



# ADVANCING REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN GREECE

UNHCR Greece | Update #9  
SEPTEMBER 2024

Heritier, refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, at the Blue Refugee Centre in Thessaloniki. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis

## Our Strategy

**107,135\***  
**Refugees and**  
**21,830**  
**Asylum-seekers**  
**in Greece**

Source: Ministry of Migration and Asylum  
 \*75,660 beneficiaries of international protection and 31,475 beneficiaries of temporary protection

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 the 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, UNHCR 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)\*



### Employability

**11,202** refugees and asylum-seekers received employability services.



### Hires

**3,115** hires of refugees and asylum-seekers.



### Upskilling

**1,567** refugees and asylum-seekers regularly attending Greek language classes  
**60** supported with individualized entrepreneurship counselling  
**120** trained in childcare and caregiving for people with disabilities



### Private sector

**281** registered businesses in the online job-matching platform.

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

## LATEST HIGHLIGHTS

### Memorandum of Cooperation between UNHCR and the Municipality of Heraklion, Crete



The Mayor of Heraklion Alexis Kalokairinos (right) and the Deputy Representative of UNHCR in Greece Mahir Safarli (left) during the signature of the Memorandum of Cooperation. © Municipality of Heraklion

On 27 September, UNHCR **signed** a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Municipality of Heraklion, Crete, in continuation of their already established cooperation since 2017. The Memorandum focuses on access of refugees and asylum-seekers to services and the development of strategies and programmes of integration support, including the implementation of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum pledge by the Municipality.

### Participation in the International Women's Entrepreneurship Forum

UNHCR participated in the 3rd **International Women's Entrepreneurship Forum** held in July 2024 in Heraklion, Crete. Organized by the Union of Greek Chambers of Commerce, it provided a networking platform and a visibility opportunity to showcase UNHCR's work on female refugees' access to employment and entrepreneurship. The UNHCR Representative **stressed** the particular obstacles refugee women entrepreneurs need to overcome, and, above all, the benefits they bring. Monica Okorie, a refugee entrepreneur in Athens, participated in the event and gave an inspirational account of **her journey** to success.



The UNHCR Representative in Greece in her speech emphasized the additional difficulties that refugee women entrepreneurs face. © Athens-Macedonian News Agency

### Refugee Paralympian in Paris

UNHCR, along with the Embassy of France in Greece, **met** with Greece-based refugee athlete Ibrahim Al Hussein before his departure to the Paris Paralympic Games. Ibrahim fled to Greece after losing his leg in an explosion while trying to save a friend. Ibrahim **posted** about this meeting, thanking the Embassy of France and UNHCR for the hospitality and support. Ibrahim has repeatedly **said** in interviews that he found a home in Greece and feels like he has been reborn as a Greek. He has lived diverse experiences in the country, from uninsured work to receiving for free a prosthetic leg by a private doctor. Ibrahim, who wishes to acquire Greek citizenship, has managed to learn Greek and make many Greek friends. As an avid athlete, he had also been a basketball player besides a swimmer. Paris 2024 was his third successive Paralympic Games representing the Refugee Paralympic Team.



The UNHCR Representative and the Chargé d'affaires of the Embassy of France meet with the refugee athlete Ibrahim Al Hussein before his departure to Paris. © Embassy of France

## GENERATING LIVELIHOODS OPPORTUNITIES

### Stepping Stone Programme



Bayan, refugee from Syria, attends a Greek language lesson at the Stepping Stone programme in Thessaloniki. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis

UNHCR supports the 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. The programme is complementary to the Adama Center as they operate in different locations, both strategically placed in areas where refugee populations reside. While both provide employability support, they also offer different services or specializations, e.g. Greek classes offered by "Stepping Stone" and extended network of employers of Adama Centre. Both UNHCR partners coordinate with each other to ensure that there is no overlap in services.

Since the beginning of the programme by September 2024, "Stepping Stone" had helped 3,710 refugees and asylum-seekers in their search for a job, while 1,477 had been hired by different companies. As of 2024, "Stepping Stone" also offers language support in 12 different locations across the country, with 1,567 people regularly attending Greek language courses in 2024.

### ADAMA job-matching platform

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

Scan to access the  
 Adama Centre's  
 online job-matching  
 platform



### 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 through finding employment 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.

As of September 2024, the Solidarity Now had offered support services in 1,089 people which ranged from assessing refugees' employability profiles, helping them prepare CVs and facilitating interviews, resulted in 354 hires.



