

# ADVANCING REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN GREECE

UNHCR Greece | Update #4  
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Julien Makalu, a refugee entrepreneur from the Democratic Republic of Congo who has been naturalized, during his speech at the UNHCR event for refugee integration and employability. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

## Our strategy

**67,027**  
Refugees in  
Greece

Source: UNHCR estimate  
as of end June 2023

Successful integration of refugees needs a whole-of-society approach. UNHCR works with the Government, local authorities, the private sector, civil society and the refugees themselves to create synergies, promote sustainable change and offer targeted support in areas that demand immediate results. In Greece, UNHCR works with the Government to advance refugee integration, in line with Greece's National Integration Strategy, and building on UNHCR's 70 years of experience from around the world.

Working closely with refugee communities, UNHCR identifies skills and experience, understands refugees' intentions and needs, and helps create support networks amongst peers. Reaching out to the private sector, the Office contributes to the creation of employment and training opportunities for refugees. Finally, UNHCR capitalizes on its ability to bring different actors together and works closely with central and local authorities and civil society to enact positive change for refugees.

## Key achievements (since January 2022)



### Career coaching

**7,514** career coaching services provided to **1,443** refugees and asylum-seekers.



### Employability

**604** refugees and asylum-seekers hired.



### Upskilling

**984** adult asylum-seekers attended language classes in five islands.

**50** refugees obtained a driving licence.



### Private sector

**226** collaborations with employers across Greece.

## LATEST HIGHLIGHTS

### World Refugee Day 2023: Hope Away from Home

On 20 June, UNHCR in cooperation with refugee and host communities, authorities, non-governmental organizations and local actors, commemorated World Refugee Day 2023 (20 June) lamenting that this world is tragically short on solutions for people forced to flee. In the aftermath of the shipwreck where some 600 people lost their lives in the Mediterranean, UNHCR called for a world where refugees are included, and the events organized across the country highlighted the need for more hope and opportunities. Refugees do not want handouts, they want the opportunity to work and earn their living, the opportunity to be heard and the opportunity to belong.

### Refugees at work: a win-win for refugees, business and society



Refugee children during a World Refugee Day event in Thessaloniki. ©UNHCR/ Lefteris Konstantopoulos

On 13 February, UNHCR brought together businesses and refugees in an event that showcased that refugee inclusion is a win-win for refugees, companies and societies. UNHCR showcased practical tools and solutions to help businesses effectively support refugee

integration and enhance their employability. One of these is an [online job-matching platform](#) UNHCR developed in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), connecting refugees looking for a job with prospective employers country-wide. Representatives from 26 businesses, along with government officials, members of the diplomatic community, NGOs and refugees attended the event, which resulted in 67 companies registering on the platform and posting their vacancies online.



Maria Clara Martin, UNHCR Representative in Greece, presents the benefits of integration during the private sector event. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis

### Information Guide for Refugees

In June, the Department of Socioeconomic Integration of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, together with UNHCR, released the [Information Guide for Beneficiaries of International Protection](#). This guide offers extensive information to help refugees and individuals with subsidiary protection status integrate in Greece. It covers essential topics about life in the country, the key documents to work in Greece and social services, employment opportunities, accommodation options, education and health care.

## GENERATING LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

Similar to other countries in Europe, Greece is facing labour shortages. At the same time, there are some 67,000 refugees in the country, many of whom are willing and able to work, if given the right opportunity. UNHCR has put into action strategic partnerships with organizations specialized in livelihoods and employability that promote opportunities for the inclusion of refugees in the labour market, including upskilling and support to both refugees and employers so that such inclusion is successful.

### Stepping Stone programme

UNHCR supports the educational integration programme "Stepping Stone" implemented by the NGO METAdrasi, which operates in seven locations: Athens, Thessaloniki, and the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos. Stepping Stone provides key services such as career counselling, job matching, CV preparation, and Greek language courses. Since the beginning of 2023, Stepping Stone helped 745 refugees in total find work, out of whom 185 people have already secured employment.



*Abdallah, refugee from Sudan, attends an individualised employability session at the 'Stepping Stone' programme on Lesbos island. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis*

### Blue Refugee Centre

Refugees and asylum-seekers who live in Thessaloniki and nearby camps receive similar support through the **Blue Refugee Centre** run by Solidarity Now. The centre's main goal is to help refugees become self-reliant and, for those with special needs, gain access to essential welfare services. Employability officers provide individual career counselling, information sessions, entrepreneurship seminars and referrals to specialized actors and training.



