
Athens, 2019

In August 2019, IRC Hellas started a new Child Protection programme, the supported-independent living (SIL) of unaccompanied children in supervised apartments, for adolescents over 16 years old. IRC Hellas supports 20 youngsters by providing shelter, one-to-one and group psychosocial support sessions, legal counselling, non-formal education, and a variety of creative and skills-building activities. At the same time, activities that promote their interaction and integration in Greek society are highly supported.

The supported-independent living programme for unaccompanied children started as a pilot programme in Greece in 2018 and is considered a quality alternative that promotes one-to-one support and is centered around the best interest of the child. This specific programme offers holistic care that aims to prepare adolescents, in the best way possible, for their demanding adulthood lives.

The support team consists of 2 social workers, 4 caretakers, 3 interpreters, 1 lawyer and the programme coordinator.

2. Women Protection and Empowerment

In September 2018, IRC Hellas, in partnership with the Centre for Research on Women’s Issues Diotima, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality - Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Research Center for Gender Equality (KETHI), started the “SURVIVOR” project to enhance the quality and accessibility of Greek services to refugee and asylum seeking women who are survivors of gender based violence (GBV), and to enhance transnational dialogue and exchange of good practices in Europe.

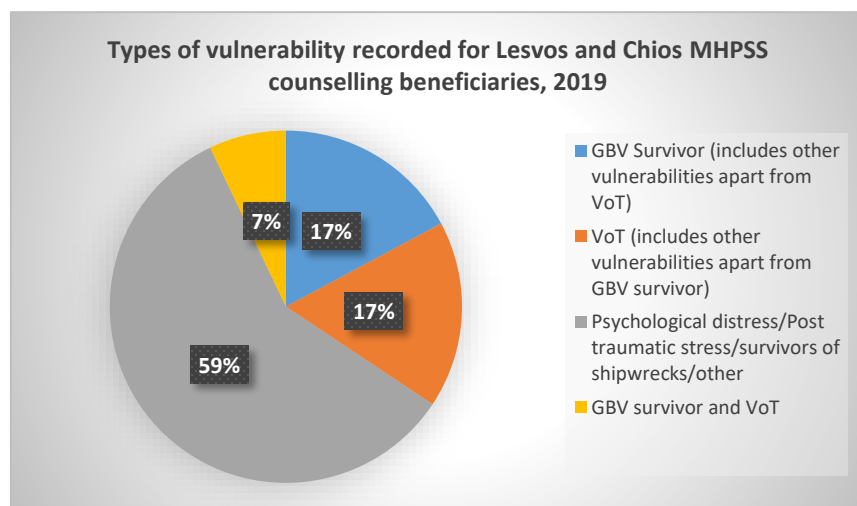


Training on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) to frontline responders.
Athens, 2019

The main programme activities include the trainings of women cultural mediators and public social services personnel, the establishment of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and a mechanism for referrals to services responding to GBV. Other activities include trainings for professionals, the drafting of informative and awareness-raising content in several languages, and international visits to exchange skills and good practices related to GBV across Europe. Finally, the programme includes the creation of an online platform for the exchange of content related to the prevention of and response to GBV, to policy & advocacy, as well as the empowerment and integration of survivors.

In 2019, we delivered trainings to frontline responders, such as police officers, social workers, midwives and psychologists of public services, municipalities, hospitals and NGOs.

3. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services



IRC Hellas continued implementing its mental health and psychosocial support programme in Lesbos and Chios, which started in 2018, while initiating the same programme on Samos as well, in October 2019. This programme focuses on providing mental health and psychosocial support services to asylum seekers who reside in Reception and Identification Centers (RICs). These people are forced to live in substandard circumstances, in overcrowded camps, where

