



Πληροφορίες για Τρένα & Bus Information

ONE

Annual Report 2023

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GREEK
COUNCIL
FOR REFUGEES

Cover photo:

The Baruti family reunites after many years of separation, in the arrivals hall of Athens International Airport «Eleftherios Venizelos».

At every stage of the long process of refugee reunification, from the moment the application is filed until the arrival of the family in Greece, the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) provides legal assistance, with the support of UNHCR..

Annual Report 2023



**GREEK
COUNCIL
FOR REFUGEES**



SOZ

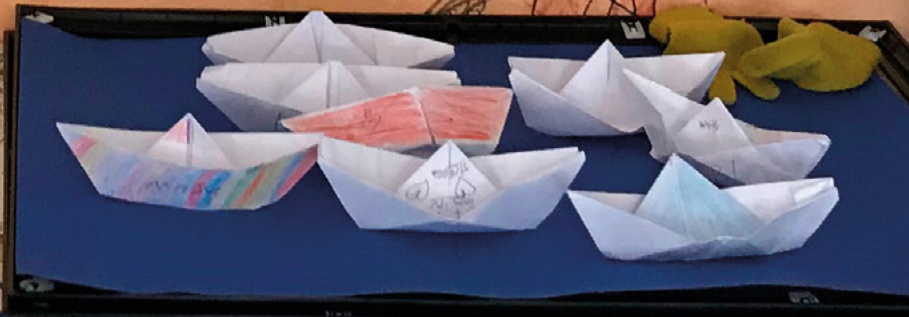


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Message from the Board of Directors of the Greek Council for Refugees

2023 was a year of mixed trends in terms of refugee protection in Greece, but also across Europe.

The year was marked for Greece by the Pylos Shipwreck in June 2023, which shook Europe with hundreds of human victims, as the whole world realized where deterrent border management policies can lead, without respect for human life.

At a global level, the crisis in Gaza and the attempted displacement of the Palestinian population to the point of genocide, which followed Israel's reaction to the repulsive attack by extremist Islamists on its civilians, is the closest Europe has come to an imminent refugee crisis, for which, unfortunately, a hesitant policy of dealing with it prevails worldwide.

At the European level, the Ukrainian crisis continued, but now as a stagnant and manageable situation, as did the refugee flows towards Europe, mainly through the deadly Mediterranean routes. And the deterrent policies of pushbacks and the restriction of the rights of refugees, and in particular of those who have been recognized as beneficiaries of international protection, have continued.

Already, the policy promoted by the Pact on Immigration and Asylum, a set of EU regulations, is moving in this direction, mimicking the failed model of managing refugee flows on the Aegean islands. Despite all the opposition, the Pact is heading towards completion, adoption and implementation in the first half of 2024, amid fears of worse policies that could trigger a surge of xenophobic and racist forces in the upcoming European elections in June 2024. But a fear that cannot be helped by refugee rights restriction policies that turn a blind eye to such extreme policies.

On the other hand, the reactions of the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe, as well as the reactions of the Greek, European and international civil society, have shown that the rights of refugees are one of the components of a Rule of Law, which is threatened, but at the same time endures and resists.

GCR was again this year at the forefront of defending the rights of refugees at every level, from the moment of their first entry into the country to their attempts to be integrated in it, which is a constant challenge.

It submitted reports to all international bodies that demonstrated the problems even of the Rule of Law in the country, through the degradation of the rights of refugees, and organized workshops, such as the one with the European Council on Refugees (ECRE) on the concept of instrumentalization of the migration phenomenon, a dangerous concept which, unfortunately, despite minor improvements, was adopted in the forthcoming Pact on Immigration and Asylum.

It also assisted all national independent human rights protection bodies, cooperating with all Independent Authorities and leading the creation and implementation of the National Commission for Human Rights' Recording Mechanism of Informal Forced Returns.

The new year finds the GCR at the forefront of judicial support for refugees' rights, as in March 2024 the application of the concept of safe third country to Turkey by the Court of Justice of the EU will be put to the test, while in June the first public hearing of the European Court of Human Rights takes place, in relation to two cases of pushbacks, cases defended, among others, by the GCR.

Unfortunately, the extreme policy of the previous years, which prevented the entry and expelled refugees and migrants settled in the country, led in 2023 to shortages even of manpower, so that the Greek government was forced to adopt a provision for the legalization

of migrants in our country, after many years, a provision that is in any case promising for dealing with the problem.

The slight decline in the number of pushbacks, as a result of the international outcry following the Pylos Shipwreck, has led to a dramatic reappearance of the reception problems, especially with regard to living conditions in the reception centers on the islands, where the restrictive policy of geographic confinement continues to be applied.

The long-standing problems of the lack of a coherent policy for the integration of refugees continue unabated, which have intensified in recent years, with the closure of programmes such as ESTIA and the maintenance of refugee camps cut off from the urban and social fabric.

These problems have intensified to such an extent that even the only refugee integration program in the country, the HELIOS program, which is implemented by the GCR among others, is frequently interrupted due to funding problems, and contributes to the uncertainty of the situation of the refugees who benefit from it.

The other actions implemented by the GCR in order to facilitate the integration of refugees in the country (such as employment counselling, language learning, psychosocial support and cultural activities), together with those of other organizations, are not sufficient to properly address the issue.

However, the success in reuniting refugees with their families in the country, through the special program implemented by the GCR, which is now receiving a positive response, albeit limited, from the official institutions of the Greek State, is comforting.

GCR would not be able to continue to exist and produce work without the constant support and funding of all the major international organizations (UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration), as well as other foundations and institutions, and the many large and small donors who, together with its employees and volunteers, contribute to the work of supporting refugees in our country and for this reason we thank them all.

Let us hope that 2024 will be a better year for refugees and for the well-being of our societies at every level.

Vassilios Papadopoulos, Chairman of the Board

Eleni-Danina Maniou, Vice President

Anastasia Pantazi, General Secretary

Nikolaos Koulouris, Treasurer

Maria Zaimaki, Member

Polyxeni Passa, Member

Eleni Spathana, Member

2023

Our work in numbers



6.495

GCR beneficiaries in 2023



1.859

people received Legal Aid from GCR*



4.115

people received Social Support from GCR*

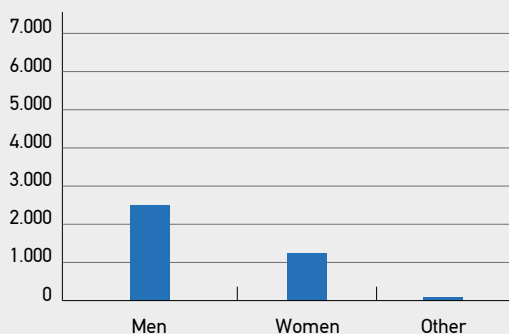


< 170.000

GCR beneficiaries from 1989 to the present day

* The assistance of the GCR interpreters was important for the effectiveness of the above support.

