

IRC Hellas Activity Report 2021



Stefania Mizara/IRC

IRC Hellas in a nutshell

Our mission at IRC Hellas is to help people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster, to survive, recover and gain control of their future.

Our Vision is to be recognised as a key civil society stakeholder supporting an expanded body of vulnerable people become empowered and thrive through inclusive, feminist oriented and sustainable programs.

In IRC Hellas, we define success as the ability to help people *survive*, *recover*, *and regain control of their lives*. Specifically, 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.

Background and Contextual Analysis

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

In 2021, our team of professionals in the field of humanitarian response was engaged in Greece on the islands of Lesvos, Chios and Samos, as well as in Athens, and we provided up-to-date reliable information through Refugee.Info nationwide. On Lesvos, Chios and Samos, we provided mental health and psychosocial support services, while on Lesvos we also provided emergency assistance in the areas of water, sanitation, environmental health and COVID-19 prevention, as well as services of child protection, women's protection and non-formal education. On Lesvos as well, early integration services via language classes and computer literacy were provided, as well as face-to-face information on services. In Athens, we provided a variety of services in the areas of child protection and labour market integration.

2021 was a difficult year, with different challenges on each area IRC Hellas operates. The new 'Closed Controlled Access Centers' were established on the islands of Samos, Kos and Leros in the period of September to November 2021. They are surrounded by a barbed wire fence, characterised by prison-like architecture and ubiquitous digital surveillance, with restrictions to the residents. Moreover, the impact of the implementation of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement was further compounded by a Greek Joint Ministerial Decision (JMD) in June 2021, which designated Turkey as a 'safe third country' for people from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Somalia, and Syria. Last but not least, the closure of Kara Tepe municipal camp on Lesvos island left many people with vulnerabilities without dignified shelter.

According to <u>UNHCR</u>, 9,157 people reached Greece in 2021, compared to 15,696 in 2020 and 74,613 in 2019. According to the Greek government the <u>Aegean islands</u> have gone from hosting 16,156 people in

December 2020 to 3,264 in December 2021. While the number of people arriving in Greece and the number of asylum seekers living on the Greek islands fell sharply in 2021, conditions have not improved for many vulnerable people seeking safety in Europe, who still face significant and persistent barriers, from accessing Greece, to a fair asylum procedure, to dignified reception and integration in Greece.

OUR WORK IN 2021

Child Protection



17-year old Azaz* is cooking in one of the IRC supported independent living apartments.

In 2021, IRC Hellas operated 14 Supported-Independent Living (SIL) apartments for unaccompanied asylum-seeking adolescents in Athens. Each apartment can host up to 4 adolescents, supported by a team of experienced professionals, such as social workers, caretakers, interpreters, and lawyers. Throughout 2021, 75 children were supported in the IRC SIL apartments. We provide shelter, one-to-one and group psychosocial support, legal counselling, non-formal education, and a variety of creative and skills-building activities. At the same time, we support activities that promote the adolescents' interaction with and integration in Greek society like visits

to cultural performances, museums and participation in sports activities. Children are enrolled in local General and Technical Lyceums and/or High Schools and are encouraged to attend their classes daily. The staff in the apartments, and in particular the social workers, have constant 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 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 for adulthood. In 2021, the SIL support team consisted of six social workers, thirteen caretakers, seven interpreters, two lawyers, one educator, three coordinators, a SIL senior officer and a programme manager.