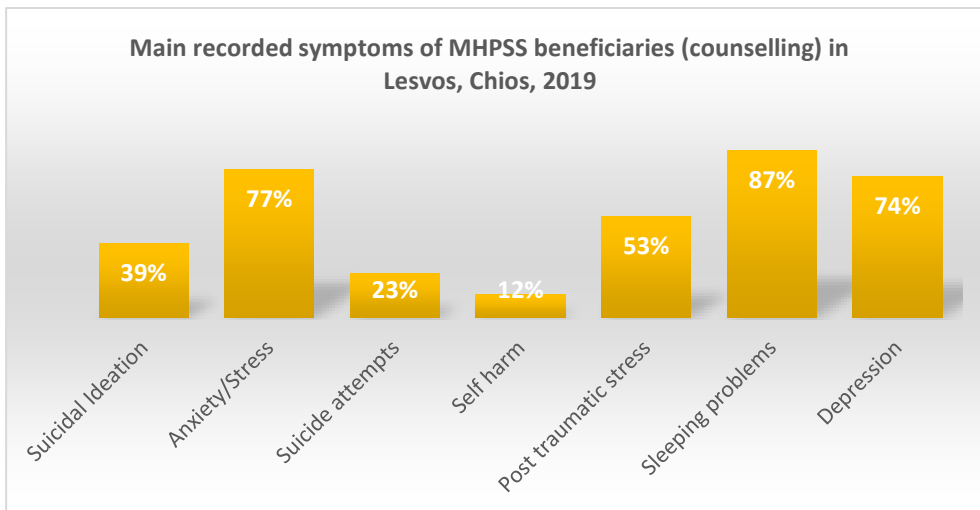
tensions and violence are daily issues. These living conditions and the uncertainty about the future, can trigger or reinforce existing psychological trauma.

In 2019, the programme supported one-to-one and group sessions of therapeutic counselling, for 452 vulnerable people (324 in Lesvos and 128 in Chios)¹, 56% of whom were men and 44% women.

Additionally, the IRC team on Lesvos and Chios, conducted various information and psycho-education sessions to beneficiaries, aiming to inform and raise awareness on issues related to mental

health that affect primarily the refugee populations arriving on the islands, such as panic attacks, sleep problems and stress management, with 259 participants (142 on Lesvos and 117 on Chios).

Of the people attending our counselling sessions, 41% (43% on Lesvos) were survivors of torture or GBV, or both, and were within the spectrum of severe side effects such as depression, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal ideation. Nearly 40% of these cases, (47% on Lesvos), had considered suicide, half of which (23%) had attempted suicide.



98% of the beneficiaries of IRC’s MHPSS programmes assert that their mental health improved after the therapeutic intervention, than before receiving any support. Apart from mental health support services for refugee populations, the IRC builds the capacity of NGOs and other entities active within the RIC of Moria through trainings. In 2019, 100 people were trained in these two islands in the following: Psychological First Aid (PFA), specialised trainings for interpreters working at mental health settings and referral pathways.

4. Supporting the accommodation Center Kara Tepe, on Lesvos



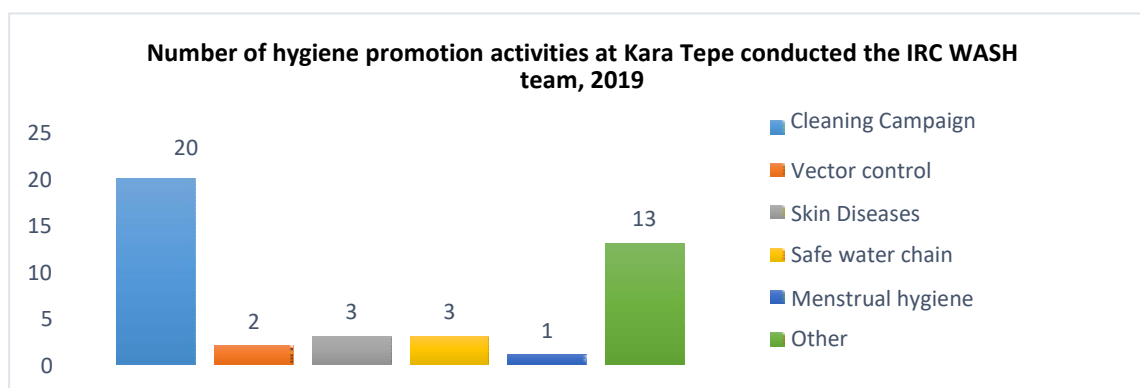
Kiosk for distribution of essential supplies at Kara Tepe.
Lesvos 2019