Breakdown of GCR's beneficiaries by gender



Analysis by origin

Among the main countries of origin of those served were the following countries:

- Egypt
- Afghanistan
- Iraq
- Iran
- Cameroon
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Ukraine
- Pakistan
- Sierra Leone
- Somalia
- Syria
- Turkey



GCR's Presence on the Map

| Presence | Offices | HELIOS ILC |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crete - Kos - Evros | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Athens Office (HQ) - Thessaloniki Office - PYXIDA - Lesvos Office | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ILC Athens - ILC Thessaloniki |

Challenges and successes



Challenges and successes for the past year

2023 was another challenging year in the field of international protection, as well as in the protection of fundamental human rights. GCR, firm in its values, with the perseverance and tireless efforts of its staff, has shown consistency and dedication in defending the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, responding to the challenges and achieving significant successes. Some of these are listed below:

Pushbacks

GCR intervened again this year in a significant number of cases of informal and forced returns to Turkey (pushbacks), a phenomenon that continues to be recorded, following numerous complaints, which international organizations have assessed as well-founded¹.

Specifically, in addition to the 24 interim measures granted by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2022 in our cases, **in 2023 our Legal Service filed 18 applications for interim measures** before the ECtHR, which were granted, representing 221 asylum seekers from Syria, Turkey, Afghanistan, etc. The ECtHR advised the Greek government not to remove the refugees from Greece and requested information on their access to the asylum procedure and legal assistance. **In addition, GCR sent over 195 interventions to the Greek authorities for assistance and access to the asylum procedure for 2,119 asylum seekers** the majority of them in the Evros region and the islands².

We have also filed 5 appeals before the ECtHR, which are pending (in addition to the 11 appeals we filed in 2022).

In 2023, 39 incidents of pushbacks from our cases were recorded in National Commission for Human Rights' Recording Mechanism³ of Informal Forced Returns.

The cases of the 11 appeals are included in the GCR report «AT EUROPE'S BORDERS: BETWEEN IMPUNITY

AND CRIMINALIZATION», published in the European Court of Auditors' report «AT EUROPE'S BORDERS: BETWEEN IMPUNITY AND CRIMINALIZATION» was presented to the European Parliament in 2023⁴.

One of our appeals, which has been prioritised by the ECtHR, is due to be heard at a preliminary hearing before the Court on 4 June 2024 (A.E. v. Greece - no. 15783/21)⁵.

Pylos Shipwreck

Just one year after the landmark decision⁶ of the European Court of Human Rights on the shipwreck in Farmakonisi in 2014 (Safi and Others v. Greece), another huge tragedy took place in the sea area west of Pylos on 14/6/2023. According to testimonies, more than 600 people drowned when the vessel ADRIANA, on which they were travelling, capsized and sank. **GCR, together with other organisations, has been on the side of the survivors from the very first moment, 49 of whom have already filed a complaint before the Piraeus Maritime Court against all those responsible for the Greek services and authorities involved.**

The survivors complain that the Greek authorities failed to intervene immediately and to organise a timely and appropriate operation to rescue the passengers. This is despite the fact that they were obliged to rescue the victims under International Law of the Sea, Human Rights Law, EU Law and National Law, although they were informed from the outset and subsequently became aware of the imminent danger of life that the occupants of the obviously unseaworthy and overloaded fishing vessel were

facing. On the basis of these complaints, the Greek authorities not only refrained from taking the necessary rescue measures as soon as the vessel was sighted, but instead proceeded to attempt to tow the vessel, resulting in its capsizing and sinking. A comprehensive analysis of the Pylos shipwreck tragedy is included in the GCR and ECRE Report to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the implementation of the Farmakonisi decision⁷.

The preliminary examination before the Maritime Court is still ongoing. Following the refusal of the Coast Guard to conduct internal disciplinary proceedings, the Ombudsman⁸ is conducting its own investigation, with its special competence as the National Mechanism for Investigating Incidents of Arbitrariness.

Recently, in the context of a press investigation, a **report⁹ of the FRONTEX Fundamental Rights Office**, was leaked, in which, among other things, it is stated that: *"the means mobilised by the authorities during the day (including commercial vessels and helicopters of the L.S.-Hellenic Coast Guard) were not sufficient for the objective of rescuing the migrants. Judging from the resources actually used, and on the basis of some migrant testimonies, it appears that, prior to the shipwreck, rescue was not the immediate objective of the authorities» kai blames the Greek port authorities for "delaying the start of the rescue operation, which began after the capsizing of the ship in distress..."*.

Furthermore, the European Ombudsman in her **«Conclusions on EU Search and Rescue following her investigation into the way in which the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) complies with its obligations in the field of fundamental rights in the context of maritime surveillance activities, in particular the Adriana shipwreck»¹⁰**, mentions inter alia in relation to the shipwreck: *"Any assessment of the events of this tragedy is seriously compromised by the absence of video or other recordings of what happened in the hours and minutes leading up to the capsizing of the vessel, as well as by the events that took place. Found that the control device on board the port vessel had been deactivated for questionable reasons..... Frontex had not received permission from the Greek RCC tohead to the Adriana's area before it sank. Had it done so, it might have been able to record what happened and possibly*

influence the actions of the Coast Guard". The European Ombudsman concludes: *"In the light of these conclusions and the growing concerns about the ongoing violations of fundamental rights by a Member State in its border control operations, Frontex should examine whether the threshold has been reached that allows it to terminate, withdraw or suspend its activities with that Member State. It should publicly state the reasons why it concludes that the threshold has or has not been reached.*

In order to provide answers to the broader systemic issues that go beyond the mandate of this inquiry, the Advocate calls on the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission to set up an independent commission of inquiry to assess the reasons for the high number of deaths in the Mediterranean, to draw lessons from incidents such as the Adriana shipwreck and to make recommendations on how to protect fundamental rights and the right to life when dealing with emergency situations".

A number of international organisations and institutions, including the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe and the LIBE Committee of the European Parliament¹¹ have already requested the Greek authorities to fully and effectively investigate the circumstances of the shipwreck.

Pushback incident published by the New York Times (NYT)¹²

On the initiative of GCR¹³ a Report was submitted to the Prosecutors of the Piraeus Maritime Court, the Court of First Instance of Mytilene and the Prosecutor of the Supreme Court, together with 27 other civil society organisations, for the effective investigation of any wrongdoing in connection with the New York Times (NYT) publication on 19/5/2023, which includes video footage of alleged pushback from the island of Lesbos, which allegedly took place during the midday hours of 11 April 2023. Among other things, the publication had provoked the reaction of the European Commission's Internal Affairs Commissioner, Ylva Johansson, who had asked the Greek authorities to conduct a full and independent investigation into the reported incident.

Case of a kidnapped Turk from the centre of Athens

An important decision¹⁴ of the European Court of Human Rights was issued in 2023, in which Greece was convicted of violating article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights in the case of the Turkish refugee V.Y., who complained that she was forcibly abducted from the centre of Athens, in front of dozens of surprised citizens, on 30 May 2013, by assailants in a car with special license plates (belonging to the Greek state) and was taken under a hood straight to Turkey, with the involvement, according to his complaint, of the Turkish authorities, by whom he was arrested. **The GCR, together with other organisations, represented the refugee before the Greek courts and the ECtHR.**

Turkey as a safe third country - Preliminary question from the Council of State (CoS) to the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU)

Following a request for annulment by GCR and the organisation "Refugee Support in the Aegean (RSA)", the Plenary of the Council of State (CoS) in its decision (StE Olom. 177/2023)¹⁵ formulates preliminary questions to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) regarding the national list (KYA 458568/15-12-2021, FEK B2425/17-12-2021), in which which includes Turkey as a safe third country for asylum seekers whose applications are rejected as inadmissible, thus placing thousands of refugees who are not accepted by Turkey in a precarious, undocumented, socially excluded, economically exhausted, starry-eyed and at risk of prolonged detention in our country.

