# ADVANCING REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN GREECE

**UNHCR Greece | Update #11**
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*Shaimaa, a refugee from Iraq, opened her own restaurant "Ustura" with the support of BRC Livelihoods Programme. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis*

**126,400**
**Refugees and**
**30,200**
**Asylum-seekers in Greece**

*Source*: Ministry of Migration and Asylum (June 2025)

## Our Strategy

Successful inclusion of refugees requires a comprehensive, society-wide approach. UNHCR collaborates with various levels of the Government, the private sector, civil society and refugees themselves to foster synergies, promote sustainable change and provide targeted support where immediate results are needed.

In Greece, UNHCR leverages its 70 years of global experience to drive positive change for refugees. Since 2022, UNHCR and its partners joined efforts to support the implementation of the National Integration Strategy on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the Ministry for Migration and Asylum.

**UNHCR is currently facing a global funding crisis, which has significantly affected its operations in Greece, including key programmes that support refugee integration. Integration needs, however, remain.**

## Our Key Achievements *(since January 2022)**

### Employability

**Over 17,000**
refugees and asylum-seekers have been supported with employability services

### Hires

**Over 4,000**
hires of refugees and asylum-seekers

### Upskilling

**~3,100** regularly attended Greek language classes

**~100** received individualized entrepreneurship counselling

**~320** participated in vocational training

### Private sector

**Over 300**
registered businesses in the online job-matching platform

**The number of people does not necessarily reflect unique individuals as some may have received services across different programmes.*

# HIGHLIGHTS IN 2025

## Joint event hosted by the British Embassy and the Hellenic British Chamber of Commerce

On 11 March 2025, UNHCR co-organized an event with the British Embassy in Greece and the Hellenic British Chamber of Commerce titled "Unlocking Growth: How Refugee Integration Can Strengthen Businesses". Participating companies exchanged with UNHCR how refugees and asylum-seekers, who have the legal right to work, could help address their workforce needs. The UNHCR Representative noted that refugees have diverse skills which can help increase productivity and innovation and advocated for the development of goods and services by companies tailored to refugee needs.

*The UNHCR Representative in Greece presented UNHCR's work on integration and the potential benefits for businesses through refugee integration. ©UK Embassy in Greece*

## Health and safety training seminars for asylum-seekers and refugees

UNHCR, in partnership with METAdrasi and with support from the Reception and Identification Service of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, coordinated pilot health and safety training for some 20 asylum-seekers and refugees; the pilot run in the Ritsona Controlled Facility for the Temporary Accommodation of Asylum-Seekers. The training sessions were implemented by the company Management Force Group. The participants obtained a certificate in health and safety which will be of great support in finding employment.

*"In my homeland we say: 'As long as there is life, there is hope'. I came to this seminar because I hope for something better," shared Ricardo, a young asylum-seeker from Cameroon, who participated in the pilot seminar in Ritsona. ©UNHCR/ Christina Stefania Tsantioti*

## Kebab hub: refugee sets up his own authentic Iranian kebab house

Filippos-Mahdi Safaei, a refugee from Iran, arrived in Greece in November 2016. He worked various jobs to support himself, but his true passion lay in cooking, which he pursued with determination. In 2023, he joined the "Ready4Business" programme, funded by UNHCR and implemented by METAdrasi. With their guidance, Filippos-Mahdi opened his own restaurant, Kebab Hub, in Nikaia, Attica. The restaurant specializes in authentic Iranian kebabs, bringing a taste of his homeland to Greece.

*"Cooking has always been my passion, and opening Kebab Hub has given me the chance to share a piece of my homeland with the people of Greece. This journey has been challenging, but with determination and support, I have turned my dream into reality.", said Filippos-Mahdi. ©METAdrasi*

# OUR LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMES

## Employability centres in Athens and Thessaloniki

The **Adama Centre**, established in early 2022 by UNHCR partners CRS and Caritas Hellas, supports refugees and asylum-seekers in integrating into the labour market by offering services such as job search, CV writing, interview preparation, support with navigating public services, career coaching in multiple languages and also provides employers with guidance on hiring refugees. By June 2025, Adama had assisted 4,534 individuals, resulting in 682 hires.