*Adjara, an Ivorian refugee, meets with her employability consultant at the Blue Refugee Centre in Thessaloniki. ©UNHCR/ Achilleas Zavallis*

Since March 2023, the Solidarity Now team has processed 450 service requests, one third of which are linked to employability support, such as assessing their employability profiles and helping them prepare CVs. The team has facilitated 49 job interviews for 44 individuals which resulted in 42 hirings.

## Adama employability centre

The **Adama** employability centre, run by UNHCR's partners CRS and Caritas Hellas, opened its doors in early 2022 to help refugees and asylum-seekers find work and other support they need to integrate in Greece. By June, 7,514, career coaching services had been provided to 1,443 refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the country. Most importantly, over 280 people had secured jobs. At Adama, refugees and asylum-seekers get practical help on how to look for a job, write their CV, prepare for an interview and understand Greek labour law. They also receive counselling, find help to obtain the documents necessary to access the labour market and are supported in navigating the different public services. Refugees across the country can attend in-person and remote career coaching sessions in English, Farsi, Arabic, French and Ukrainian.



*Berenice, asylum-seeker from Cameroon, prepares his CV with the assistance of a Livelihoods Officer at the Adama centre. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis*

## Job fairs for refugees

In 2023, UNHCR joined forces with central authorities, municipalities and NGOs to organize **job fairs** to connect refugees and asylum-seekers with employment opportunities.

Since the beginning of the year, four successful job fairs have been organized on the islands of Lesvos, Kos, Chios, and Samos, collectively drawing 535 participants and 67 employers. The efforts resulted in 817 interviews, leading to 143 job offers.

On the mainland, two job fairs were held in Thessaloniki and one in Athens, attracting 784 participants and 68 employers in total. The interviews conducted during these fairs reached 3,000, resulting in 335 job offers.



*During a Job Fair on Lesvos, refugees had the opportunity to meet with local employers. ©UNHCR/Theodoros Alexellis*

## Entrepreneurship Counselling for Refugees

In collaboration with NGOs Nostos and METAdrasi, UNHCR launched the "Entrepreneurship Counselling" programme in 2022 to provide a launching pad for refugees with entrepreneurial skills. The programme provides them with support to set up successful businesses through entrepreneurial advice, assistance to develop early company proposals and finally the opportunity to develop business for ten successful candidates from an initial pool of 80 people. In May, the programme celebrated its first success as an Ethiopian woman had her business plan approved and received €15,000 grant from to start a beauty salon.

## Vocational projects

In October 2022, UNHCR and its partner METAdrasi joined efforts on integration initiatives that are in line with the National Integration Strategy and the Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the Ministry for Migration and Asylum.

### Driving and Road Safety Lessons:

UNHCR has been providing [driving and road safety](#) in cooperation with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Road Safety Institute Panos Mylonas since July 2022. In this project, participants attend road safety seminars and driving lessons and prepare for the driving licence test.

Out of the first cohort of graduates, 35 refugees received driving licences. A second cohort of 79 students are undergoing training, of whom 15 have already received their driving licence.

### Child care Assistants:



Refugee women learn how to make handicraft for children during a "Child care Assistants" class. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

Lack of child care has been identified as one of the impediments for employment among women, whether they are refugees or nationals. The "Child care Assistants" project is a pilot

initiative that focuses on training refugees for employment in the child care sector. Participants from diverse backgrounds have enrolled in Greek language classes and vocational training courses to acquire the necessary skills. Upon successful completion, they will have the opportunity to work as nannies by joining the national roster "Neighbourhood Nannies" of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. This helps refugee women work as childcare assistants, and also helps mothers who need childcare support pursue their career goals. So far 14 participants completed the course, while another 16 are currently in training.

### Caregivers to people with disabilities:

The "Caregivers to People with Disabilities" project trains refugees to become personal assistants to people with specific needs. Participants receive comprehensive training and support to fulfil registration requirements on the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs platform. The first cycle concluded in April with 12 successful participants, three of whom have already registered on the platform. A second training cycle began in April 2023.

### Cultural Mediators:

The "Cultural Mediators Training and Accreditation Programme" will train and certify 30 refugees in cultural mediation to improve communication and facilitate refugees' access to essential services. Implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, partner organizations include the Labour Institute, Vocational Training Centre, and the National Organisation for Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance, promoting inclusion and integration.