In particular, the CoS asks the CJEU questions about the influence on the legality of the national list of the fact that, for a long period of time (more than 20 months), Turkey has refused to readmit applicants for international protection, while at the same time it is not clear whether the possibility of Turkey changing its position in the near future has been investigated.

The case was heard before the CJEU at an oral hearing on 14 March 2024, at which GCR and RSA were present.

Greece condemned by the ECtHR for the appalling living conditions of a young single woman refugee in Samos¹⁶

On 30 November 2023, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled against Greece for

violation of Article 3 and violation of Articles 3 and 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), for the living conditions of a young single woman refugee in the old camp of Samos and the lack of access to an effective remedy. **The case was represented before the ECtHR by the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR).**

The GCR has repeatedly expressed its deep concern about the ever-recurring **violations of the fundamental rights of asylum seekers that have been recorded in the new - EU-funded structures (Closed Controlled Access Centers, CCAC) in Zervos in Samos and other islands of the North-Eastern Aegean.**

Interim measures granted by the European Court of Human Rights for the living conditions in the new Closed Controlled Access Center of Kos¹⁷

On 12-12-2023, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), applying Rule 39 of its Rules of Procedure, accepted an application for interim measures from two Afghan women and their five accompanying minor children, who had been living in **absolutely inadequate conditions after their arrival at the Closed Controlled Access Center (CCAC) of Kos.** In its judgment, the Court orders the Greek authorities to ensure that the applicants "**have full access to reception conditions which respect human dignity and take account of their multiple vulnerabilities**". **The applicants are represented by the GCR.**

Administrative Courts of First Instance of Kavala and Athens¹⁸: unlawful detention of asylum seekers pending full registration of their asylum application

In cases supported by the GCR, the Courts have ruled that the adoption of a decision on the turning and detaining Afghan citizens who were arrested and detained while awaiting the date of full registration of their asylum application. Specifically, the Courts found that they had already "*acquired the status of asylum seekers*" by logging into the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum's online platform and submitting a registration scheduling application and ordered their detention to be lifted.

These decisions are particularly important, as they are the first to recognise the preliminary procedure currently provided for access to asylum and the consequences it has for persons wishing to lodge an application for international protection.

The cases concern cases of Afghan citizens who had already submitted an application for registration of their asylum request to the electronic platform of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum and were waiting for the date given by the Ministry for the complete registration of their asylum request, but were arrested and detained in violation of the legislation in force. In their decisions, the Courts (*including the Athens Court of Appeal AR 721/2023, AR 741/2023, Kavala Court of Appeal 164/2023*) held that the submission of a planning application for the registration of an asylum application on the online platform operated by the Ministry of Immigration & Refugee Affairs (MIMA) is not a valid application for asylum. Asylum, establishes a person's status as an asylum seeker and ordered the removal of their detention. The State Legal Council (SCC) filed a Petition for Recall against the First Decision on Objections upheld by the GCC, however, the relevant Court dismissed the SCC's Petition for Recall.

Protection from arbitrary detention

In 2023, the GCR argued more than 40 cases of persons in need of international protection who were in administrative detention before Administrative Courts across the country. In most of these cases, the competent Courts found the measure to be unlawful and ordered the detention to be lifted.

This includes a significant number of citizens from Afghanistan, who remained in administrative detention for several months, despite the fact that no return took place in Afghanistan, due to the situation in that country after the Taliban takeover, and to a third country (Turkey), due to the suspension of readmission already from March 2020. This practice is completely illegal and subjects persons who have fled persecution to unjustified deprivation of liberty and mental suffering, with the sole aim of being an additional deterrent measure. **Following a significant number of decisions by the Administrative Courts and interventions by the Ombudsman, following reports from the CPC to the Independent Authority, this practice has been significantly curtailed.**

Family reunification of recognised refugees

Family reunification is a right of recognised refugees under international, European and national law. In practice, the family reunification process is extremely lengthy and complex. It requires continuous legal

assistance and support, which is provided by the GCR, with excellent results, including communication and cooperation with the competent Greek Consulates, interviews of refugees before the Asylum Service and of their family members before the competent Consulates. Interventions before national supervisory authorities for systematic violations of the right to respect for family life are also carried out and legal representation before Administrative Courts is provided in the event of rejection of the application for family reunification or a negative decision on an entry visa for family reunification. In addition, in 2023, a compensation claim was filed in the case of a recognised refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) concerning the delay in the enforcement of the family reunification decision for more than 6 years after its issuance. In addition, in difficult and long pending cases, the CPC files appeals before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

In the year 2023, **510** refugees and their family members were supported. It is worth noting that 51 family members of recognised refugees were reunited with them in Greece during the year.

Of the cases that were successfully completed in 2023, the following stand out because of the exceptional challenges we faced:

- **After 12 years and 2 court decisions**, the family of a recognised refugee from Eritrea was reunited in December 2023.
- **After 7 years and 1 court decision**, the family of a recognised refugee from the DRC was reunited in December 2023.
- In May 2023, a family reunification decision was issued, which **is the only case of Sudanese citizens** who, despite internal conflict and procedural obstacles, managed to be reunited in December 2023.
- **After 6 years** the family of a recognized refugee from the DRC was reunited in October 2023¹⁹.
- In March 2023, **the first family reunification decision for an unaccompanied Syrian minor**, was issued, which includes not only his/her parents but also his/her siblings, although it is not provided for in Decree 131/2006. The family was reunited in July 2023.

In 2023, GCR filed 3 appeals before the ECtHR, which were prioritised by the Court as pilot cases of exceptional importance and notified to the Greek government. The first concerns an indigenous refugee of the Rohingya minority who cannot be issued with travel documents (ECtHR, *Suji v. Greece*, ref. 13250/23). The second concerns the case of an Afghan refugee who faces particular challenges because the Greek diplomatic authorities do not accept documents issued after the Taliban seized power (ECtHR, *Dotani v. Greece*, ref. 31077/23). The third case concerns a refugee from Burundi, whose family are asylum seekers in South Africa, with the result that they cannot issue travel documents (ECHR, *Ndikumana v Greece*, ref. 41855/23). It is worth noting that in the first two cases, applications for intervention by international actors have already been filed with the ECtHR, which have been accepted by the Court.

Asylum cases

In addition, the GCR successfully argued asylum cases before the Asylum Service, the Appeals Authority and the Administrative Courts. Indicatively:

- Cases on asylum applications, which were examined in the context of a safe third country, namely Turkey, and found admissible, as well as cases on asylum applications, which were examined in substance and granted refugee status or subsidiary protection.
- Cases before Administrative Courts that annul and/or suspend the contested decisions of the Appeals Authority, in cases such as the above as well as in cases where reduced procedural guarantees are applied.

New issues of the Asylum Law Bulletin²⁰

GCR in cooperation with the organisations Refugee Support Aegean (RSA) and HIAS Greece published two new issues of the Asylum Case Law Bulletin in 2023, with extracts from 169 decisions of the administrative courts, the Independent Appeals Committees and the Asylum Service in the field of international protection, on issues such as the interpretation of the concept of «safe third country», the assessment of the credibility of the applicant and the merits of the application, the procedural guarantees of the asylum procedure, the operation

of appeals and judicial protection of asylum seekers, the rights of recognised refugees, administrative detention, the right to family reunification and the criminal treatment of refugees.