An employability counsellor with a refugee woman at the Blue Refugee Centre. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis

## Adama Centre

The [Adama](#) 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 the end of September 2024, the centre provided services like job searching, CV writing, and preparation for interviews to 3,144 refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the country, with 569 hires as a result. Refugees also received counselling, found help to obtain the documents necessary to access the labour market and were 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. Companies wishing to hire refugees can receive counselling and advice from the Adama Centre.

## Job Fairs

UNHCR collaborates with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Chambers of Commerce, private companies, NGOs and other interested actors in organizing job fairs across the country. The Ministry [highlighted](#) its successful collaboration with UNHCR in organizing nine job fairs in 2024, in Attica (Athens, Malakasa, Ritsona), northern Greece (Thessaloniki, Epirus), and the Aegean islands (Lesvos, Samos, Kos, Chios). In total, 2,100 refugees participated, with 365 accepting job offers on the spot.

## Training and Vocational Projects

In October 2022, UNHCR and its partners joined efforts to support the implementation of the [National Integration Strategy](#). A main pillar of the Strategy is the social integration of refugees by developing education and training programmes to facilitate their access to the labour market. The programmes developed by UNHCR and its partners are also in line with the Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the Ministry for Migration and Asylum.

## Entrepreneurship Counselling for Refugees - Ready4Business

In collaboration with METAdrasi, in late 2022 UNHCR launched the "Entrepreneurship Counselling - Ready4Business" programme which provides a launching pad for refugees to start their own business. The programme provides entrepreneurial advice and assistance for developing company proposals.

The Ready4Business pilot project has so far supported around 60 refugee entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the programme resulted in eight people setting up their business, out of whom six received start-up financing. In particular, four received grants from the [People's Trust](#), a privately funded not-for-profit organization that supports start-ups and existing small businesses, providing micro-finance and free business development services and two obtained a loan through the [Action Finance Initiative \(AFI\)](#), a private, non-profit organization focused on supporting economic and social inclusion in Greece, providing microcredit, free training and advice for the unemployed and micro-entrepreneurs.



*"I've been thinking about opening my own hair salon for a long time. But I had no budget, and I didn't know where to start. I did not know what the procedure is and which services to turn to. I learned about the METAdrasi programme and thought that this is the opportunity I was looking for".*

Brwa, refugee from Iraq opened his own hair salon in Thessaloniki, with the support of the "Ready4Business" programme. © METAdrasi

### Caregivers to People with Disabilities

The "Caregivers to People with Disabilities" project trains refugees to become personal assistants to people with disabilities. Participants receive comprehensive training and support to fulfil registration requirements on the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family platform. Since January 2023, 73 individuals from five cycles have completed the programme and 43 are working as caregivers for people with disabilities.

### Intercultural Mediators

Around 30 participants have successfully completed the "Intercultural Mediators Training and Accreditation Programme". This programme developed a comprehensive curriculum, a pool of trainers, and a certification system in cultural mediation. The goal is to facilitate communication and thus refugees' access to essential services. Implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, partner organizations include the Labour Institute of the General Confederation of Greek Workers, the Institute of Small Enterprises under the General Confederation of Greek Professionals, Manufacturers and Merchants and NGO METAdrasi.

Once certified, the cultural mediators are qualified to work in Migrant Integration Centres (KEM), select Community Centres, public services, organizations and NGOs. They are eligible for various roles, including in the reception of asylum-seekers and refugees. At least 28 participants of the training have found employment in a relevant field.

### Academic Counselling

The Academic Counselling Programme, implemented by UNHCR's partner METAdrasi, offers guidance to young refugees looking to start or continue their education. It helps them explore their options, identify scholarship opportunities and enrol in academic institutions. So far, the programme has enrolled 22 participants and successfully secured 12 scholarships.

### Refugee Women's Academy

UNHCR and Piraeus Bank launched the [Refugee Women Academy](#) in July 2023. The Academy, run by the NGO Odyssea, offers a specialized programme focused on jobs in the tourism sector and language skills.

The Academy provides practical training, mentorship and networking, aiming at the participants' well-rounded professional development. The programme, which started in September 2023, had by September 2024, trained 82 women in vocational training for kitchen assistants and hotel services. Out of these, 43 women found employment shortly after completing the programme. In an innovative effort to encourage the participation of refugee mothers with young children, the Academy set up a child-friendly space, employing two childcare assistants who had recently qualified through UNHCR programmes.