"I am sad to go- in two months you have done for me more than anyone else the 1,5 year I am in Greece", Amir, UAC upon adulthood that lived in an IRC SIL apartment

"I did not feel so bad when I came from Pakistan, to leave my family. But today I felt like I was leaving my home.", Baashir, UAC upon adulthood that lived in an IRC SIL apartment

In 2021, the IRC Child Protection programme in the Reception and Identification Centre on Lesvos (Mavrovouni RIC) expanded its operations. Added to the case management team, which started operating in 2020, a team running a 'Child Friendly Space' and a 'Mother-Baby Corner' started in spring 2021. The case management team had three main tasks: outreach, case management, and psychological counseling. Through outreach activities, the team screened the camp population with door-to-door visits and, if protection concerns were identified and a child was deemed to be at risk, case management began. The team developed a case plan based on identified needs and offered services directly, through the provision of psychosocial support, and through referrals to other actors including health, educational or legal organisations, and/or the Public Prosecutors' office. The 'Child Friendly Space' and a 'Mother-Baby Corner'

team also ran activities for children up to 17 years old and mothers & babies, up to 2 years old, such as educational, psychosocial, parental skills sessions, and mothers' peer groups. In total, 1,007 children and parents were screened for the identification of their needs, 196 children entered the case management process and 53 children underwent individual counseling by the IRC child psychologist. The Mother-Baby Corner catered to 82 mothers and 101 babies, while 547 children aged 3-17 participated Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Child-Friendly Space (CFS) activities. The Child Protection teams in Mavrovouni RIC on Lesvos consisted of six caseworkers, three facilitators, seven interpreters, a child psychologist, two drivers, and a child protection manager

In February, a consortium led by the IRC, with partners Diotima – Centre for Gender Rights & Equality, Caritas Hellas and Iliaktida, was initiated with UNICEF's financial support to work in the Mavrovouni RIC. The consortium was initially designed to provide Child Protection, Protection against Gender-Based Violence, Social services and Non-Formal Education to children and women. Consortium partners operated in 2021 inside the RIC and in a safe space outside the camp, 'Tapuat'. From February to December 2021, 1,819 people benefitted from Child Protection services provided by IRC Hellas and Iliaktida, while 948 unique people attended non-formal education activities.

In 2021, the IRC, launched the "REEC: Reinforce Educators, Empower Children" project, under the coordination of Terre des homme Hellas, in partnership with the Municipality of Milan and under the auspices of the Municipality of Athens. The overall objective is 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 FGDs, KIIs and consultative workshop with 33 professionals and children. This feedback promoted the adaptation and contextualization of the IRC Healing Classrooms and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Curricula & Terre des hommes Movement, Games and Sports Methodology in the Greek context, resulting 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 SEL 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.

In April 2021, the 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's Health. The project will provide three apartments in Athens, with the capacity to accommodate up to twelve people. In addition to safe housing, beneficiaries will receive personalized psychosocial and educational and employability support, including recreational activities and career guidance. The IRC conducted an overview of relevant child protection legislation, in particular with regard to the housing and support of children displaced from their families, and the context of child protection structures through desk research, as well as a well-rounded needs assessment through five semi-structured interviews and 14 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with future possible beneficiaries and key staff working in institutional care and in the broader child protection sector, in order to provide for a deeper understanding of 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 MoLSA, UNICEF and IRC, worked intensively on the writing of the SIL Joint Ministerial Decision.

Women's Protection and Empowerment

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, were implemented by IRC partners Caritas Hellas and Diotima. From February to December 2021, the consortium ran a Women and Girls' Safe Space, offering psychosocial support, case management, recreational and information sessions for women and girls and the provision of non-formal education activities for adult women.

From November 2020 to November 2021, IRC's partners provided emergency accommodation, 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 294 unique individuals received the above services provided by our implementing partner, Diotima. Moreover, Caritas Hellas provided recreational activities, case management, informational and psychosocial sessions and Non-Formal educational activities to 991 women that were enrolled in the Women's and Girls Safe Space. 93 people received GBV case management, 150 people participated in GBV prevention activities while 110 front line workers received GBV capacity building training.

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 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) and in 2021 was implemented on the islands of Lesvos, Chios, and Samos.

The IRC's MHPSS programmes include the identification of needs and, where necessary, referrals to private psychiatrists, the local hospitals, as well as to the UNHCR for safe accommodation and other NGOs for legal support and to other different services based on the identified needs of the people we support. The IRC collaborates with private psychiatrists and neurologists 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.