GCR's comments on a public consultation on legislation

The Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) submitted its comments to the public consultation on the Immigration Code²¹, as well as on the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure²², as a member of the Child Rights Advocacy Network (CRAN), whose work it has been coordinating since its establishment in 2021.

Report "At the Borders of Europe: Between Immorality and Criminalisation"

The GCR report²³, published in March 2023 and presented to the European Parliament during the event "Upholding EU Values at Borders: Pushbacks and Criminalisation", **adds to an already extensive body of evidence on the criminal practice of the Greek state's**, pushbacks by providing extremely detailed descriptions of eleven cases of pushback in the Evros border region and the Aegean islands and two cases of illegal pullback to Turkey by the Turkish authorities in Evros. All the cases included in the report have been referred to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and/or the Greek prosecution authorities. The victims' testimonies show similar characteristics to what they suffered during the pushback operations, thus outlining the organised and systematic nature of these illegal practices.

The report also describes how the Greek state intimidates, stigmatises and criminalises human rights defenders who support victims of pushbacks. We highlight statements by high-ranking Greek government officials who link non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to smuggling networks, accuse them of collaboration with Turkey, claim that these NGOs undermine Greek national sovereignty and characterise them as enemies of the state. These false accusations have created an environment of repression which makes it extremely difficult to support asylum seekers and their rights.

Contribution to the European Ombudsman inquiry on how the European Commission ensures the respect of the fundamental rights of those living in closed facilities on the islands

GCR, together with OXFAM, submitted in June 2023 a **Memorandum to the European Ombudsman-Report²⁴ on the violations of the fundamental rights of asylum seekers in the European Union funded Closed Controlled Access Centers (CCACs) on the islands** of the North-Eastern Aegean, contributing to its investigation (no.01/3/2022).

GCR reports to international bodies / Farmakonisi (Safi) Case and MSS Case

The ERC, together with the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), submitted to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of the European Union, Report²⁵ on the implementation of the landmark judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Farkonisi (Safi and others v. Greece (Application No. 5418/15, 7 July 2022)). We recall that GCR, together with other organisations, had supported, before the Greek courts and the ECtHR, the survivors of the 2014 shipwreck in Farmakonisi, in which 8 children and 3 mothers drowned when the boat they were on board, together with other refugees, sank near Farmakonisi while being towed by a Greek Coast Guard vessel. In its judgment, the ECtHR condemned Greece for violating the European Convention on Human Rights by failing to rescue the refugees when it should and could have done so, and for failing to investigate the refugees' claims.

With this Report, the GCR and ECRE argue that the Farmakonisi case covers a structural and complex problem, which cannot be considered an isolated incident, and call on the Committee of Ministers to place the Safi case under enhanced supervision.

For another year, the GCR submitted observations²⁶ on the MSS case (M.S.S. v. Greece (Application No. 30696/09)) before the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, regarding the shortcomings and issues related to the asylum procedure in Greece, reception conditions, detention, protection of unaccompanied minors, etc. Also the GCR: Submitted, together with other organisations, a report²⁷ to the European Commission as part of the annual audit of national systems conducted by the Commission through the Rule of Law Report, contributed to the draft Joint Statement of the UN Committee on

Enforced Disappearances of Short Duration and submitted jointly with PICUM, comments before the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Torture for the drafting of the Sub-Commission's General Comment on Places of Deprivation of Liberty.

Other Reports

Finally, GCR has once again published important reports²⁸ and has participated jointly with other organisations in reports and press releases on the situation in the field of asylum and human rights of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as human rights defenders. For example: "*At Europe's borders: between impunity and criminalization*", published and presented at the European Parliament, "*PRAB VII: Surprisingly Surprised*", "*Food for All*" report revealing the food insecurity faced by refugees, asylum seekers and people "without papers" in Greece, "*Without papers, there is no life: Legal Barriers to Access to Protection for Unaccompanied Children in Greece*", which describes the difficulties faced by unaccompanied children in moving in relation to the legalization of their residence and how this affects their lives, and the *Annual AIDA (Asylum Information Database) Report*.

Review of challenges in the field

The **accommodation** of asylum seekers continues this year only in accommodation camps outside urban centres and cities, even for the most vulnerable cases. The majority of the population is unable to accept the accommodation offers of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum (MoIAS), with the result that families (nuclear, single-parent families) and individuals trying to find alternative ways of living, without success, with increased risk, precariousness and a significant increase in multiple cohabitation or even the rate of homelessness. Precarious living led to repeated exposure to multiple risks, abuse and exploitation, increasing the risk of exposure to gender-based violence and human trafficking, conditions that resulted in people being re-victimised and experiencing traumatic experiences. The above situation pushed the population into forced neglect/lack of care of their medical issues, exclusion from state subsidy/economic policies and a generalised sense of rejection, despair and frustration. We have documented many cases, mainly from refugee women and LGBTQ+ people, of sexual abuse and harassment, with lack of access to food, basic



sanitation and access to health services, living in an undignified situation. People's mental health has been severely affected, while at the same time they have been cut off from the psychosocial support services provided by facilities and organisations. The difficulty in accessing psychological, psychiatric and medical care was strongly felt.

Many people who chose to be housed in the **state-run shelters** were forced to leave their jobs and cut off from their social networks in their neighbourhoods within the urban fabric that functioned as a support network. People with chronic and life-threatening illnesses, pregnant women and families with newborn babies lose access and contact with hospitals and doctors who attend to their cases due to the de-urbanisation of asylum seekers' accommodation, causing terrible precariousness, distress and further exclusion. Complementing the above, since the second half of the year, there has been a noticeable delay in the response to housing applications from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum with over 3 months of waiting time. Moreover, during the period of the

autumn floods in the Thessaly region in September 2023, due to the relocation of flood victims to refugee camps, placements of the population had stopped taking place, with a strong feeling by the individuals themselves as third class citizens²⁹.

Somali man 22 years old:

"After so many months on the island, I came to Athens and I managed to find a small network of people and even found some wages. Now from Athens, the Ministry tells me to go to Drama. They don't understand what's going on, do they? I feel like they are mocking me and playing with me."

Cameroonian woman 9 months pregnant, 21 years old:

"I understand the damage you have suffered with the floods, but I have been waiting for a long time to come to Athens from Leros and at least enter a camp. To have a doctor and give birth like a human being. There's always someone else in priority. I need right now to give birth to my son like a human being and not in the park."

At the same time, children were forced to stop going to their **schools** in urban centres in order to be transferred to the camps. The violent change of school, social and friendly environment, as well as the disruption of extracurricular activities and daily life, has consequences for children's mental health and family balance. Particularly significant delays in children's school transition and integration into the new school context, increasing the number of pupils who drop out of school because of the difficulty of establishing links with the school environment. This situation creates a feeling of **hopelessness** among the population and undermines the integration process. Integration cannot be achieved in the remote camps but only in the urban fabric and in the neighbourhood.