The **Blue Refugee Centre** (BRC) in Thessaloniki, operated by Solidarity Now under UNHCR's Livelihoods programme, helps refugees and asylum-seekers achieve self-reliance through personalized career counselling, entrepreneurship seminars, and referrals to specialized services. By June 2025, BRC had supported 2,597 individuals, leading to 442 hires.

Binta, a refugee from Sierra Leone, arrived in Greece six years ago and, facing language and financial challenges, turned to the Blue Refugee Centre in Thessaloniki. With support from her employability counsellor Mary through the BRC Livelihoods programme, she received job counselling and social services, ultimately overcoming her fears and securing a hotel job.

***"I took my first steps towards integration in the country after getting in touch with the Centre. They introduced me to the job search process, and now I feel more independent. Most importantly, they supported me psychologically, giving me the strength to stand on my own feet", said Binta.***

*©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis*

**Adama Job Center**

**Are you a refugee looking for work?**
**Are you an employer looking to hire refugees?**

**Scan to access the online job-matching platform**

## #Together: holistic support for effective access to socio-economic rights and livelihoods in Epirus

Since 2023, UNHCR's **"#Together"** programme in Epirus - run with the Municipality of Ioannina, Intercultural Centre "Academia," and INTERSOS Hellas - has supported refugees in setting career goals, accessing training, and integrating into national support systems. By June 2025, 1,574 individuals had received employability support, leading to 233 job placements.

## ReA - Refugee Assistance to Livelihoods and Employability

The **"ReA"** programme, a partnership between UNHCR and the Heraklion Development Agency, helps refugees access public services and the labour. To date, it has assisted 1,159 individuals, with 329 securing employment.

*UNHCR's partner, METAdrasi, provides Greek language classes in Thessaloniki, through the "Stepping Stone" programme. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis*

## "Stepping Stone" Educational Integration Programme

The **"Stepping Stone"** programme, run by UNHCR partner METAdrasi in seven key locations across Greece (Athens, Thessaloniki, and the islands of Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos) offers career counselling, job matching, CV support, and Greek language courses to refugees and asylum-seekers. Complementing the Adama Centre by serving different areas and offering distinct services, it ensures coordinated, non-overlapping support. The programme has helped 4,999 individuals, resulting in 1,848 hires, while 3,113 people have regularly attended Greek language classes in several locations.

Launched in late 2022 by UNHCR and METAdrasi, the **"Ready4Business"** programme supports refugee entrepreneurs with guidance and assistance in developing business proposals. Setting up one's own business is a lenghty and complex affair. So far, "Ready4Business" has helped 102 refugees, with 12 creating business plans and nine launching their own businesses. Of these, seven secured start-up funding — five through grants from The People's Trust and two via loans from The Action Finance Initiative (AFI).

## Past programmes and initiatives

- **Caregivers to People with Disabilities:** 73 refugees were trained as personal assistants for people with disabilities, with 43 securing employment in this role.
- **Intercultural Mediators Training and Accreditation:** 30 refugees completed comprehensive training and were certified as intercultural mediators, with at least 28 finding relevant employment.
- **Child Care Assistants**: 47 refugees were trained as child care assistants, with the aim to join the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family's "Neighbourhood Nannies" roster.
- **Drivers**: 129 refugees participated in road safety seminars and driving lessons to prepare for the driving licence test.
- **Academic Counselling**: Implemented by UNHCR's partner METAdrasi, this programme guided 27 young refugees in pursuing education and scholarships, resulting in 14 scholarship awards.
- **Disabilities Inclusive:** In partnership with the City of Athens and the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA), this initiative supported 262 refugees with disabilities in accessing national social protection, helping 262 refugees accessing specialized services including rehabilitation, 67 applying for welfare disability allowances, and providing 28 with assistive devices such as wheelchairs and hearing aids.
- **Job Fairs:** Between 2023 and 2024, 18 job fairs were organized across Greece in collaboration with collaborated with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Chambers of Commerce, private companies, NGOs, and other stakeholders, connecting nearly 4,000 refugees with 400 employers and resulting in 365 on-the-spot job offers.

