



# IRC Hellas

## Activity Report 2020

## 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 conflict across the globe.

In 2020, our team of professionals in the field of humanitarian response, was engaged in Greece on the islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos, as well as in Athens, and we provided up-to-date reliable information through [Refugee.Info](#) nationwide. On Lesbos, Chios and Samos, we provided mental health and psychosocial support services, while on Lesbos we also provided emergency assistance in the areas of water, sanitation, environmental health and COVID-19 prevention, as well as services of child protection and women's protection. In Athens, we provided a variety of services in the areas of child protection, women's protection, and empowerment, as well as labour market integration.

2020 was a challenging year, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and all related prevention measures and movement restrictions. Programmes had to be implemented remotely, the majority of staff had to work from home, travelling was restricted, and new programmes launched for the prevention and management of COVID-19. In September 2020, the fires that destroyed Moria Reception and Identification Center (RIC) on Lesbos shone the media spotlight on conditions in the island camps once again, bringing renewed political and public attention to Greece. Recognizing the immense suffering people endure in the camps, and the impact this has on their rights, dignity, wellbeing and mental health, new programming started.

## Activities in 2020

### 1. Child Protection



16-year old Amir\* has just arrived in one of the IRC Hellas SIL apartments and is making his bed.

In 2020, IRC Hellas established 15 Supported-Independent Living (SIL) apartments for unaccompanied asylum-seeking adolescents in Athens. Each apartment hosts 4 adolescents of mixed nationalities, supported by a team of experienced professionals, such as social workers, caretakers, interpreters, and lawyers. We provide shelter, one-to-one and group psychosocial support services, legal counselling, non-formal education, and a variety of creative activities and activities that strengthen their skills. At the same time, we support activities that promote their interaction with -and integration in- Greek society.

The SIL framework is considered a quality

alternative for children 16-18 years old, which promotes one-to-one support and is centered around the best interest of the child. It offers holistic care that aims to prepare adolescents, in the best way possible, for their demanding adulthood lives. In 2020, the SIL support team consisted of five social workers, nine caretakers, five interpreters, two Lawyers, three Unit Coordinators, one SIL Senior Officer and one Program Manager. Throughout 2020, 27 children were supported.

In October 2020, an IRC team consisting of two mobile units started an emergency child protection programme in the new, emergency Reception and Identification Centre on Lesbos (Mavrovouni RIC) with three main tasks: outreach, case management, and psychological counseling. Through outreach activities, the team screens the camp population with visits to their tents and, if protection concerns are identified and a child is deemed to be at risk, the case management begins. The team develops a case plan based on the identified needs and offers services directly through the provision of psychosocial support and indirectly through referrals to other actors including health, educational or legal organisations, and/or the Public Prosecutors' office. In 2020, the RIC support team consisted of one Senior CP Officer, five case workers, six interpreters, one child psychologist and two drivers. In total, 1,439 children and parents were assisted through identification of their needs, 61 children benefited from case management and 16 children benefited from individual counseling by our child psychologist.

## 2. Women's Protection and Empowerment

In December 2020, IRC Hellas concluded the [SURVIVOR](#) project, which aimed at strengthening Greek gender-based violence (GBV) services and enhancing transnational dialogues and the exchange of best practices and tools for GBV prevention and response across Europe. The project was implemented with civil society actor Diotima, the General Secretariat for Family Policy & Gender Equality of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the National Research Centre for Gender Equality (KETHI).

In the context of SURVIVOR, the IRC launched a [website for sharing GBV resources](#), conducted six GBV trainings to service providers, organized four webinars that reached 244 participants, and piloted the set-up of a community referral mechanism in urban Athens, creating four focus groups for discussions, training and coaching sessions to 24 refugee/migrant women from the Farsi, French and Arabic speaking communities. Following the completion of the activities with the women from the community, the IRC compiled and shared with protection actors a [Guidance Document](#) that includes lessons learned, best practices and recommendations, as developed through the knowledge gained from piloting a community referral mechanism.

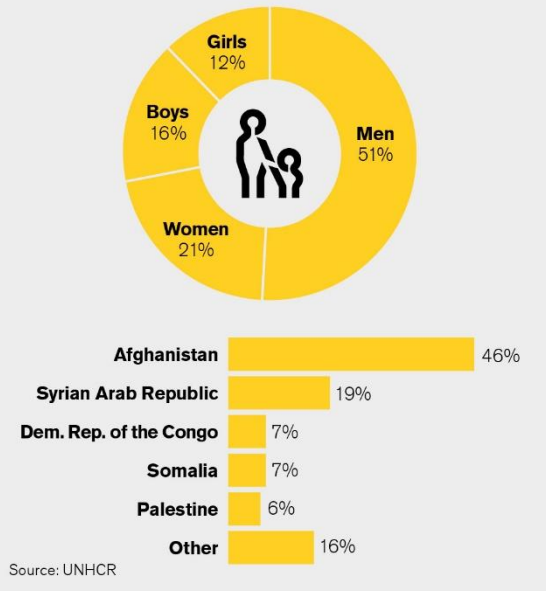
Following the Moria fire and the emergency situation on the island of Lesbos, in November 2020, the IRC started providing emergency accommodation, case management and legal services to GBV survivors and women at high risk of experiencing GBV, through our implementing partner Diotima.