"Thank you so much. The services that are you provided are really important for the people in the camp. We need this kind of help.", Julie, refugee from Cameroon

"During the moments that I was in bad mood, I was seeing the van coming to pick me up and I had hope again. And again I wanna say thank you that you count me as a human.", Fahimeh, asylum seeker from Afghanistan

IRC MHPSS teams further provide individual and group psychosocial support services, to improve the mental health wellbeing and to decrease the stress and the suffering of the people we serve. Additionally, in order to reduce stigma and raise awareness IRC provides psychoeducation sessions on various mental health topics. In order to ensure community engagement, 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 addition, the IRC MHPSS teams ensure accessibility to their services by providing transportation to people with particular vulnerabilities, and top up cards for

beneficiaries.

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 2021, the MHPSS teams on Lesvos, Chios and Samos consisted of one senior officer, two senior psychologists, five case workers, eight psychologists, eight interpreters, one interpreter team leader, an M&E officer, three programme assistants, a driver, two managers and one senior manager. In 2021, on the three islands, the IRC MHPSS programme supported 592 people (388 male and 204 female) through 4,475 individual and group sessions, 670 people (388 males and 282 females) through 146 psychoeducation sessions, and 398 internal and external professionals and volunteers in the area of mental health, through trainings.

Economic Recovery and Development Programming

Since 2017, IRC Hellas has been providing 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



Stathis Mamalakis/IRC: Job Fair event at Serafeio

Employability services include individual career counselling, help with job search, and job readiness workshops that develop crucial employability skills, as well as an introduction to labour rights and familiarisation with Greek work culture. In 2021, the IRC provided employment services directly to vulnerable youth as part of the Resilient Futures programme funded by Citi Foundation and to women with the support of Webhelp through the Think Human Foundation and with support from LDS Charities and in collaboration with its partners, the Municipality of Athens and the Network for Children's Rights. In collaboration with the Municipality of Athens, the IRC supported the employability of

refugees enrolled in the European pilot integration program "Curing the Limbo: From apathy to active Citizenship". Along with the organization Network for Children's Rights and Syntechnia tou Geliou, we implemented the programme "PROSVASIS" aiming to empower adolescents to a more active and positive way of living their lives as future young adults. Our efforts covered a holistic package of job counselling, formal and non-formal education and multi-level support, helping teens and youth discover new opportunities. In total, 259 people received employability support in 2021 and over 2,300 since 2017.

"I have many problems. Finding a job has been my biggest challenge. So, I was looking for a job and was informed by the municipality of Athens about this training. It was easy to apply and I was really happy to do so".

Beheshta, single woman, mother – refugee from Afghanistan

Entrepreneurship

The IRC provides self-employment support to refugees, migrants, and vulnerable Greeks. About 30 people received entrepreneurship support in 2021 and over 500 to date. As part of Resilient Futures, the IRC together with its partner the Alba Graduate Business School, the American College of Greece, implement "Craft your Business", a programme where people receive business training and coaching and have the opportunity to apply for start-up grants and further mentorship.

Education and Cultural Orientation Support

The IRC also supports the early integration and cultural orientation of refugees and asylum seekers on Lesvos 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 on non-formal adult educational opportunities aiming and skills improvement and empowerment. In 2021, 180 people received basic language and digital skills training and 144 were supported with immediate relief through the distribution of supermarket vouchers. In 2021, IRC Hellas also supported 80 local low-income individuals through the provision of supermarket vouchers and 17 with job readiness training to support the acquisition of market-relevant skills.

"Thank you very much for the information you give to people and especially me – today I found a job thanks to you!" Hadhuurami, asylum seeker from Comoros islands

National Integration Project "HELIOS"

Since 2019, IRC Hellas collaborates with METAdrasi and the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) in the implementation of International Organization for Migration's (IOM)-led national integration project HELIOS – Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection, with the aim to integrate beneficiaries of international protection into the Greek society, and especially to support them during the transition from camps to autonomous living. In the framework of the HELIOS project, IRC Hellas provides life, cultural and job readiness skills to refugees in Athens. In 2021, IRC Hellas supported 167 refugees with soft skills training, through 747 hours of classes.