IRC Hellas has been providing services to the municipal accommodation center Kara Tepe since its foundation in 2015. This center provides accommodation to about 1,300 of the most vulnerable people, mainly families, including about 750 children. We ensure the functionality of power generators, installation and maintenance of water supply and drains, hot water supply, daily cleaning of shared hygiene and surrounding open-air spaces, air condition maintenance, and fire protection infrastructure, technical works, promotion of good hygiene practices, and distribution of personal hygiene products and other non-food supplies, provide important information about the center and the active organisations within it, transportation services,

as well as support to the Site management.

In 2019, we distributed 158,362 essential supplies, such as cleaning and personal hygiene products, and we provided transportation services to 15,926 people to and from Kara Tepe. One of the core services provided by IRC Hellas are hygiene promotion activities (e.g. correct way to use the toilet for children, treatment of scabies cases, vector control during summer months) and cleaning campaigns with the participation of the beneficiaries. In 2019, 5,386 beneficiaries, participated in these activities, or / and were informed about those, in the framework of Communication with Communities (CwC) meetings.

In 2019, the IRC also supported the operation of the transit center for new arrivals, “Stage 2”, by providing cleaning and security services, as well as heating and small-scale maintenance. Stage 2 offered basic assistance and temporary accommodation to people arriving at the north shore of Lesbos from Turkey, until they were transferred to Moria Reception and Identification Center.



5. Labour market integration services

The IRC Hellas labour market integration programmes are focused on efforts to support vulnerable groups to achieve financial independence and stability. In 2019, the IRC Hellas consisted of 10 staff, among which, job and business counselors, trainers, interpreters and administrative staff, and 4 partnerships with NGOs, local governments and academic institutions.

Employability and Training Services:

IRC Hellas offers employability services that include one-to-one job counselling, employability workshops to improve skills, such as how to write a CV and motivation letter, job searching techniques, preparation for interviews, financial training, information on basic labour rights and cultural awareness. In 2019, IRC Hellas, directly and in collaboration with its partners, Generation 2.0 RED and the Municipality of Athens, provided employability services in Attica region to more than 600 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

More than 70% of the beneficiaries were 18-35 years old, an crucial age to learn new skills and to enter the labour market. Most beneficiaries come from Afghanistan (14%), Cameroon (13%), Iran (13%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (10%) and Syria (10%). 80% were men and 20% women.

In collaboration with external partners, our beneficiaries had the opportunity to train in webpage development and coffee preparation techniques. On average, 18% of the beneficiaries received at least one job offer after attending the programme, with the main hiring sectors being the food industry, tourism and hygiene management services.

In the framework of the national pilot programme HELIOS, IRC Hellas, in collaboration with METAdrasi and the National Research Foundation (EKKE), created educational material for cultural orientation, job readiness and skills-building to refugees residing in Athens.

Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship Services

IRC Hellas, in collaboration with Alba Graduate Business School: the American College of Greece, implements the “Craft your Business” programme that provides business education and guidance to young people, men and women alike, to prepare for self-employment. Through business plan competitions, the IRC provides mentoring and small grants for the support of business ideas.

In 2019, IRC Hellas completed the Business for YOUTH programme in collaboration with SolidarityNow and the social enterprise Knowl, which provided business training to more than 350 young refugees, migrants and vulnerable Greeks.



Fariba, Business for YOUTH program beneficiary
Athens 2019

Collaboration with the Municipality of Athens

The IRC is a core partner of the European pilot program “Curing the Limbo”, which aims to create a dynamic and innovative integration model, through which refugees become more active, they attend language, creative expression and new technologies lessons, get access to affordable accommodation and participate in job counselling sessions, tailored to their specific profile. Within this framework, the IRC provides trainings and supports the job counselors of the Municipality of Athens.

