



# ADVANCING REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN GREECE

UNHCR Greece | Update #10  
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Binta, a refugee from Sierra Leone, was able to navigate procedures and secure a job with the assistance of Blue Refugee Centre. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis

## Our Strategy

**114,937**  
Refugees and  
**26,275**  
Asylum-seekers  
in Greece

Source: Ministry of Migration and  
Asylum (November 2024)

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.

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



### Employability

**>12,700** refugees and  
asylum-seekers supported  
and/or received  
employability services



### Hires

**3,406** hires of refugees  
and asylum-seekers



### Upskilling

**2,079** regularly attended Greek  
language classes  
**64** received individualized  
entrepreneurship counselling  
**150** trained in childcare,  
caregiving for people with  
disabilities and intercultural  
mediation



### Private sector

**>290** 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.

## LATEST HIGHLIGHTS

### “Ustura”: An Iraqi refugee woman opens restaurant in Thessaloniki

In October 2024, Shaimaa, an Iraqi refugee woman, opened her own restaurant in Thessaloniki called “Ustura”, which means “myth” in Arabic. Shaimaa notes: *“The entire journey, from the moment I fled Iraq with my children because we were in danger, through our safe arrival in Greece, how my children grew up, and how I managed to open this restaurant – it’s all like a myth”.*

Shaimaa was supported by the Blue Refugee Centre’s Livelihoods programme, implemented by Solidarity Now in collaboration with UNHCR. Through the programme, Shaimaa received support in developing a business plan, seeking microfinance resources, securing a loan, and finding the perfect location for the restaurant. Shaimaa’s story is also featured in the newspaper [To Vima](#), along with another refugee entrepreneur who was able to set up his business with the support of UNHCR partners.



*Shaimaa enjoys cooking homemade food to her customers, bringing authentic Arabic cuisine flavours to Thessaloniki, a city that as she shares gives her strength.*  
 ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis

The restaurant opening took place on 31 October, attended by a large crowd of locals, including the Vice-Mayor of Social Policy, Solidarity and Welfare of Thessaloniki who [expressed](#) the Municipality’s support to such initiatives.

### Renewal of Memorandum of Cooperation with the City of Athens



*The UNHCR Representative and the Mayor of Athens signing the new Memorandum of Cooperation.* ©City of Athens

On 19 December, UNHCR and the City of Athens renewed their commitment to promote refugee integration through a new Memorandum of Cooperation, a best practice which offers tools and methodologies that can be replicated by other municipalities.

### 22<sup>nd</sup> Corporate Responsibility Conference of American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

On 22 October, the UNHCR Representative participated in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Corporate Responsibility conference “The Pale Blue Dot”, organized by the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce. The Representative highlighted that integration of refugees is a win-win situation benefitting local economies while enabling refugees to be active members in the host communities.



*The UNHCR Representative in Greece (right) participating in the fireside chat “Refugee streams: the current state”.*  
 © American Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

## GENERATING LIVELIHOODS OPPORTUNITIES

### Stepping Stone Programme

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 Centre 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 December 2024, "Stepping Stone" has helped 4,032 refugees and asylum-seekers in their search for a job, while 1,608 have been hired by different companies. As of 2024, "Stepping Stone" also offers language support in 12 different locations across the country, with 2,079 people regularly attending Greek language classes in the course of 2024.



*Through the "Stepping Stone" programme, refugees have the valuable opportunity to learn Greek. The language barrier is one of the major integration challenges that refugees encounter. ©UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis*

### Blue Refugee Centre

Refugees and asylum-seekers who live in Thessaloniki and nearby accommodation sites 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.

By the end of 2024, BRC offered support services to 1,212 people, which ranged from assessing refugees' employability profiles, CV and interview preparation, resulting in 389 hires.



***"Overall, the Blue Refugee Centre has helped me become part of the country. Now I feel free and safe here, although the biggest challenge I am still facing is finding a house to live", Consty says.***

Consty, refugee from Cameroon, arrived in Greece in 2018 seeking safety. He regularly visits the Blue Refugee Centre (BRC), which has been instrumental in helping him navigate the various challenges of the integration process. With the assistance of the BRC counsellors, Consty has tackled numerous obstacles including administrative procedures such as filling out tax declarations, and supported him with Greek language lessons, CV preparation, and ultimately to secure a job.

©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. It also provides support and guidance to employers seeking to hire refugees. By the end of December 2024, the centre provided services like job searching, CV writing, and preparation for interviews to 3,437 refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the country, with 587 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.

**ADAMA job-matching platform**

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

Scan to access the  
 online  
 job-matching platform



## 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). So far, more than 3,000 refugees participated in job fairs and 365 accepted 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](#) on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the Ministry for Migration and Asylum. 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. UNHCR and its partners formulate such programmes in view of their sustainable inclusion in national systems.