Syrian mother of 3 children:

"The children were starting to get used to the idea of the new neighborhood, the school. We had gotten into a pattern, sort of. My husband had found some shares in a compatriot of ours. Now from Athens to send us to Thermopylae doesn't make sense. All those appointments at Children's that need to be made for my daughter's unidentified medical issue are going to be made at another hospital? When are we going to get an available appointment? We've already been waiting months."

One of the main challenges faced by the population on a daily basis is the intense **bureaucracy** in asylum services, public services and health facilities, which prevents access to basic services such as health care, education and employment. Procedures are overly complex, often unclear and involve delays, from submitting asylum applications and gathering the necessary documentation to making a medical appointment in automated call centres or via websites, in only two languages (Greek and English). Complementing the above, the continued lack of interpreters in all government services is a major challenge, reinforcing racist attitudes and marginalising the population, further excluding them. These shortages lead to insecurity for the population and undermine the integration process.

63-year-old man from Pakistan:

"Over 30 years in Greece, if you hadn't come with me to the EFKA, if you hadn't come with me for so many efforts, for so many months, I would never have found out about my AMKA. You took care of me in my health problem that arose this year."

In the above scenarios, the social service plays a crucial role in providing comprehensive, stable and ongoing support to asylum seekers who face problems or barriers to entry to the National Health System, to medical examinations and medication, to all levels of education and the labour market, but also to **undocumented** persons and families or to persons and families with **first or second degree refusals**.

Congolese single mother of 4 children:

"I waited a long time for the decision to come and we were turned down. What am I going to do with four children? I am forced to live in a house with other women, no personal space, no food, lots of tension, so many people living in. Now with the rejection I was also thrown out of work, which I was getting very little from there too. I'm desperate. We'll be on the street again and God knows what will happen to us. It's rougher than ever out there."

Further discrimination and exclusion is also carried out against **recognised refugees** who experience the gap in the country's bureaucratic system and remain without a legal status, an active AMKA for several months (during the conversion of the PAAYPA into an AMKA), with the result that access to health care and prescription of medicines and medical examinations, psychiatric support, employment and the country's benefit policy is instantly interrupted. Access to the platforms of public services (banks, tax offices, OAED, etc.) also remains extremely difficult, as these were exclusively in Greek or are difficult to access because of the procedures required, i.e. electronic and/or telephone appointments, without the population having the necessary technical means. A major issue in the national health, social welfare and public services system, which remains unresolved, is the lack of interpretation. Those who are unable to join the HELIOS programme for recognised refugees (either because they do not qualify, because their cover under the programme has expired or because they cannot afford to rent a house) are once again at risk of stagnation, poverty and unemployment, with serious problems of survival and lack of prospects. Without a supportive framework, most recognised refugees also experience exclusion, the destitution, risk and precariousness of imminent potential abuse (human trafficking, domestic violence, sexual violence, etc.)



Young adults (18+), a vulnerable group of the general refugee population, who have a high level of access to social services, remain unsupported, facing significant gaps in access to the national health system, education, employment, the collection of the necessary documentation for benefits and psychological support.

As a result, both applicants and beneficiaries of international protection continue to experience multiple exclusions due to the long-standing lack of a comprehensive national policy from reception to integration. For beneficiaries of international protection in particular, the lack of a sustainable framework of support and integration policies has resulted in many being forced to flee to other EU countries and resettle far from the support networks and lives they created. All of the above underlines the need for reforms in reception systems, asylum processing and realistic integration programmes in order to improve protection and support for refugees.

18 year old trans girl from Pakistan:

"Thank God I came to you. Back in Pakistan, I would have been dead already and right now you have helped me, after many years in Greece, to get asylum, to take care of my health and my body. You are family to me."

In 2023, access to affordable and livable apartments, especially in big cities, where the beneficiaries' interest is obviously focused due to the immediate access to health services, education, etc., has become even more difficult, as rents have skyrocketed. The difficulty of accessing (and maintaining) affordable housing, combined with the general increase in the cost of living, makes the integration process for recognised refugees extremely difficult.

The bureaucratic procedures as established in Greece may depend on the discretion, information or the way an official interprets the law or the regulations of the service.

50-year-old woman from Ukraine:

"In November 2023 my identification documents as a beneficiary of temporary protection expired and the bank blocked my bank account. So I was not able to receive the rent subsidy from HELIOS. I had to present to the bank the FEK proving that the renewal of the documents was automatic. However, the delay in receiving our subsidy was already very long, as the scheme was also suspended for almost the whole of October. At other times, the same bank or other banks ask for a certified interpreter to be present at our service, even if we are able to communicate in Greek or English."

During 2023, GCR's Social Service in Athens, Thessaloniki and Mytilene, supported and responded to a number of requests. Many of these were of an emergency nature with a need for immediate intervention and advocacy. The Social Service team responded in a timely and comprehensive manner to many requests, using various means of communication (telephone, online, in person), both for urgent issues and for psychosocial sessions. The support provided to the people served, of all ages, was an important point of reference and connection with Greek society. The members of the Social Service remained committed and active throughout the year, trying to increase the visibility of the problems faced by the population and to offer assistance.

Housing

Throughout the year, the Social Service responded promptly to the increased need to register housing applications for asylum seekers. It also contributed to highlighting housing issues, but also living conditions in general, through testimonies and interventions with the relevant bodies. Of key importance was its contribution to people in detention, with cooperation and housing referrals to the relevant department of the Ministry of Justice and direct contact with Presidents of First Instance Courts with a view to their release and post-detention support. The members of the Social Service cooperated directly with the Ministry, both with new requests during the reception of new guests, as well as with issues that

arose on a daily basis in the housing programme and the relocation of the population in the camps.

Psychosocial assistance

The Social Service contributed to the provision of psycho-social counselling through daily psychosocial support sessions and the drafting of social reports in extremely vulnerable cases (social, medical, psychological and/or psychiatric health issues, employment, stress). It also provided support to former detainees, asylum seekers/asylum seekers who wished to integrate, in representation and advocacy in services and in the community, with accompaniment and training, in order to achieve the fullest possible understanding and perception of the functioning of the service concerned.

The professionals of the Social Service fully trained in crisis interventions (Mental Health First Aid), **responded in a comprehensive and timely manner to all requests of an emergency nature, such as the survivors of the shipwreck off Pylos, people with psychiatric difficulties arriving at the door of GCR, witnesses of tragedies with drowning of people in the Mediterranean, active victims of trafficking, survivors of domestic violence, etc. The development of a counselling and therapeutic relationship with the person(s) served, as well as the creation of a stable point of reference played, in all these cases, a decisive role.**

Also, in the context of providing protection to unaccompanied minors who are homeless or in detention (protective custody or administrative), the GCR Social Service intervened immediately, by visiting police stations and receiving unaccompanied children, as well as informing the Public Prosecutor's Office for Minors, the National Tracing Mechanism of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors and requesting assistance to the Ombudsman for Children. The above actions were decisive in the rapid lifting of detention, access to health and medical care, the sending of a request for accommodation and direct cooperation with the competent state bodies and the placement of the minors in appropriate accommodation facilities.

In the past year, the beneficiaries received more first and/or second degree rejections than in previous years, which had a highly stressful effect on their

psyche. Professionals provided counselling and practical assistance, using all the tools and resources at their disposal. These included liaison with other institutions, organisations and communities, as well as cooperation with competent state authorities, such as the Ombudsman, the Ombudsman for Children, the National Reference Mechanism, the Public Prosecutor's Offices for Minors, the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors and the relevant departments of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum.

