

GREECE HIGHLIGHTS

POSITIVE STEP FOR REFUGEES' EMPLOYMENT AND INTEGRATION

Profession of cultural mediator becomes official in Greece



Refugees attending a vocational training programme to develop job skills.

In May, Greece established the profession of “cultural mediator” through the creation of an official profile by the National Organisation for the Validation of Professional Qualifications of the Ministry of Education. A cultural mediator serves as the bridge between refugees and the host country, its administration, public services and even local communities. This is a positive step for refugees’ employment and may help integration, particularly for the newly recognized refugees.

This development may also facilitate the recruitment of cultural mediators to 47 public services country-wide, including Municipal community centres. The profile describes in detail how any Greek citizen, or foreigner legally residing in Greece and with the right to work can exercise this profession. Requirements include 12-month work experience, 180 hours of vocational training and knowledge of Greek as well as a key language the refugee population.

While great progress has been made in the legislative and policy framework in Greece, robust efforts are still needed to integrate refugees in the country. Currently, asylum-seekers and refugees have limited access to opportunities to make their integration in Greece possible in practice. They face difficulties navigating complex, bureaucratic procedures. They also have limited access to information on how to enrol in Greek language classes, or educational and vocational programmes.

In May 2021, UNHCR collected education and work-experience data of asylum-seekers on the islands.

Results:

- **Doctors, lawyers, teachers, accountants, ICT professionals** are amongst the refugee population of the islands
- **Most common:** skilled trades (19%); construction, manufacturing and mining (16%); agriculture and food (12%) and business and sales (10%)
- **78%** of refugees have some level of **formal education**

UNHCR supports the Government implement its national strategy on integration through providing educational and skills profiles of refugees to guide policy decisions and Government support, monitor integration levels and protection risks faced by refugees including GBV, and others.

UNHCR works with the Government to identify practical obstacles in legislation and administration and proposes solutions to facilitate access to key documents, to open bank accounts and enrol in schools; mobilizes and empowers refugees to set up peer-to-peer support networks and help each-other through functional Greek language classes for adults. UNHCR supports refugees with legal aid, through mass information on important developments, and housing tailored for refugees with disabilities, amongst others. UNHCR engages the corporate and private sector in including refugees in the labour market. Finally, UNHCR joins forces with Municipalities to cross-fertilize good practices of integration.

This month, UNHCR's partnership with local authorities in the field of integration was further strengthened with the [signature of a Memorandum of Cooperation](#) with the city of Neapoli-Sykies in Thessaloniki. Municipalities are instrumental in promoting the effective inclusion of refugees into their communities. UNHCR deploys experts in eight cities to help Municipalities design and roll-out integration plans for the refugee population living in their communities. As a result, Municipal services (such as shelters for the homeless, Greek language classes) can become more accessible.



89,000 people **received international protection** in Greece between January 2016 and April 2021.

53,300 of those had a **valid residence permit** in Greece on 30 April 2021.

Ministry of Migration and Asylum [data](#).

UNHCR expresses appreciation to municipalities and local actors in Crete for fostering refugee inclusion



During a two-day visit to [Heraklion](#), Crete, the Deputy Representative of UNHCR, Jason Hepps, paid tribute to the local authorities, partners, and communities for their unwavering support and vital work towards facilitating refugee integration and creating inclusive societies.