### 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 business proposals.

Ready4Business has so far supported 64 refugee entrepreneurs resulting in 12 developing business plans. Nine refugees have already set up their business, out of whom seven have secured start-up financing; five received grants from the [People's Trust](#), a privately-funded non-profit organization providing micro-finance and free business development services to start-ups and small businesses, and two obtained a loan through the [Action Finance Initiative \(AFI\)](#), a private non-profit organization providing microcredit, free training and advice for the unemployed and micro-entrepreneurs.



METAdrasi's Ready4Business programme provides entrepreneurial advice and ongoing support from developing business plans to securing financing. ©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 completed the "Intercultural Mediators Training and Accreditation Programme". This programme developed a comprehensive curriculum, a pool of trainers, and a certification system in intercultural mediation with the goal 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 eligible for various roles and qualified to work in Migrant Integration Centres (KEM), select community centres, public services, organizations and NGOs. 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. By December 2024, the programme has enrolled 27 participants and has successfully secured 14 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 developing new skills for refugee and asylum-seeking women through vocational training as kitchen assistants and hotel employees, two sectors that offer promising employment opportunities in the country's thriving tourism industry.

The Academy provides practical training, mentorship and networking, aiming at the participants' well-rounded professional development, with 93 women having completed the programme so far. Based on their feedback, participants were highly satisfied and feel more confident in seeking employment with the new skills they acquired. Forty-seven women found employment shortly after completing the programme. In an innovative effort to encourage the participation of refugee mothers with young children, the Academy also set up a child-friendly space, employing childcare assistants who had recently qualified through UNHCR programmes.



*During the last day of the Kitchen Assistant course the students of the Refugee Women Academy must pass a cooking challenge to obtain the certificate.*

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## MUNICIPALITIES AS CATALYSTS OF LOCAL INTEGRATION

### Cities Network for Integration



The [Cities Network for Integration](#) (CNI), supported by UNHCR, has 25 member-cities: Athens, Thessaloniki, Chania, Delta, Heraklion, Ioannina, Kalamaria, Karditsa, Katerini, Larissa, Livadeia, Neapoli-Sykies, Piraeus, Tilos, Trikala, Tripoli, Agios Dimitrios, 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.

On 13 December, UNHCR participated in a meeting organized by the CNI and the Municipality of Thessaloniki on the empowerment of the Councils for the Integration of Migrants and Refugees (SEMP). The participants, elected officials and municipal staff, discussed, the improvement of the institutional framework to facilitate the establishment of the SEMPs and strengthening linkages between communities, local governments, and central administration to improve accessibility to services.

### 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 which has concluded in December 2024, has helped 262 refugees to access specialized services including rehabilitation, 67 people applied for the welfare disability allowance and 28 received assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and hearing devices. UNHCR also works with the City of Athens on disseminating information to its municipal clinics aiming at strengthening collaboration and referrals within the City's services.

### Municipality of Ioannina



Since 2023, UNHCR has been 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 goal of the project is to help refugees set career objectives, match their interests and qualifications with professions, foster self-sufficiency, identify vocational training opportunities and facilitate their access to national social solidarity and financial inclusion programmes. By the end of 2024, 1,228 refugees and asylum-seekers had received employability support and 163 had found employment.

### Municipality of Heraklion

*ReA – Refugee Assistance  
to livelihoods and employability*

The "Refugee Assistance to Livelihoods and Employability (ReA)" project is a partnership between UNHCR and the Heraklion Development Agency. Its aim is to support refugees and asylum-seekers to fully enjoy their rights by providing assistance with meeting formalities linked to public services, health and education, personalized advice to help them navigate and access the labour market and by creating job opportunities for them. So far, the ReA project has provided employability support to 673 refugees while 171 people secured jobs.

### Municipality of Larissa

UNHCR supports the Municipality of Larissa with capacity-building and raising awareness among refugee communities about the services provided by the Migrants' Integration Centre, established within 2024, thus fulfilling the Municipality's pledge at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023.

## 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 August 2021, in collaboration with the Greek Council for Refugees, UNHCR has provided assistance in 290 cases of family reunification. So far, 145 individuals have already arrived and successfully reunited with their family members in Greece.

Naemi Solomon, a young refugee whose family was reunited in Greece after a long struggle, will bring her own experience as evaluator in the Annual National Student Contest for the 2024-2025 with the theme "**Family Means Together**".



In November 2024, Mr. Suji, a Rohingya stateless refugee in Greece, was finally reunited with his wife and two children after more than five years of separation, thanks to the continuous efforts of UNHCR's partner, the Greek Council of Refugees.

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# Adama Center

An integration and support center  
for refugees and asylum seekers  
living in Greece



Bruce, refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, works in a flour mill thanks to the support he received from the Adama Centre, run by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Caritas Hellas, in partnership with UNHCR. When he talks about his job, he emphasizes how his life has changed for the better. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

**“Work gives you the opportunity to build your life from scratch and dream big.”**

When Bruce, refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, arrived in Greece, he had two main priorities: to reach safety and to find a job that would allow him to live with dignity. Bruce faced numerous setbacks in his job search, including unpaid wages and discrimination. With the assistance he received from the Adama Centre in Athens, he managed to secure a job at “Dakos Mills” and now dreams of a brighter future.

[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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