## MUNICIPALITIES AS CATALYSTS OF LOCAL INTEGRATION

### Working together to maximize impact

UNHCR supports 11 municipalities (Athens, Herakleion, Igoumenitsa, Ioannina, Karditsa, Larissa, Neapolis-Sykies, Pogoni, Thessaloniki, Zitsa and Katerini), to strengthen their expertise on refugee issues and include refugees in their services. The Office deploys specialized personnel, facilitates coordination of resources and activities at local level and identifies sources of funding that can ensure the sustainable continuation of integration programmes for refugees and asylum-seekers living in the host communities.

**UNHCR deploys experts in 11 Municipalities to provide guidance on refugee matters.**

UNHCR has intensified its cooperation with municipalities by concluding partnership agreements with the Herakleion Development Agency and the Municipality of Larissa focusing on employability support; the Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies for the provision of Greek language courses; and the Development Agency for Karditsa to conduct a study on affordable housing and to support refugees who want to set up their own, new businesses.

In the context of its overall cooperation with the City of Athens, UNHCR works with ADDMA, the development agency of the Municipality of Athens, to help refugees with disabilities access the national social protection system and employment opportunities. From the beginning of the [Disabilities Inclusive](#) programme, 141 were assisted to access specialized services including for rehabilitation, 27 people applied for

the welfare disability allowance and 15 received assistive devices, such as wheelchairs.



In the context of the City of Athens “Integration and Innovation Hub”, eligible refugees and migrants took preparatory courses to sit the examination for citizenship. The preparatory courses strengthen students’ understanding of the Greek language, history and geography, culture, customs and political institutions. In 2023, 35 people attended the courses.

The municipalities of Athens and Herakleion (Crete) submitted pledges to the 2023 Global Refugees Forum to be held in December in Geneva, committing to supporting refugee inclusion and self-reliance. Moreover, UNHCR, together with IOM, continues to support the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR), the first municipality-led coordination hub in Greece, facilitating cooperation between the City of Athens and civil society, international organizations and central government and setting enabling integration policies; and the Cities Network for Integration (CNI); a forum that facilitates exchange of ideas and coordination of activities and interventions at local and national level, aimed at promoting social integration of refugees and migrants and strengthening social cohesion. Today, the Network consists of 18 Municipalities (Athens, Thessaloniki, Chania, Delta, Heraklion, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Kalamaria, Karditsa, Katerini, Larissa, Livadeia, Neapoli-Sykies, Nea Filadelfeia / Nea Chalkidona, Piraeus, Tilos, Trikala, Tripoli and Agios Dimitrios).

## WORKING TOGETHER WITH REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

### Advice from refugees to refugees

A group of nine recognized refugees living in Greece form part of an advisory group brought together by UNHCR. The group provides advice to UNHCR and guidance to other refugees to help their integration into the social, economic, and cultural life. Drawing from their own experience, they also inform UNHCR's advocacy through concrete recommendations on needed policy changes and practical examples of the obstacles that refugees may face along their way to integration.

The members of the Refugee Advisory Group have been selected based on their journey and successful integration in Greece. They are men and women from diverse backgrounds, like Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Some are proficient in Greek, some have become Greek citizens, and some have started their own businesses.

### Outreach volunteers

UNHCR also identifies refugees who are interested in becoming outreach volunteers and act as the connecting link between their community on the one hand, and humanitarian agencies and authorities on the other. They help

disseminate valuable information in urban areas, including on available services and how to access them, the roles and responsibilities of different actors, and how to get specific types of help. In 2023 UNHCR trained 14 outreach volunteers in Athens, while eight outreach volunteers are active in Thessaloniki and Karditsa. Moreover, UNHCR has started a street outreach programme in central Athens to establish links with refugees living in the city, either directly or by approaching around 50 shops and other venues owned and/or visited by refugees, sharing useful information and identifying several cases in need of support.

## LEGAL ASSISTANCE

### Family reunification for recognized refugees

As part of UNHCR's efforts to find durable solutions for refugees, the organization actively supports family reunification procedures for recognized refugees. In collaboration with expert partner the Greek Council for Refugees, UNHCR has provided assistance in 133 cases of family reunification in 2023. So far, 54 individuals have already arrived and successfully reunited with their family members in Greece.

### You can support the integration of refugees by

- Opening up jobs for refugees.
- Joining UNHCR in public advocacy and efforts to identify innovative solutions.
- Making a financial contribution to UNHCR [here](#).
- Developing goods and services that refugees need.
- Exchanging ideas with organizations that help refugees.
- By investing in funds that support refugees.
- By serving as a role model and leading by example.



UNHCR is grateful to the donors of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions to its 2023 global programmes.

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