ADVANCING REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN GREECE

UNHCR Greece | Update #5
September 2023

Emanuel works in the room service of "Summer Palace" hotel on Kos island. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

Our Strategy

69,494 Refugees and 25,043 Asylum-seekers in Greece

Source: UNHCR estimate as of end September 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 its 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)*

Employability

3,228 refugees and asylum-seekers received employability services.

Hiring

862 refugees and asylum-seekers hired.

Upskilling

2,097 adult asylum-seekers country-wide attended language classes.

53 refugees obtained a driving licence.

Private sector

231 collaborations with employers across Greece.

LATEST HIGHLIGHTS

Refugee Women Academy

UNHCR and Piraeus Bank launched the Refugee Women Academy in July. This project offers advanced training and upskilling opportunities for refugee women in the tourism sector. The Refugee Women Academy seeks to address the unique challenges that refugee women face in accessing education and employment.

The Academy's curriculum was jointly developed with NGO Odyssea to cover skills needed in the tourism sector like hospitality and languages. Participants receive practical training, professional mentorship and networking opportunities that facilitate holistic professional development. The inaugural cycle of the Academy which started on 25 September at Odyssea's facilities is training 15 women as Kitchen Assistants and Hotel Employees. UNHCR has been an advisor on the project, offering expertise and guidance in shaping its design and implementation methods, as well as on the particular challenges faced by refugee women. UNHCR favours the employment of refugee women by hiring two refugee women caregivers from METAdrasi's relevant program. These caregivers provide childcare services to the mothers participating in the Refugee Women Academy, allowing the latter to focus on their training.

Entrepreneurship Counselling for Refugees - Ready4Business

In collaboration with METAdrasi, in 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 and it ultimately offers ten successful candidates – out of 80 – holistic guidance on drawing up business plans, including support with the necessary documentation. In May, the first refugee entrepreneur – a woman – had her business plan approved and received a €15,000 grant from the microfinance institution The People's Trust, to open a beauty salon. In late June, an Iraqi refugee, part of the second cohort of the "Ready4Business" programme, secured a €14,000 grant from the same institution to open a barber shop in Thessaloniki.

Updating our Knowledge on Refugee integration

Between July 2022 and June 2023, UNHCR, together with NGO and municipal partners, conducted a survey on the experiences of refugees in Greece. The key findings indicate that only one third of refugees had some form of employment, and this varied in terms of job security, while many faced problems securing work. Notably, 73 per cent of the respondents identified employment as a priority need. In addition, 40 per cent found not speaking Greek as a key barrier to finding work, more than one-third of refugee women said that lack of child care hampered their ability to work, while 16 per cent reported that missing documentation was a major challenge in securing a job.

GENERATING LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

Similar to other countries in Europe, Greece is facing labour shortages. At the same time, there are some 69,500 refugees and 25,043 asylum-seekers in the country, most of whom are of adults willing and able to work, if given the 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 Lesvos, 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 1,299 refugees in total find work, out of whom 396 people have already secured employment.

Peyman, refugee from Iran, attends a Greek language lesson as part of the Stepping Stone programme.
©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.

Since March 2023, the Solidarity Now team has processed 1.038 service requests which are linked to employability support, such as assessing refugees' employability profiles and helping them prepare CVs. The team has facilitated 90 job interviews which resulted in 93 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 September, 8,589 employability services had been provided to 1,580 refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the country. Most importantly, over 371 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.

Adama Job Center

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

Training and Vocational Projects

In October 2022, UNHCR and its partners 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.

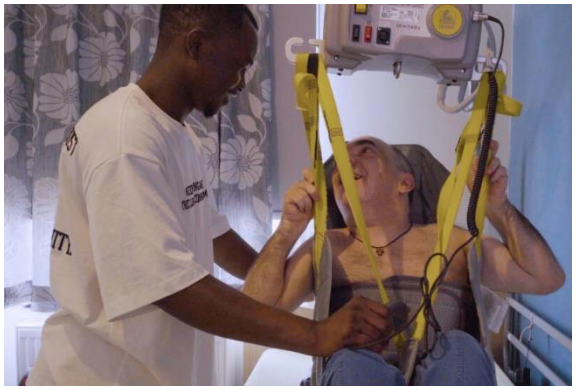
Driving and Road Safety Lessons:

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 18 have already received their driving licence.

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 Social Cohesion and Family platform. By September 2023, 29 people graduated and 16 had already found work in their new sector.



Facinet, refugee from Guinea, has attended NGO METAdrasi's programme for assistants for people with cerebral palsy and mobility disabilities. Today he works at a facility taking care of persons with severe mobility disabilities. © METAdrasi

Child Care Assistants:

Refugee women advance their skills in recreational activities for children at a "Child care Assistants" class. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

Lack of child care has been identified as one of the impediments for employment among women, irrespective of 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, and to join the national roster "Neighbourhood Nannies" of the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family. Having refugee women trained as nannies is a win-win situation: it helps refugee women find work in a much in demand sector and also helps mothers who need childcare support pursue their career goals. So far, 30 participants have completed the courses.

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 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.

MUNICIPALITIES AS CATALYSTS OF LOCAL INTEGRATION

Working together to maximize impact

UNHCR deploys experts to work with 11 municipalities (Athens, Herakleion, Igoumenitsa, Ioannina, Karditsa, Larissa, Neapolis-Sykies, Pogoni, Thessaloniki, Zitsa and Katerini), on refugee issues and include refugees in their services. In addition, the Office 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.

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. From the beginning of the Disabilities Inclusive programme, 156 were assisted to access specialized services including for rehabilitation, 33 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.

Municipality of Ioannina

Since August, UNHCR is implementing the programme "#Together: Holistic support for effective access to socioeconomic rights and livelihoods in Epirus", through a tripartite collaboration between the Cultural Centre of 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.

Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies

The project "Advancing the Inclusion of Recognized Refugees in Greece (AIR)", led by the Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies in collaboration with UNHCR, offers various free services, including language courses and seminars on life in Greece. It also assists refugees with financial and social service needs like tax declarations, setting up bank accounts and accessing social benefits. Moreover, the project conducts awareness-raising activities, including in school to promote coexistence and address prejudice.

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, including information and support in covering formalities related to public or municipal services, medical issues and education. It also seeks to help them find employment opportunities and delivers specialized guidance to help them navigate and access the labour market.

Event co-organized by UNHCR and the Heraklion Development Agency on refugee employability on 14 July. © HDA/Giorgos Pakioufakis

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 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.

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. Since the beginning of the programme in August 2021, in collaboration with expert partner the Greek Council for Refugees, UNHCR has provided assistance in 167cases of family reunification. So far, 70 individuals have already arrived and successfully reunited with their family members in Greece.

Yahya finds a job and a new family at a hotel in Kos

A year and a half ago, when Yahya –a refugee from Yemen– arrived in Greece in search of safety, he could never have imagined that he would find a new family at his workplace. Today, in his second consecutive season of employment at the Mitis Blue Domes Resort & Spa, he maintains the same enthusiasm he initially felt. However, there's been a significant change; and that's the growing sense of commitment and belonging, diligently nurtured by his colleagues. *"This year, I truly feel like I've found my place, like I belong here now"*, Yahya says.

Read the full story here.

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

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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.

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