

ADVANCING REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN GREECE

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Fridoon, refugee from Afghanistan, filmmaker, founder and director of Joinda Production shared his inspiring yet challenging journey towards integration during the roundtable discussions. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

Our Strategy

75,420
Refugees and
30,490
Asylum-seekers
in Greece

Source: UNHCR estimate as of end December 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

4,192 refugees and asylum-seekers received employability services.



Hiring

1,114 refugees and asylum-seekers hired.



Upskilling

2,128 adult asylum-seekers country-wide attended language classes.
53 refugees obtained a driving licence.



Private sector

231 collaborations with employers across Greece.

LATEST HIGHLIGHTS

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.

By December 2023, the Ready4Business pilot project had concluded two cycles and supported 30 refugee entrepreneurs.

Twenty comprehensive business plans were created, with four new companies already established: two beauty parlours, a vegan cosmetic brand and a company offering support services to refugees.

Furthermore, the programme helped participants access financing for their businesses, as two received grants from the [People's Trust](#) and one obtained a loan through the Action Finance Initiative. The Action Finance Initiative (AFI) is a private, non-profit organization focused on supporting economic and social inclusion in Greece. Through the provision of microcredit, free training, and advice for the unemployed and micro-entrepreneurs, AFI aims to foster job creation and improve the legal and institutional environment for self-employment.



Refugee Women Academy

UNHCR and Piraeus Bank launched the [Refugee Women Academy](#) in July. The Academy, in partnership with NGO Odyssea, offers a specialized programme in the tourism sector which focuses on hospitality and language skills.

The Academy provides practical training, mentorship, and networking, aiming at the for participants' well-rounded professional development. The programme which started on 25 September, had by the end of 2023 completed two cycles of language and vocational training in Kitchen Assistance and Room Service. Of the 31 participants, 13 secured jobs immediately after the end of the training. In an innovative effort to encourage the participation of refugee mothers with young children, the Academy set up a child-friendly space, employing two child care assistants who had recently qualified through UNHCR programmes.

GENERATING LIVELIHOODS OPPORTUNITIES

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. In 2023, Stepping Stone helped 1,896 refugees with their job searches, out of whom 572 people had secured employment at the end of the year.



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.

Operating since March 2023, during the year the Solidarity Now team processed 1,352 service requests which are linked to employability support, such as assessing refugees'

employability profiles and helping them prepare CVs. The team facilitated 281 job interviews which resulted in 122 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 December 2023, the centre provided services like job searching, CV writing, preparation for interviews and understanding of Greek labour law to 1,775 refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the country.

They 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. Most importantly, over 394 people had secured jobs.

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 to support the implementation of 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 underwent 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 December 2023, 56 people had graduated



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

and 12 had already found work in their new sector.

Child Care Assistants:

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 completed the courses and five have found job in the childcare sector, two of whom in the Refugee Women's Academy,

Cultural Mediators:

The "Cultural Mediators Training and Accreditation Programme" will develop a curriculum, a pool of trainers and a certification system to train and certify at least 30 refugees in cultural mediation to improve communication and facilitate refugees' access to essential services. Certified cultural mediators can apply and fill vacant positions in municipalities running KEM (Migrants Integration Centres). 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

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, 165 refugees were assisted to access specialized services including rehabilitation, 37 people applied for the welfare disability allowance and 16 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, 130 people attended the courses and 39 passed the exam by the end of the year.

Municipality of Ioannina

In August, UNHCR started 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-Sykyies

The project “Advancing the Inclusion of Recognized Refugees in Greece (AIR)”, led by the Municipality of Neapoli-Sykyies 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



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

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. Since its launch in May 2023, it helped 13 refugees find employment.

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



Refugee family reunites and finds hope after many years of separation. Read the full story [here](#).

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 182 cases of family reunification. So far, 88 individuals have already arrived and successfully reunited with their family members in Greece.

In 2023, with the help of one of UNHCR's partners, a refugee family reunited after 12 years. **Father Solomon**, an Eritrean priest of the Orthodox Church, had to flee his homeland in 2007, but had to leave his family behind. He was granted refugee status in Greece in 2011, and he runs a small worship centre in central Athens with the help of his congregation. The length of the separation underscores the critical need for faster procedures so that families can be reunited sooner.



Work for the Future: Unlocking together with businesses refugees' full potential

On 10 October 2023, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Athens, in collaboration with the Hellenic-Dutch Association of Commerce and Industry (HeDA) and UNHCR, organized an event at the premises of the INTERAMERICAN Hellenic Insurance Company in Athens, focusing on the crucial role of employment in facilitating refugee integration and driving economic growth.

[Read the full article here](#)

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

Australia | Belgium | Canada | Denmark | France | Germany | Ireland | Italy | Japan | Luxembourg | Netherlands | Norway | Republic of Korea | Spain | 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.

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