## 3. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services

Since March 2018, IRC Hellas has been offering a comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programme aiming to ensure that vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers in Greece receive the MHPSS 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) on Lesbos, Chios, and Samos, where the living conditions and the uncertainty about the future trigger or exacerbate pre-existing trauma.

The IRC's MHPSS programmes include the identification of needs and, where necessary, referrals to private psychiatrists, neurologists and the local hospitals, as well as to the UNHCR for safe accommodation and other NGOs for legal support. The IRC collaborates with private psychiatrists and neurologists when needed and covers the costs of psychiatric medication for clients 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.

**Gender and nationality breakdown of asylum-seekers in the five Greek island hotspots, November 2020**



IRC MHPSS teams further provide individual and group psychosocial support services, including community engagement activities (namely, mental health awareness and psychoeducation activities) to reach more individuals and prevent increased distress and suffering. Further focus is given to capacity building of other key actors (mental health professionals and other first responders from NGOs and public authorities) that work in and outside the RICs, to ensure improved quality of care and access to service provision for people in need of mental health care. In addition, IRC’s MHPSS teams safeguard the wellbeing of refugee and asylum seekers by providing resources (i.e. snacks and top-up cards, public transportation tickets), and a laundry service. In July 2020, the IRC mental health office on Lesvos started a safe space for the children of people attending its counselling sessions, where a specialised child protection officer provided childcare, enabling more parents to attend.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying movement restrictions, most of the IRC MHPSS individual support services have been provided remotely (tele-therapy) as part of adapted programming to continue offering services while adhering to public health guidelines.

In 2020, MHPSS team on Lesvos, Chios and Samos consisted of one MHPSS Senior Manager, one MHPSS Manager, one MHPSS Senior officer, six case workers, eight psychologists, three senior psychologists, seven interpreters, one junior CFS facilitator, one laundry assistant, one receptionist, two program assistants. In total on the three islands, in 2020, our MHPSS programme had 463 beneficiaries, while our trainings reached 300 internal and external professionals in the area of mental health.

#### 4. Economic Recovery and Development Programming

The focus of IRC’s Economic Recovery and Development team is to support refugees, migrants and vulnerable host populations with integration - especially into the labor market. Since 2017, IRC Hellas has been providing directly and in collaboration with partners employment and self-employment services and skills development.

Employability: The IRC directly and together with its partners, the Municipality of Athens and the Network for Children Rights provides employability services, such as 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 familiarization with Greek work culture. In total, 330 people received employability support in 2020 and over 2,300 since 2017. In collaboration with the Municipality of Athens, the IRC supports the employability of refugees enrolled in the European pilot integration program “Curing the Limbo: From apathy to active Citizenship”. Along with the Network for Children’s Rights and Laughter’s Guild, we are implementing the program “PROSVASIS” aiming to empower adolescents to a more active and positive way of living their lives as future young adults. Our efforts cover a holistic package of job counselling, formal and non-formal education and multi-level support helping teens and youth discover new opportunities.

**Entrepreneurship:** The IRC provides self-employment support to refugees, migrants, and vulnerable Greeks. About 80 clients received entrepreneurship support in 2020 and over 500 to date. Between 2019 and 2020, the IRC, together with its partner the Alba Graduate Business School, the American College of Greece, implemented “Craft your Business”, a program where clients received business training and coaching and had the opportunity to apply for start-up grants and further mentorship.

Finally, we also collaborate with METAdrasi and the National Centre for Social (EKKE) in the IOM-led national integration program “HELIOS” which is funded by DG HOME to provide life, cultural and job readiness skills to refugees in Athens.

## 5. Supporting the Municipal accommodation Center Kara Tepe

IRC Hellas has been providing services to the municipal accommodation center Kara Tepe since its foundation in 2015. This center provides accommodation to about 1,200 of the most vulnerable asylum seekers, mainly families. We ensure the functionality of power generators, installation and maintenance of water supply and drains, warm water supply, daily cleaning of shared hygiene and surrounding open-air spaces, cleaning and maintenance of shelters and houses of residents, including disinfection services and air condition maintenance, and fire protection infrastructure, technical works, good hygiene practices promotion, and distribution of personal hygiene products, and other non-edible first aid supplies, provide important information about the center and the active organizations within, transportation services for beneficiaries as well as support to the Director of the center through the secondment of 25 staff members assigned to support the management of the facility.