***"It's never too late for us women to achieve what we want, without fear".***

Fatmata, refugee from Sierra Leone, and graduate from the Refugee Women Academy programme launched by UNHCR and Piraeus Bank and run by NGO Odyssea.

© UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

## MUNICIPALITIES AS CATALYSTS OF LOCAL INTEGRATION

### Cities Network for Integration

In June 2024, the Cities Network for Integration (CNI), supported by UNHCR and IOM, expanded its membership with eight new cities joining the existing 17 members and with the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The network now includes Athens, Thessaloniki, Chania, Delta, Heraklion, Ioannina, Kalamaria, Karditsa, Katerini, Larissa, Livadeia, Neapoli-Sykies, Piraeus, Tilos, Trikala, Tripoli, and Agios Dimitrios and the new members Agia, Galatsi, Kallithea, Kavala, Mytilini, Serres, Veroia, and Zografou. The CNI serves as a platform to exchange ideas and coordinate activities at local and national levels, to promote the social integration of refugees and migrants and to strengthen social cohesion.

### City of Athens



In the context of its overall cooperation with the City of Athens, UNHCR works with ADDMA, the development agency of the City of Athens, to help refugees with disabilities access the national social protection system and employment opportunities. Since November 2021 the [Disabilities Inclusive](#) programme has helped 254 refugees to access specialized services including rehabilitation, 65 people applied for the welfare disability allowance and 25 received assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and hearing devices.

In September 2024, UNHCR and the City of Athens launched a series of sessions for the staff of the seven municipal clinics on equal access for migrants, refugees, and undocumented persons with the aim to strengthen collaboration and referrals within the City's services.

### Municipality of Ioannina

In August 2023, UNHCR started implementing the programme "#Together: Holistic support for effective access to socioeconomic rights and livelihoods in Epirus", through a tripartite collaboration between the Municipality of Ioannina/Intercultural Centre "Academia" and the NGO INTERSOS Hellas. The primary goal of the project is to help refugees set career objectives, match their interests and qualifications with professions, foster self-sufficiency and independence, identify vocational training opportunities, and facilitate their access to national social solidarity programmes and financial inclusion projects. In 2024, some 700 refugees and asylum-seekers have received support and 83 have secured employment.

### Municipality of Heraklion

Operating in Heraklion, Crete, the "Refugee Assistance to Livelihoods and Employability (ReA)" project is a partnership between UNHCR and the Heraklion Development Agency, to support refugee livelihoods. This initiative provides assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers to ensure they fully enjoy their rights, and support in covering formalities related to public services, medical issues and education. Additionally, the project focuses on creating job opportunities for refugees, providing personalized advice to help them navigate and access the labour market. By September 2024, the ReA project provided employability support to 622 refugees and 148 people were hired.

### Municipality of Larissa

Municipality of Larissa established its Migrants' Integration Centre thus implementing its pledge before the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. UNHCR supports the Centre by providing capacity-building and raising awareness with the refugee population of the area.

## WORKING TOGETHER WITH REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

### Advice from Refugees to Refugees

A group of nine recognized refugees living in Greece form part of UNHCR's Refugee Advisory Group. 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 trajectory 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.

### 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. Reuniting separated families boosts integration prospects as united families typically adapt better in their new communities. Family members not only provide a sense of safety, especially for vulnerable groups like women, children and older people, but also contribute to economic self-reliance. Getting back together with family also helps refugees affected by conflict-related trauma to heal. Since the beginning of the programme in August 2021, in collaboration with the Greek Council for Refugees, UNHCR has provided assistance in 277 cases of family reunification. So far, 121 individuals have already arrived and successfully reunited with their family members in Greece.



*The Baruti family reunites again in Athens international airport after many years of separation.*  
© UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis



Hamza, refugee from Iraq, managed to build his own business in Greece with natural skincare products, with the support of the "Ready4Business" entrepreneurship programme implemented by METAdrasi in collaboration with UNHCR. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

**“The journey from confronting hardships to achieving success requires years of hard work. Yet, I cherish every moment I’ve experienced.”**

Hamza arrived in Greece in October 2017, after fleeing war in his home country, Iraq. Today, with the support of UNHCR's "Ready4Business" refugee entrepreneurship programme, implemented by the NGO METAdrasi, Hamza has successfully established his own business with natural skincare products in Greece.

[Read the full article here](#)

UNHCR is grateful to the donors of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions to its 2024 global programmes.

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

### 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.

### CONTACTS

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