## REUNITING REFUGEE FAMILIES

*A Rohingya stateless refugee in Greece, was finally reunited with his wife and children after more than five years of separation. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis*

As part of its efforts to support durable solutions, UNHCR helps recognized refugees in Greece reunite with family members, enhancing integration prospects as united families typically adapt better to their new communities, emotional well-being, and contributing to economic self-reliance. Especially for vulnerable groups like children and the elderly, family members provide a sense of safety. Since August 2021, in partnership with the Greek Council for Refugees, UNHCR has assisted over 290 family reunification cases, with 145 individuals successfully reunited in Greece.

## SUPPORTING MUNICIPALITIES

The Cities Network for Integration (CNI), supported by UNHCR, brings together 25 municipalities across Greece to coordinate local and national efforts that promote the social integration of refugees and migrants and strengthen social cohesion. Moreover, UNHCR has signed Memoranda of Cooperation with the City of Athens and Heraklion to work together in promoting refugee integration.

## WORKING WITH REFUGEES

UNHCR's **Refugee Advisory Group**, made up of nine recognized refugees from diverse backgrounds, offers guidance to both UNHCR and fellow refugees. They share their personal experiences of overcoming obstacles refugees face on their path to integration and help shape policy recommendations.

UNHCR also identifies **refugee outreach volunteers** who act as a link between their community, humanitarian agencies and authorities. They share vital information about available services, service providers and support mechanisms in urban areas.

## ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

UNHCR collaborates with the private sector to create employment and training opportunities for refugees.

Launched in July 2023 by UNHCR and Piraeus Bank and run by Odyssea, the **Refugee Women Academy** offers specialized vocational training for refugee and asylum-seeking women who can then work as kitchen assistants, hotel employees and waitstaff in Greece's thriving tourism industry. The Academy provides practical training, mentorship, and networking. Participants reported that they were highly satisfied with the training and feel more confident in seeking employment with their newly acquired skills. So far, 123 women have completed the programme, with 57 finding jobs. In an innovative effort to encourage the participation of refugee mothers with young children, a child-friendly space was also created to support refugee mothers, staffed by childcare assistants trained through UNHCR programmes.

***"I left my home in Ukraine within the first week of the conflict [...]. During this course I felt that I'm part of a team [...]. It helped me be optimistic about the future", said M. refugee woman from Ukraine.***

*©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis*

In 2025, UNHCR supported several **Career Days** organized by partners, including METAdrasi, the City of Athens' Coordination Centre for Migrant & Refugee Issues (ACCMR), the Municipality of Mytilene, and hotel associations in Lesvos and Halkidiki. These events connected refugees with companies operating across Greece, from key sectors such as tourism, catering, hospitality, human resources services, sales, construction, transport and retail.

*Refugees and locals alike attend the Career Day held in Lesvos on 12 March. ©UNHCR*

*Bayan, a refugee from Syria, during a Greek language course in Thessaloniki. of the "Stepping Stone" programme implemented by METAdrasi in partnership with UNHCR.*
*© UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis*

"The programme's greatest advantage for me has been acquiring the ability to communicate in Greek, a skill crucial for connecting with other people and finding a job."

Bayan arrived in Greece in 2016 with her husband and three children seeking safety and a new beginning. In Syria, Bayan was a teacher, and she has continued to share her knowledge by informally teaching Arabic to refugee children in Greece. To further her own education and improve her communication skills, she decided to join Greek language courses offered as part of the "Stepping Stone" programme.

UNHCR is grateful for the support of donors to the Greece Operation as well as to those who have contributed to UNHCR's operations globally and regionally through unearmarked and softly earmarked funding, including:

Australia | Belgium | Denmark | European Union | France | Germany | Ireland | Netherlands | Norway | Republic of Korea | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America

UNHCR also acknowledges the support of private sector donors to the Greece operation:

VISA Europe

## How you can support refugee inclusion:

- **Make a financial contribution:** Support UNHCR's efforts by donating here.
- **Create job opportunities:** Offer employment to refugees, helping them build a stable future.
- **Join public advocacy:** Partner with UNHCR in advocating for refugees and identifying innovative solutions.
- **Develop goods and services:** Create products and services that meet the needs of refugees
- **Exchange ideas:** Collaborate with organizations dedicated to helping refugees.
- **Investing in refugee support funds:** Contribute to funds that provide financial assistance to refugees.
- **Lead by example:** Serve as a role model by actively supporting refugee inclusion.

## CONTACTS

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