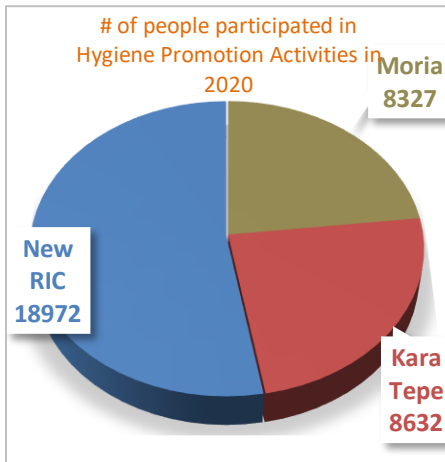


The IRC info kiosk in the Municipal accommodation center Kara Tepe, Lesvos

In 2020, we distributed 173,334 first aid products, such as cleaning and personal hygiene products, and we provided transportation services to 2,060 people to and from Kara Tepe in order to access services such as health and asylum services. One of the core services provided by IRC is the organization of activities to promote good hygiene practices (right way to use the toilet for children, treatment of scabies cases, avoiding insects and reptiles during summer months etc), and campaigns to clean the center with the participation of the beneficiaries. In 2020, 8,632 beneficiaries, participated in these activities, or / and were informed for what took place, within the framework of Communication with Communities (CwC) meetings.

## 6. Environmental health & COVID-19 response

In late 2019, IRC started supporting vulnerable groups at Moria RIC, to better prepare them for the upcoming winter, by providing much needed heating equipment, tents, as well as a power generator. In 2020, the IRC supported the population by taking measures for the COVID-19 pandemic with a rapid emergency response and the creation and maintenance of a triage area while special focus was given to increase hygiene promotion intervention by the construction of water points, installation of chemical toilets and solid waste management activities, including mass clean-up campaigns. Since the fires destroyed Moria RIC, the IRC moved and expanded its response to the new RIC in Mavrovouni, supporting the residents with Environmental Health, WASH promotion and COVID-19 prevention and response.



The IRC builds on and improves WASH in the emergency RIC in Mavrovouni and ensures that water sources are clean and sustainable, while waste and sanitation are implemented in a way that does not negatively impact the environment. Additionally, with the support of community volunteers, we focus on hygiene promotion activities for COVID-19 and skin diseases prevention, such as handwashing and solid waste management and recycling campaigns, proper use of masks, distribution of essential hygiene items. In 2020, 18,972 people in total participated in activities aimed at raising awareness on how to reduce the transmission of WASH-related diseases and children’s activities related to key hygiene messages, as environmental health awareness sessions for children. The IRC WASH team tries to engage the community to good hygiene practices with the construction and maintenance of water points.

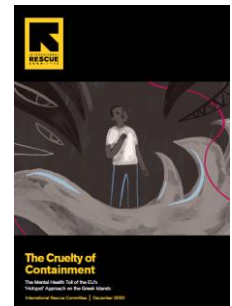
In addition, the IRC started preparing environmental health and hygiene promotion activities in the new quarantine site for new arrivals, Megala Therma, located in northern Lesvos, aiming to provide service there in 2021, as well as the quarantine site for new arrivals within the municipal site of Kara Tepe.

**7. Information**

Born in 2015 as a mobile website, [Refugee.Info](https://www.refugee.info) provides critical information to thousands of asylum-seekers in Greece and travelling across Europe. It has since evolved into a unique multi-channel platform with 118,000 followers on Facebook in December 2020 while 68,928 new users accessed the Refugee.Info website and Facebook page in 2020. IRC keeps Refugee.Info up to date, in order to capture changes in procedures, policies or practices that might be impacted by COVID-19 measures or administrative changes, share information in eight languages (Arabic, Farsi, French, Lingala, Urdu, Somali, Kurmanji and English). Refugee.Info website currently hosts over 90 articles covering the above topics and more. It also provides service mapping across Greece, produces content for the Facebook page across these eight languages and provides two-way communication through a helpdesk (Facebook messenger). Refugee.Info follows a strict priority protocol when receiving inquiries about Protection cases, aims to link the Refugee.Info Facebook page with refugee and asylum-seeker Facebook and other social media groups based in RICs, sites, and urban areas in Greece, plans to update and redesign survival guides for Athens and Thessaloniki in five languages, and utilizes text to speech technology to render all articles and service mapping pages in French, Arabic, Farsi, and English more accessible for illiterate/with sight problems.

**8. Advocacy**

IRC Hellas advocates in Greece and abroad for the protection of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees regarding asylum procedures, reception conditions, protection, 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 organises meetings and events to bring policy makers together and push for the full respect of asylum seekers and refugees’ rights. In 2020, IRC published two reports on Greece : [‘The Time is Now: a Plan to realise the potential of refugees in Greece’](#) and [‘The Cruelty of Containment: The Mental Health Toll of the EU’s Hotspot Approach on the Greek Islands’](#). The advocacy team also cooperates with other NGOs to share information and produce joint briefings and reports.



### **EMPLOYEES**

The number of employees occupied with the above-mentioned activities at any one time in 2020 reached 168 persons.

### **FUNDING**

The budget for the implementation of the above-mentioned activities in 2020 was 5,575,392.94 €.

**IRC Hellas**

Dimitra Kalogeropoulou, Head of Office

[Dimitra.Kalogeropoulou@rescue.org](mailto:Dimitra.Kalogeropoulou@rescue.org)

<https://eu.rescue.org/hellas-en>