UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Greece

Supporting refugees in Greece to access decent work

"My dream is to stay in Greece. I want to see my children grow up happy, for all of us to have stable jobs, and for us to eventually buy our own home.",
Tavi, refugee from Iraq

Tavi, refugee from Iraq, works in the kitchen of a central hotel in Athens thanks to the employability programme. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

170,000
refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless. 54% are women & children

Source: Ministry of Migration and Asylum, UNHCR; February 2026

50%
have completed secondary education. 17% have tertiary level education

Source: UNHCR, 2024

50%
of refugees are reportedly out of work

Source: UNHCR, 2024

CONTEXT

Refugees and asylum-seekers bring skills, innovation, and diversity that can strengthen the workforce, fill labour gaps, and create new businesses. This can stimulate and benefit local economies and society. In parallel, employment and entrepreneurship are critical pathways to integration, contributing to social cohesion and peaceful co-existence.

Although refugees and asylum-seekers in Greece have the right to work, they need administrative and legal support along with Greek language training to access decent work and to become more self-reliant.

UNHCR's Integration Programme was designed in 2022, in collaboration with partners, to provide this individualized support and is aligned to the National Integration Strategy, while it also fits to the corresponding provisions of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

While a number of organisations now deliver employability support to refugees, UNHCR's programme uniqueness relies on the strong, long-standing relationships UNHCR and its partner METAdrasi have built with both refugee communities and employers. This trusted position on both sides enables effective job matching and delivers tangible, sustainable results.

However, due to an unprecedented funding shortfall in 2025, UNHCR's integration services had to close in Lesvos, Crete, Ioannina, Kos and Leros, with only limited assistance continuing in Athens, Thessaloniki, Ritsona, Chios and Samos. Greek language classes also ended by October 2025. As a result, refugees' access to integration and employability support through UNHCR has narrowed significantly.

A total of $8.3 million is needed in 2026 to sustain priority responses and scale up critical interventions across all UNHCR programmatic areas.

UNHCR'S INTEGRATION PROGRAMME 2026

1,000 refugees will benefit from livelihoods and economic inclusion interventions in 2026

$790K prioritized financial requirements for 2026 integration programme

More than **3,200** refugees and **340** companies registered on Adama online job-matching platform

UNHCR, continuously advocates with the authorities to enable effective access to social protection services by addressing systemic barriers. Moreover, in collaboration with its partner NGO METAdrasi, UNHCR assists refugees and work-eligible asylum-seekers — with possible extension to those returned from other EU countries:

Unlock employment opportunities for refugees

Through **group sessions and individualized support**, Employability Counsellors offer refugees and asylum-seekers residing in both island reception centres and in urban areas of Athens and Thessaloniki **comprehensive employability services**, including:

- job counselling and career orientation
- support with acquiring the basic documentation for employment
- pre-vocational training, such as basic computer literacy
- workshops on labour rights and responsibilities
- CV writing and job search strategies
- job matching
- interview preparation and soft skills development

Create opportunities for refugee entrepreneurs

By providing targeted guidance to refugees across Greece who wish to start a business, advising on the administrative, legal, and practical steps of entrepreneurship, in cooperation with accounting advisors, microfinance institutions, and relevant public authorities. Support includes information on business requirements and procedures, assistance in developing viable business plans, mentoring on marketing and financial management, guidance on market research and access to microfinance and grants.

Match labour supply and demand

By **engaging continuously with the Greek private sector** to monitor labour market trends and identify emerging employment opportunities. This information supports effective matching of qualified refugees with employers, aided by the Adama job-matching platform, which enables direct connections between refugees and companies nationwide. Refugees can upload CVs and access job and training opportunities, while employers can post vacancies and tap into a diverse talent pool. Continuous communication and follow-up with all parties is ensured, supporting employers throughout the recruitment process, and providing ongoing guidance to resolve any challenges encountered.

UNMET NEEDS & POTENTIAL TO SCALE UP

In 2024, UNHCR provided employability services to some **7,000** people

In 2025, due to funding cuts of more than 50%, **4,100** refugees were able to access employability support through UNHCR programmes

In 2026, UNHCR needs **$1.5M** more to bring back parts of its integration programme and support an additional **3,500** refugees with livelihoods interventions