The strong and extensive network of links with all relevant institutions and initiatives (e.g. soup kitchens, shelters, organisations for specialised assistance and referral) and the direct cooperation of the staff of the Social Service and the Interpretation Service ensured the continuous support and social assistance of all service applicants of all ages. The accompanying of persons served by the Social Services to hospitals and public services to ensure and exercise their rights and meet their needs strengthened the already existing cooperative and therapeutic relationship, as well as the sense of belonging and self-empowerment for each person served. The members of the Social Service give the highest priority to promoting the development of skills, autonomy, opportunities and creating an environment of acceptance and inclusion for the individuals served.

Education

Another important success is the continued enrolment of children in schools at all levels of education whose families are unable to provide proof of address with an official document, which is considered necessary. The Social Service, through continuous interventions and cooperation with the Schools and the Education Directorates, has facilitated the enrolment process for a significant number of children. Registration and applications for younger children (infants and toddlers) were again successfully carried out this year in the nurseries for the school year.

Labour

The Social Service provided job counselling and enabled many people to prepare themselves for job search and integration into the labour market. This, in this particular year, proved to be crucial for their survival, their integration into the community and the sense that there are prospects, hope and a future for these people and their families. The employment office has further enriched the employment counselling tools, further expanded the network of employers and thus the number of secure jobs available in various sectors, with future partnerships secured for the year 2024. During the year, the communication policy was further strengthened in relation to employers, with an emphasis on securing and enhancing the qualitative characteristics of jobs. The employment office has in-depth knowledge of the latest developments in the legal framework relating to the service's target group. The main challenges encountered related to the accommodation of staff in remote areas, outside the urban centers, and the need to meet basic needs (food, clothing, health care) resulted in preparation (job counselling appointments, Greek and English lessons, health care) and/or starting work being interrupted or prevented. In addition, bureaucratic procedures related to the issuance of legal documents, such as the long period of time required for the assignment of the AMA and AFM to new workers and the assignment of the AMKA after recognition, caused serious disruption in many cases of beneficiaries who are qualified for stable employment.

35-year-old Congolese dad:

"I would like to say thank you for all your help and all your support until I find the job, it means a lot to me and to my family."

37-year-old man from Pakistan:

"Hello, my brother. Thank you for the job. This job is changing my life. God bless you always."

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The GCR's interventions





ΠΩΣ ΣΕ ΖΕΝΕ

ΣΕ ΑΧΑΙΩ

ΣΗΜΕΡΑ ΕΧΕΙ ΤΟΛΛΗ ΖΕΣΤΗ

ΣΗΜΕΡΑ ΕΙΜΑΙ ΧΑΡΟ



A. Reception / One-Stop Service

Providing legal and psychosocial assistance through reception teams

Partner: UNHCR

Implementation period: 1/1/2023 - 31/12/2023

Place of implementation: Attica, Thessaloniki, Ioannina

The project concerned the provision of legal assistance to asylum seekers and refugees at all stages of the asylum procedure and other procedures related to their legal status. The type of assistance provided included information, advice and representation before the authorities in the asylum procedure at A and B degree, in the family reunification procedure under the Dublin III Regulation and support for recognised refugees. In addition, the project involved the provision of psychosocial assistance to ensure that people have access to rights and services. The type of assistance provided included information, support during the asylum procedure, counselling and related interventions on medical, educational, housing and other issues. In the framework of the project, **734 asylum seekers and refugees** received legal assistance in Athens and **281** in Thessaloniki. Similarly, **676 persons** received psychosocial assistance in Athens and **233** in Thessaloniki. In addition, **57 άτομα** received legal assistance in Ioannina. Many of the cases were supported before the relevant competent Administrative Court with a positive outcome and many persons were granted refugee status.

B. Provision of legal assistance of the first and second degree

Providing legal support to people in detention

Partner: UNHCR

Implementation period: 1/1/2023 – 31/12/2023

Place of implementation: Athens and Thessaloniki

The project involved the provision of legal assistance to people in detention to ensure their access to rights and to the asylum procedure. The team carried out regular visits to detention facilities and police stations in Attica and Thessaloniki, and missions to

other detention centres (Corinthos, Paranesti, Xanthi, and the Orestiada Outpost). The assistance included support at all stages of the asylum procedure, through counselling and representation, appeals before the administrative and judicial authorities for the lifting of detention. In addition, the detention team carried out institutional interventions and submitted reports before Independent Authorities and International Human Rights Protection Mechanisms, both to support cases and to address systemic problems.

In total, **221 people** in detention received legal assistance in Attica and **180 people** in Northern Greece. The team filed objections to detention for **133 persons** before the Police and for **39** persons before the Courts. Following the group's actions, at least **117 people** in detention were released. The team's interventions not only benefited the cases supported, but also helped to address systemic problems.

C. Access to Asylum and Social Support

Providing legal support to the islands and Evros

Partner: UNHCR

Implementation period: 1/1/2023 – 31/12/2023

Place of implementation: Lesbos, Kos, Evros, Crete

The project concerned the provision of legal assistance to asylum seekers and refugees at all stages of the asylum procedure and other procedures related to their legal status. More specifically, the main activities concerned, inter alia, counselling and representation before the authorities during the asylum procedure, during the family reunification process, interventions to lift detention and geographical limitation and vulnerability assessments. In particular, in 2023, **794 applicants/applicants will be asylum seekers and refugees** received legal assistance. With the assistance of GCR, inter alia, more than **80 people** were able to obtain refugee status and a significant number of persons in detention were released. In addition, the team filed injunctions and appeals before the European Court of Human Rights and carried out institutional interventions to address systemic problems identified in the islands.

Providing legal support to refugees during the family reunification process

Partner: UNHCR

Implementation period: 1/1/2023 – 31/12/2023

Place of implementation: Athens

The project concerned the provision of legal assistance to recognised refugees in Greece, during the family reunification process, so that they can be reunited with their family members in their countries of origin or in third countries outside the EU. The main actions included legal advice, interventions and representation before the competent authorities (services, consulates, administrative courts, etc.), assistance with the issuance of the necessary travel and other documents, certificates and tickets for the transfer of family members to Greece. In 2023, the project supported **109 cases** involving **510 persons** (120 refugees in Greece and 390 members in their countries of origin or in third countries outside the EU). For **14 cases**, the procedure was successfully completed and **51 persons managed to come to Greece and be reunited with their family, with a positive impact on a total of 69 persons**. It is worth noting that among the completed cases there were three extremely difficult cases, which required multiple representations before the courts and repeated interventions before Consulates, Ministries and other authorities in order to be completed after 7 or even 12 years. Most cases have been the subject of multiple interventions before the competent authorities. In addition, the team filed three appeals to the European Court of Human Rights.

Providing psychosocial and legal support to asylum seekers and refugees in Lesbos

Funding: Help - Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe

Implementation period: 1/1/2021 - 30/6/2023

Place of implementation: Lesbos

The project provided free legal support to asylum seekers, at all stages of the procedure, in family reunification cases, to applicants at risk of detention, to applicants living in unsanitary and unsafe conditions and to those who lacked access to basic rights. In addition, detainees received social services, such as a social history, support in accessing state and health services, accompaniment and practical assistance in medical and hospital emergencies.