Supporting the Municipal accommodation Center Kara Tepe

IRC Hellas provided services to the municipal accommodation center Kara Tepe on Lesvos, from its foundation in 2015 to its closure in April 2021. The center had capacity to provide accommodation to about 1,200 of the most vulnerable asylum seekers, mainly families. For more than 5 years, the IRC ensured the functionality of power generators, installation and maintenance of water supply and drains, warm water supply, daily cleaning of shared spaces and surrounding open-air spaces, cleaning and maintenance of

shelters and houses of residents. On top of those, environmental health promotion among the residents of Kara Tepe and Non-Food item (NFI) distribution through an IRC kiosk were integral part of the WASH team's activities. The Site Management Support (SMS) team was also responsible for the provision of important information about the functionality of the Canter and other topics of concern. Transportation services for beneficiaries was provided by the IRC, as well as support to the management of the Center through the secondment of 25 staff members to the Municipality of Mytilene assigned to support the management of the facility.



In 2021, the IRC distributed 65,541 first aid products, such as cleaning and personal hygiene products, and provided transportation services to 331 people to and from Kara Tepe, in order to access services such as health and asylum services. One of the core services provided by the SMS and WASH teams of IRC in 2021 was daily outreach to the community with door-to-door information provision, including important updates on government measures regarding COVID-19 as well as announcements on services and infrastructure updates in the site. In 2021, 2,130 beneficiaries were reached in the framework of this activity.

Environmental health & COVID-19 response in Mavrovouni RIC

Since the fires destroyed Moria RIC September 2020, 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.

During 2021, the IRC built on and improved WASH in the emergency RIC in Mavrovouni and made sure that water sources were clean and sustainable, while waste and sanitation were implemented in a way that did not negatively impact the environment. Through a community volunteers training programme, at least 47 community volunteers were engaged and completed cycles of 4 trainings in environmental health, which empowered them to deliver, together with IRC staff, hygiene promotion activities for adults, children and adolescent girls on COVID-19 and skin diseases prevention, such as handwashing and proper use of masks, menstrual hygiene, scabies etc. as well as organise



Louiza Gouliamaki/IRC

distribution of essential hygiene items. In 2021, 20,242 non unique participants in environmental health promotion sessions received information on how to reduce the transmission of WASH-related diseases, while 8,363 adults and children participated in Solid Waste Management promotion activities. The IRC WASH team engaged the community to good hygiene practices with the construction and maintenance of 406 handwashing stations (tippy-taps) as well as with the construction and delivery of 203 household handwashing and dishwashing points, benefitting more than 5,900 people. Moreover, the IRC WASH team provided critical non-food items (NFIs) to over 8,000 people.

In addition, since March 2021, the IRC was responsible for the shelter and facilities maintenance and cleaning in the new quarantine site for new arrivals, Megala Therma, located in northern Lesvos, while we also delivered hygiene promotion activities to beneficiaries of the site. In 2021, 172 people who arrived at Megala Therma received shelter, NFIs and hygiene promotion messaging.

Information

Born in 2015 as a mobile website, <u>Refugee.Info</u> 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 2021 while 53,978 new users accessed the Refugee.Info website and Facebook page in 2021. Throughout 2021 IRC has kept 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 and shared information in eight languages (Arabic, Farsi, French, Lingala, Urdu,

Somali, Kurmanji and English). Refugee.Info website hosted over 90 articles covering the above topics and more. It also provided service mapping across Greece (440 services regularly updated), produced content for the Facebook page across these eight languages and provided two-way communication through a helpdesk (4, 819 responses in Facebook messenger). In 2021, in collaboration with UNHCR, Refugee.Info produced 2 survival guides for Athens and Thessaloniki in eight languages and utilised 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.