Moreover, the IRC presides the Council for Skills Development and Empowerment, of the Coordination Center for Migrants and Refugees’ Issues (ACCMR), of the Municipality of Athens. In 2019, the Council and the Coordination Center organized the first Job Fair for candidates of migrant and refugee background, aiming to create an open space for networking and communication between the private sector and candidates, thus enhancing increased access to the labor market. About 20 enterprises and 200 candidates among which beneficiaries of IRC’s programmes participated in the Job Fair.

6. Information

Refugee.Info is a trusted and successful online information platform, established to create an innovative standard for how information reaches — and can be developed in collaboration with — communities in crisis. Born in 2015 as a mobile application, Refugee.Info provided critical information to the thousands of asylum seekers arriving onto the Greek islands and travelling across Europe. It has since evolved into a unique multi-channel platform with over 96,000 unique users on Facebook in 2018-2019 in Greece, 45,000 in 2019 alone, reaching 115,000 followers on Facebook in June 2019.

“Refugee.Info is a welcoming, accessible, informative and trustworthy site for the refugee population. Always updated on educational issues, offering coherent and concise information, trustworthily translated into several languages. The quality education of all children living in Greece is the Ministry’s main objective and we warmly welcome initiatives like Refugee.Info’s that we are confident will contribute to this aim.”

– Gelly Aroni, Head of the Department for the Coordination and Monitoring of the Refugee Education of the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs

In 2019, Refugee.Info received messages from more than 7,000 unique users in Greece and created a vivid online community around a mobile-optimized website, a blog and a very active Facebook page where users of all ages actively interact, comment, and pose questions on the topics that matter most to them. Refugee.Info content, currently available in English, Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, and French, is centered on rights (registration, documentation, access to asylum, legal status, access to health, women’s rights); integration (access to education and employment); safe movement (in-country transport, open routes, safety); and services (shelter, healthcare, mental health, legal assistance, social services, etc). The information provided is always impartial and journalistically researched, fact-checked and confirmed.

Through the [Refugee.Info Facebook page](#) and [Facebook Messenger](#) platform, asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece can pose their most pressing questions, in their own language, to a team of moderators trained in social media management, online safety, identification of protection concerns, and empathetic listening. The Refugee.Info Greece team responds to all kinds of questions and refers users to the appropriate services, based on their needs.

7. Emergency Response on the islands, before winter

During November 2019, we started our efforts to support the vulnerable people at Moria RIC on Lesbos, and at Vathi on Samos, to better prepare them for the upcoming harsh winter weather conditions.

Specifically, we provided a power generator that was installed in the beginning of 2020, as well as electrical equipment to link it to 74 tents of 10 people each, that are located at zone 9 of the “Olive Grove”, at Moria. In addition, we provided 200 heaters, to keep 100 tents warm during winter. In collaboration with partners we distributed, mainly to newly arrived people, 800 sleeping bags, 800 mats and 100 tarps to protect tents from rain. At Vathi RIC, we procured and distributed 100 tents of 3/4 people each and 100 tents of 4/5 people each, in December 2019.

8. Advocacy

Apart from the offered services of the programmes above, IRC Hellas advocates in Greece and abroad for the protection of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, as regards their access to the asylum process, reception conditions, protection and integration. To achieve this, we draft reports, letters and press releases with evidence we collect from our programmes, which we address to relevant decision-makers and we organise meetings, offering recommendations for the protection of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees.

In 2019 along with 7 other organizations, we organised [a round table regarding unaccompanied children](#), where professionals on the topic of child protection, as well as interested entities in the topic of migration, met to discuss the reception and integration of refugee and migrant children in Greece, under the scope of European funding.

We participated in the public consultation on the draft Law of the Ministry of Citizen's Protection "About International Protection and other provisions", we sent various letters to different Ministries on issues related to access to healthcare, reception conditions on the islands, protection of unaccompanied children, and the need for integration programmes, and we published at least 10 press releases, on these topics

STAFF

In 2019, the number of staff employed in the above-mentioned activities reached 114.

FUNDING

The total budget for the above-mentioned activities in 2019 was 4,121,896.64€.

IRC Hellas



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