Harmonising Protection Practices in Greece-HARP / Harmonizing protection policies in Greece

Funding: Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission (DG HOME).

Implementation period: 1/1/2022 - 31/12/22 (with extension 30/6/2023)

Implementing Partners: International Organization for Migration, Municipality of Athens (through the Athens Management and Development Agency - ADDMA), Arsis, Arbeiter Samariter Bund (ASB), Danish Refugee Council Greece (DRC Greece), Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), METAdrasi, Solidarity Now and The Smile of the Child

During the first half of 2023, GCR remained the sole legal entity in all the Shelters, taking on all cases for legal assistance and representation in civil, administrative and asylum cases, as well as the follow-up of previous cases during the duration of the programme.

- **635 beneficiaries were supported** through specialised legal assistance to claim or defend their rights
- **276 cases supported** through specialised legal assistance
- **325 acts of representation were carried out**
- **Family law cases** (e.g. restrictive measures in SGBV cases, custody and child removal proceedings, etc.)

In total they were taken over:

- Asylum cases: 86
- Civil cases: 107
- Criminal cases: 23
- Administrative cases: 60

Total: 276

Acts of representation:

- Total before the courts: 143
- Total other operations: 182

Total number of operations: 325

D. Families / Unaccompanied Minors

Children's Alternatives to Detention protecting their Rights in Europe (CADRE)

Funding: European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)

Implementation period: 01/02/2021 - 31/01/2023

Partners: Aditus (Malta), Foundation for Access to Rights (Bulgaria), Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland), Defence for Children International - Belgium, Hungarian Helsinki Committee (Hungary), the Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (ASGI) (Italy), supported by the participation of the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum-Seekers (Malta).

Place of implementation: Athens

The aim of the intervention is to expand, implement and improve in the European Union, sustainable and effective alternatives to the detention of refugee and migrant children with full respect for their rights.

In addition, the project aims to: provide lawyers and professionals in civil society organisations with best practices and standards to be able to ensure the protection of children's rights by offering alternatives to detention and giving them practical skills and know-how to ensure them; create an informal transnational and interdisciplinary community of experts from different backgrounds on alternatives to detention of migrant and refugee children; and strengthen the capacity of lawyers and professionals in civil society organisations to ensure the protection of children's rights by offering alternatives to detention and giving them practical skills and know-how to ensure them; create an informal transnational and interdisciplinary community of experts from different backgrounds on alternatives to detention of migrant and refugee children; and strengthen the capacity of lawyers and professionals to ensure the protection of children's rights by offering alternatives to detention and giving them practical skills and know-how to ensure them.

Results:

- Training and capacity building of over 100 frontline professionals to enable them to apply international and EU law and standards on alternatives to detention.
- Creation of educational material on alternatives to detention for refugee and migrant children.
- Production of publicly accessible electronic material to achieve the objectives of the project.

Contingency plan to deal with the Ukrainian crisis

Funding: Save the Children International

International Period of implementation: 1/4/2022 - 30/6/2023

Place of implementation: Athens

The project aimed to support the integration of Ukrainians who fled their country at the start of the war in February 2022 and other refugees. In this context, the beneficiaries received the following services:

- a) Provision of educational activities to children under 6 years old,
- b) Providing education (Greek lessons) to children (over 6 years old) and adolescents,
- c) Facilitating access to education for children,
- d) Psychological support for children and their families,
- e) Provision of counselling to facilitate access to the labour market for the beneficiaries.

Indicatively, some of the results of the project are:

- We had 457 participations in educational activities for children.
- 128 people received psychosocial support.
- We supported 97 people with labour market integration services.

E. Victims of Violence

Rehabilitation of victims of torture

Funding: United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Implementation period: 1/1/2013 - 31/12/2023

Place of implementation: Athens

The project aims to provide various forms of support exclusively to victims of torture and their family members, through the provision of individualised rehabilitation services for victims of torture by professionals. In 2023, **53 victims of torture** in total and **23 family members** were supported. Legal assistance was provided to **71 persons** and psychosocial support to **76 persons** (including family members who received services).

Provision of legal advice and legal support to people benefiting from the actions of the Positive Voice

Implementation period: 2/1/2023 – 30/6/2023

Place of implementation: Athens

As part of our collaboration, a GCR lawyer had a weekly presence at RF Checkpoint. Meetings with beneficiaries were held at the site, usually by pre-arranged appointments. More than 17 people benefited from the services, which included free legal information and representation, with cases under follow-up and with ongoing requests for legal representation. The legal assistance provided by our organisation was at the level of advice, but also representation: access to asylum services, support for asylum applications, interventions with the Immigration Sub-Directorate to lift detention of vulnerable persons lacking legal documents, etc.

In addition, the legal representative conducted a training seminar for employees of Positive Voice, RF CHECKPOINT and Red Umbrella, providing them with basic knowledge of refugee law and the legal challenges that directly affect them, as well as the provision of other support services. Also, Positive Voice/Red Umbrella conducted three training sessions for GCR workers on sexual health, sex work, and LGBTQ terminology.

It is noted that the field of LGBTQIA asylum seekers and recognized refugees, refugees and other people living with HIV is in need of legal representation and support.

FAST: Foster Action and Support to Trafficked persons

Funding: AMIF

Implementation period: 1/1/2021– 28/2/2023

Partners: Associazione Dela Croce Rossa Iatliana - ODV, Associazione CNOS-FAP Regione Piemonte, Het Nederlandse Se Rode Kruis, the British Red Cross Society Royal Charter, International Rescue Committee Italy

Place of implementation: Athens, Thessaloniki, Lesbos

Over the two-year duration of the programme, we had the following results:

- **82 cases of individuals were examined in terms of their circumstances** and received legal and psychosocial support.
- **45 people attended** skills development **workshops**.
- **23 people received job counselling** and developed vocational skills.

HEROES – Novel Strategies to fight Child Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking Crimes and protect their victims

Funding: European Commission (H2020)

Implementation period: 1/12/2021 – 30/11/2024

Partners: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, University of Kent, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Institut National de Recherche en Sciences et Technologies du Numérique, Kentro Meleton Asfaleias

(KEMEA), International Centre for Migration Policy Development, International Center for Missing and Exploited Children Switzerland, Idener Research & Development, Athina-Erevnitiko Kentro Kainotomias Stis Technologies Tis Pliroforias, Ton Epikoinonion Kai Tis Gnosis (ATHENA), Trilateral Research Limited, Centre for Women and Children Studies, Kovos su Prekyba Zmonemis ir Isnaudojimu Centras Vsi, Associacao Portuguesa de Apoio a Vitima, Fundación Renacer, Greek Council for Refugees, Associacao Brasileira de Defesa da Muhler da Infancia e da Juventude, Policía Nacional, Hellenic Police, Iekslietu Ministrijas Valsts Policija State Police of the Ministry of Interior, Glavna Direksia Borba s Organiziranata Prestupnost, Secretaria de Inteligencia Estratégica de Estado - Presidencia de la República Oriental del Uruguay, Brazilian Federal Police, Policia Rodoviaria Federal, Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime

Implementing countries: Austria, Belgium Bulgaria, Austria, Belgium, Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Colombia, France, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Peru, Uruguay, United Kingdom, United Kingdom

The project aims to develop technological tools to better prevent and tackle human trafficking and the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. It also aims to develop tools to provide improved services to victims of such crimes. These tools will be targeted at judicial and police authorities, civil society organisations and citizens in general.

