ADVANCING REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN GREECE

UNHCR Greece | Update #7
JUNE 2024

Our Strategy

98,545*
Refugees and
21,907
Asylum-seekers in Greece

Source: Ministry of Migration and Asylum
*68,068 Refugees with active resident permits and 30,477 temporary protection holders

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

9,641 refugees and asylum-seekers received employability services.

Hires

2,960 hires of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Upskilling

129 refugees obtained a driving licence.
30 refugees were trained as child care assistants
73 were trained as caregivers to people with disabilities

Private sector

106 collaborations with employers across Greece.

LATEST HIGHLIGHTS

JOB FAIRS

Between April and June 2024, UNHCR and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum co-organized six job fairs, with the participation of different employability partners and private businesses around Greece – a cost-effective way to advance refugee employability through job matching. The job fairs took place in the reception centres of Samos, Kos and Chios, and inside the reception facilities of Ritsona and Katsikas, as well as at Serafeio Athletic and Community Complex, in Athens. More than 130 employers interviewed over 1000 refugees and asylum-seekers residing all over Greece, resulting in 670 job offers.

Collaboration with the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

On 15 May, the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy in Athens and UNHCR, organized an information event for companies interested in hiring refugees to address their workforce needs. Hosted by the American College of Greece, the event highlighted how refugee inclusion can drive business growth and progress, highlighted the benefits of providing vocational and employment opportunities to refugees for both businesses and society, and demonstrated how refugees can address labour shortages and boost economic growth. Refugees and business representatives shared their experience and insights on hiring refugees, and UNHCR informed of the support it can provide to companies who wish to hire refugees. Success stories from companies illustrated the tangible benefits of these initiatives, as for instance by the Mitsis Hotels group that has hired over 300 refugees since 2021.

Collaboration with the UN Global Compact

On June 27, UNHCR and the UN Global Compact Network Greece held an event exploring how businesses can foster inclusive workplaces by hiring refugees. The discussion focused on how refugee employment promotes economic growth and supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Success stories, such as Sani/Ikos Hotel's training programs and Goody's-Everest Group's integration policies, highlighted the positive impact of refugee inclusion on both businesses and society.

GENERATING LIVELIHOODS OPPORTUNITIES

Stepping Stone Programme

Peyman, refugee from Iran, attends a Greek language lesson as part of the Stepping Stone programme.
©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 Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos. Stepping Stone provides key services such as career counselling, job matching, CV preparation, and Greek language courses. By June 2024, Stepping Stone had helped 5,228 refugees and asylum-seekers in their search for a job, while 1,231 had been hired by different companies. As of 2024, "Stepping Stone" also offers support to the residents of the Controlled Facility for Temporary Accommodation of Asylum Seekers in Ritsona, where so far, over 700 people have attended Greek language courses.

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.

The Ready4Business pilot project has so far supported 42 refugee entrepreneurs. The project continues with 14 refugees currently receiving support in developing their business plans.

Furthermore, the programme has helped participants access financing for their businesses, as three received grants from the People's Trust, a privately funded not-for-profit organization that supports start-ups and existing small businesses of all sectors, providing micro-finance and free business development services and one 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.

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.

A UNHCR partner since March 2023, by June 2024, the Solidarity Now had offered employability support in 1,042 cases which ranged from assessing refugees' employability profiles and helping them prepare CVs. The team facilitated 506 interviews which resulted in 340 hires.

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 the end of

June 2024, the centre provided services like job searching, CV writing, and preparation for interviews to 2,923 refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the country, with 566 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 also 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 Adama Centre's online job-matching platform

Refugee Women Academy

UNHCR and Piraeus Bank launched the Refugee Women Academy in July 2023. The Academy, runby 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 on 25 September 2023, had by 28 March 2024, trained 76 participants in Greek language and vocational skills for Kitchen Assistants and Room Management. Out of these, 31 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 child care assistants who had recently qualified through UNHCR programmes.

Training and Vocational Projects

In October 2022, UNHCR and its partners joined efforts to support the implementation of the National Integration Strategy, in line with the Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the Ministry for Migration and Asylum.

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. Since January 2023, 73 individuals from all the five cycles have completed the programme and 43 are working as caregivers for people with disabilities.

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

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.

In June, two new scholarships were awarded to participants — one at the American College of Athens, Deree, and another at Mediterranean College. So far, the programme has enrolled 21 participants and successfully secured 10 scholarships.

Intercultural Mediators:
Thirty 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.

Now certified, these 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.

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 strengthen social cohesion. CNI members agreed to prioritize three key areas such as: a) Enhancing employability and integrating third-country nationals into the labour market; b) Strengthening municipal structures and institutions (KEM, SEMP); and c) Promoting the inclusion of third-country nationals in urban life and creating opportunities for intercultural contact and communication.

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 234 refugees to access specialized services including rehabilitation, 59 people applied for the welfare disability allowance and 24 received assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and hearing devices.

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. So far 432 refugees and asylum-seekers have received support, while 50 have found 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. Between January and June 2024, the ReA project provided employability support to 518 refugees and 95 people were hired.

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 254 cases of family reunification. So far, 101 individuals have already arrived and successfully reunited with their family members in Greece.

"When you find safety, when you secure a job, then you also feel you belong"

On 15 May, the American College of Greece hosted a forum by the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Embassy, and UNHCR, highlighting refugee integration as a driver for business and societal growth. The event emphasized education and employment as key to leveraging refugees' potential, with government and private sector collaboration underscored as vital for successful integration.

Read the full article here

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