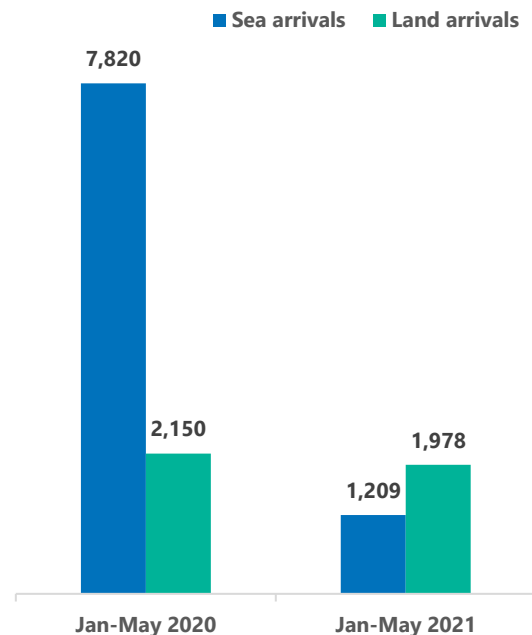
“At a time of strong pressure on Greece to respond to increased refugee needs, Crete Region, municipalities, and its people were among the first to show what solidarity means in practice. They showed the way to ensure towns were safe spaces where no one is left behind or forgotten and where everyone can live in safety and participate meaningfully in the community.”

According to Mr. Lamprinos, Mayor of Iraklion, “true civilization is seen where all people recognize for others every right that they claim for themselves. Therefore, we would not honour the history and civilization of our land, Crete, if we did not respect and help people forced to leave their home while seeking a better future.”

IN BRIEF

- The recorded arrivals of asylum-seekers to Greece remain considerably lower than previous years. Arrivals by land are higher than those by sea. Most of those arriving are from Afghanistan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Over one-third of arrivals in 2021 are children (as of end April).
- UNHCR continues to be highly concerned with reports of pushbacks at sea and land from credible sources, including from people who have been directly affected by such practices. The Council of Europe urged the Greek authorities to put an end to pushback operations at land and sea. UNHCR continues to call on the authorities to investigate allegations of pushbacks and calls for the Government to set in motion the announced plans to establish an Independent National Monitoring Mechanism.
- The profession of cultural mediator became official marking a positive step for refugees' employment and integration prospects.
- UNHCR joined forces with the Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies in Thessaloniki to strengthen the inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees in the local community.
- Asylum-seekers without social or healthcare security are now included in COVID-19 vaccinations thanks to a new registration system.

Total arrivals to Greece 2020/2021



Source: Hellenic Police. Figures are subject to future adjustment and should not be considered final.

Asylum-seekers one step closer to COVID-19 vaccination

Temporary social security number makes vaccines available to all asylum-seekers

Asylum-seekers who may not have a social security or health care number (AMKA/PAAYPA) now have access to COVID-19 vaccination with a new, temporary number which is issued for this purpose (PAMKA). This is a positive development as it ensures that uninsured asylum-seekers will be given the opportunity to be vaccinated alongside the general population. The joint ministerial decision issued on 21 May by the Ministries of Labour, Migration and Asylum and Digital Governance, defines how to obtain this new number.

Ensuring early and equitable vaccination of asylum-seekers and refugees is important, particularly in congested places such as some refugee camps. Reliable information about vaccines and the process to follow is as critical as lifting language barriers and overcoming digital literacy deficiencies, that often make registration and appointment bookings difficult.

The Government is moving forward with the vaccination of asylum-seekers living in cities and towns as well as those staying in camps. EODY led teams comprised of UN and NGO staff who reached out to refugee communities in camps to enrol those who wish to be vaccinated. UNHCR, along with IOM and other organizations, supported the Ministry of Health in awareness raising efforts and coordination. UNHCR worked with members of the refugee communities living in the reception and identification centres on the Greek Aegean islands, particularly those with a medical or paramedical background, to circulate factual information about COVID-19 and the vaccination and helped dissemination by sending text messages in multiple languages to over 27,400 people country-wide. Since the appearance of the pandemic, UNHCR helped establish screening, isolation and quarantine

medical units near reception centres on the islands and Evros and for new arrivals. UNHCR also provides personal protective equipment to hospitals on the islands and Evros; strengthens water and sanitation capacity in the island centres; delivers to asylum-seekers essential hygiene and relief items and facilitates dissemination of information through its [HELP website](#), helplines and videos on preventative measures against COVID-19. UNHCR's support to the Greek State against COVID-19 is described [here](#) at a glance.