"Thank you so much! You have already helped a lot. The information that you provide is very structured and detailed. We have already submitted the pre-registration form and we will take a PAMKA today. Our sincere gratitude for your support!!" – Medin, asylum seeker from Iran

Apart from its online presence, Refugee.Info also sustained a team in Lesvos to provide much-needed information to asylum seekers and new arrivals. With the support of a team of community volunteers, Refugee.Info team informed the population in the new Mavrovouni camp about Refugee.Info, how to use it and advocated jointly with UNHCR to relaunch the Communications with Communities Working Group in the camp to foster representation mechanisms of asylum seekers/refugees residing in the site. Furthermore, Refugee.Info conducted several camp-wide outreach/information campaigns on COVID-19 vaccination and other pandemic issues, asylum procedures and issuance of travel documents. Additionally, twenty -eight info sessions were delivered to 218 unique individuals on various topics including administrative procedures, protection issues and integration services, while 6,192 people were reached through outreach sessions.

Advocacy

IRC Hellas advocates in Greece and the EU for the protection of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees regarding access to 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 organises meetings and events to bring policy makers together and push for the full respect of asylum seekers and refugees' rights. In 2021, we organised 6 events and participated in 25 meetings with stakeholders from EU institutions and the Greek government to raise various issues refugees and asylum seekers face in Greece. In addition, we sent 8 letters, drafted 12 advocacy briefings and published 19 press releases.

In November 2021, IRC Hellas published the report 'A chance for a better future: Supported independent living and the protection of unaccompanied children in Greece', to highlight the importance of strengthening durable solutions for unaccompanied children in Greece, such as supported independent living for children over 16 years of age. The advocacy team also cooperates with other NGOs to share information and produce joint briefings and reports. In 2021, IRC Hellas partnered with Common Ground on the report 'EU funding for the integration of migrants and refugees in Greece: The clock is ticking', led on the report 'For A Europe That Truly Protects: Joint NGO Policy Brief on the Screening Regulation Proposal' and co-authored the reports 'Walling off welcome: New reception facilities in Greece reinforce a policy of refugee containment and exclusion' and 'Relocation from Greece: Lessons learned and looking ahead'.





In 2021, the IRC Hellas advocacy team also held events to bring together locals and refugees on the island of Lesvos, through cooking workshops. 50 locals and 12 refugees participated. Following the workshops, the advocacy team produced the 'Cookbook: Recipes from Home'.

Last but not least, we joined efforts with Greek Council for the Refugees, Diotima Centre and Popaganda in the project "Do the human right thing — Raising our Voice for Refugee Rights", to address the barriers that refugees and asylum seekers face in Greece, to access housing, employability and health

services.

Greek Wildfires Response

During the summer of 2021, Greece experienced one of the worst wildfires the country has ever seen. The wildfires left behind burned land and destroyed homes, schools, roads, factories, and a significant part of the country's forest wildlife. The largest wildfires were in Attica, Olympia, Messenia, and the most destructive in northern Evia. In response to the devastating wildfires in northern Evia island, IRC Hellas supported the initiative of the Hellenic Red Cross, to support the people and animals affected by the wildfires in Greece. Furthermore, IRC Hellas supported the Hellas Firefighters Association, to buy necessary equipment for their wildfires response in norther Evia. Last but not least, IRC Hellas supported the operations of Refugees who provided food for the people affected by the fires.

Donors and Supporters







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Partnerships & Collaborations ()



Aligned with global IRC strategy, IRC Hellas has been actively investing in collaborative relations with local partners with the goal of enhancing program quality and scale and enabling more durable outcomes for the communities we serve. In 2021, 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.



Action for Women



















eu.rescue.org/hellas-en

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EMPLOYEES







The number of employees occupied with the above-mentioned activities at any one time in 2021 reached 210 persons.



Stefania Mizara/IRC

FUNDING

The total spending of the organization for the period between January 2021 – December 2021 was 7.660.770,55 €.

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