A helpline by refugees for refugees: responding to those in need



“I know what it is like to feel alone and helpless in an unknown country. Even the simplest things may seem overwhelming. Many asylum-seekers call us because they need to talk to someone who speaks their language. Talking helps them overcome loneliness”. Sara Beheshte is a community psychosocial worker at EPAPSY helpline, a programme implemented with the support of UNHCR, and co-financed by the European Union.

You can find out more about the work of Sara and other EPAPSY staff [here](#)

Council of Europe urges investigation on pushbacks

UNHCR is concerned over continued pushback reports

In a letter addressed to the Minister for Citizens' Protection, the Minister of Migration and Asylum, and the Minister of Shipping and Island Policy of Greece, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, urged the Greek authorities to put an end to pushback operations at both the land and sea borders with Turkey. The Commissioner called the Greek authorities to ensure that independent and effective investigations are carried out into all allegations of pushbacks and of ill-treatment by members of security forces in the context of such operations.

Greece responded that the actions taken are in full compliance with the country's international obligations. The Greek authorities stated that they follow a strict and disciplinary legal framework investigating information concerning alleged incidents of ill-treatment at the borders, applying the foreseen by law penalties and taking all necessary measures so that unwanted incidents are avoided. Both letters were shared in the public domain and can be found [here](#). As part

of its mandated responsibility for the protection of persons seeking asylum, UNHCR continues to share any credible information in its possession regarding reported incidents of pushback with the authorities so as to assist investigations, be they by the administration or the judiciary. UNHCR is aware of one preliminary investigation initiated in recent months by the Public Prosecutor on the reported informal return of new arrivals from Lesbos' Megala Therma site for new arrivals in February 2021. UNHCR emphasizes to all States that it is possible to manage borders, while also respecting the right of individuals to seek asylum. The establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism as indicated by the Greek authorities would be a positive step in this direction and UNHCR has provided technical suggestions to the Government in this regard. Such mechanism would highly contribute towards a protection-sensitive border management at the Greek-Turkey land and sea borders.

Life is too short to live in the shadows

The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia on 17 May serves as a stark reminder that not only those fleeing war are entitled to protection.

Just like Miry and Farrah who fled their home country to find protection in Greece. "This is the first time that we can speak about who we are without being afraid", says Miry. "Back in our country if we were to admit that we loved each other, we would have ended up in jail just for saying that". UNHCR stands with all LGBTIQ+ people fleeing because of who they are and who they love. They often become victims of discriminatory national laws in their countries: same-sex relationships are criminalised in more than 70 countries and six countries consider them a crime punishable by death.

You can read more about Miry and Farrah's story [here](#).

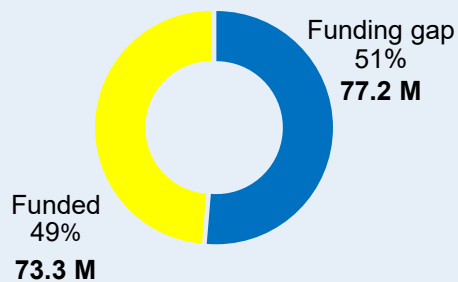


UNHCR is grateful to donors who provide generous and timely support that enables a flexible and swift response to the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece

Funding information

25 May 2021

USD 150.5 M



Major donors of unearmarked contributions to the 2021 global programmes

Norway 80 million | **Sweden** 66.9 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Private donors Spain** 28.3 million | **Germany** 26 million | **France** 20 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 14.3 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million

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CONTACT US

Eleni Biza

Associate Reporting Officer
External Relations Unit

Tel.: +30 69 555 855 67

Email: biza@unhcr.org

Elena Marda

Government Liaison Associate
External Relations Unit

Tel.: +30 69 518 012 42

Email: marda@unhcr.org

www.unhcr.org