As part of the project, the Greek Council for Refugees conducted a research on the training and pedagogical needs of the end-users of the technologies and strategies to be developed by the project, and produced a report with the results in September 2022. Since then, it has been involved in all research and other activities of the project.

F. Integration

HELIOS Support for the Integration in Greece of Beneficiaries of International Protection and Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection

Partner: International Organization for Migration (IOM) with funding from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum

Implementation period: 01/01/ 2022 – 31/12/2023

Place of implementation: Athens, Thessaloniki

The aim of the programme is to strengthen the beneficiaries' prospects of independence and autonomy by making them active members of the Greek society and to create an integration mechanism for these groups, which will also provide a rotating housing mechanism in Greece's existing temporary housing system. The activities of the programme include Greek language courses, housing support, employment support, monitoring of the integration process and awareness-raising in the host communities.

GCR implements the HELIOS integration programme by supporting beneficiaries of international protection and beneficiaries of temporary protection by conducting courses at Integration Learning Centres in Athens until October 2023 and in Thessaloniki until March 2023, where each course lasted 6 months and included modules on learning the Greek language, cultural orientation, work readiness and other soft skills. At the same time, GCR implements actions to support beneficiaries for independent housing in rented apartments on their behalf, providing them with contributions for the costs of renting (for a period of 12 months) and moving, as well as networking opportunities with apartment owners. **490 beneficiaries have participated in the Greek language and soft skills courses** implemented by GCR teachers. **13 beneficiary students passed the May 2023 Certificate of Attainment in Greek at A1 and A2 levels.** At the same time as the courses were conducted, creative activities were provided for the children of our students in specially designed areas in the Integration Centres.

More than **2,500 beneficiaries have received service in relation to their housing**, through access to the Programme's available apartments (more than 180 apartments have been checked all over Greece by the housing officers, whose details have been posted on the heliospiti platform.com platform, to which all beneficiaries of the Programme have access), interpreting support before and during the signing of the lease contract, checking the documents for the monthly rent subsidy, and communication with public services, banking institutions and apartment owners. During the Programme, organised weekly visits are carried out by mixed teams of GCR and IOM employees to the Accommodation/Temporary Reception Facilities in Attica, Central and Eastern Macedonia and Central Greece.

YOU4mi - "Youth Cooperation for Migrants Integration"

Funding: KA220 Erasmus+ (2021-1-ES02-KA220-YOU-00028798)

Implementation period: 28/02/2022 - 28/02/2024

Partners: MAD for Europe (Spain), TIA Formazione (Italy), Training to Malta (Malta), ABU gGmbH (Germany), Svenska Youth League (Sweden)

Venue: Athens

The aim of the programme is to integrate young migrants and refugees in Europe, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Due to the crises that many young people face in their countries of origin (economic, wars, political conflicts, etc.), many of them are looking for a way out in order to start a better life. The programme has helped them to integrate into their host countries. The project targeted young people from third countries, young people from local communities, young immigrants, young people from ethnic minorities at risk of social exclusion, but also professional social workers, teachers and trainers, educational organisations and local authorities.

Activities: Workshops and joint youth activities

Pathway to All Children in Education (ACE)

Funding: SolidarityNow

Implementation period: 1/9/2021 - 30/06/2023

Venue: Athens

Objective: To support all children of asylum seekers and recognised refugees in Greece to access education through the provision of non-formal education services.

Activities:

- Non-formal education courses with creative activities to develop and improve psychosocial skills.
- Provision of remedial teaching in order to improve the knowledge of Greek and help with school lessons.
- Support for families in enrolling their children in public school.

The All Children in Education Programme is a UNICEF initiative co-funded by the European Union and implemented by a number of partners, including the Greek Council for Refugees.

Support to Ukrainian refugees in Greece

Funding: Stavros Niarchos Foundation

Implementation period: 15/5/2022 - 31/3/2023

Partners: Melissa - Network of Immigrant Women in Greece, HIAS Greece, SOS Children's Villages, Babel Syn-irmos, United Ukrainian Diaspora in Greece

In the framework of the project, 5 civil society organisations worked together to support the Ukrainian diaspora and people who fled to Greece because of the war in Ukraine. **A total of 1,425 Ukrainian refugees were supported through this intervention:** they received information on housing issues, support for enrolling their children in school, assistance in obtaining a residence permit, received job counselling and support for their integration into the labour market and benefited from psycho-social support.

"Thesaurus II" – Engaging the Community

Funding: Fondation Alta Mane

Period of implementation: 1/1/2023-31/12/2023

Place of implementation: Athens

The project included **15 creative workshops** based on selected books from the children's literature collection of the PYXIDA lending library, visits to museums, as well as other educational and artistic activities during the school holidays (Easter and Summer Camp).

60 people, children, teenagers and their families participated in the activities. In addition, 200 new titles of children's books were purchased and catalogued and added to the existing digital platform «THESAYROS». Our little friends will be able to access **more than 2.925 books**, by simply registering on the platform by following the link <https://thesaurus.gcr.gr/>.

G. Monitoring / Institutional lobbying (Advocacy)

Advocacy actions to defend children's rights

Funding: Save the Children International

Implementation period: 1/3/2021 - 31/12/2024

Location: The whole territory of Greece

Provide evidence-based information on the humanitarian situation of refugee/immigrant children in Greece to support stakeholders with potential influence at EU level (Brussels, EU Member States).

Results: Publication of a bi-monthly newsletter on child protection in Greece. Establishment of a network of civil society organizations and public bodies active in the protection of children in Greece, in order to further strengthen the voice of refugee/immigrant children and their families. Reports focusing on access to education and asylum.

Reports and information notes (indicative), available [here](#).

Advocacy and assertion of the rights of beneficiaries of international protection

Funding: Oxfam Novib

Implementation period: 1/1/2022 - 31/3/2025

Place: Nationwide

Objectives:

- Promote a fair and effective asylum and reception system that respects the rights of persons seeking international protection in Greece and the EU,
- Search for legal and political ways to challenge the current situation at the Greek and European level.

Activities:

- Joint public statements, announcements in advance of important/unexpected developments,
- Compilation of reports,

- Compilation and dissemination of a bi-monthly newsletter and
- Visits by GCR advocacy officers to islands or the mainland to collect information and support material that can be included in the newsletter and other common advocacy products.

Reports, memoranda and briefing notes (indicative) are available [here](#).

Keeping the unwanted out. Irregular practices at the borders and informal cooperation by Member States to circumvent European legal frameworks and human rights

Funding: European Program for Integration and Migration and Open Society Foundations

Partners: CSD Diaconia Valdese, DRC BiH, DRC Brussels, DRC Greece, DRC Italy, Humanitarian Center for Integration and Tolerance (HCIT), Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA)

Implementation period: December 2020 - June 2024

Implementing countries: Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Greece, Serbia

Objectives: The Protecting Rights at Borders (PRAB) initiative is made up of protection and legal aid organisations focusing on human rights compliance at EU borders. The partners have an established presence in the countries where they operate and therefore have direct access to victims of refoulement, as well as long experience in strategic litigation.

Activities: The project partners are documenting and documenting refoulements and cover both internal and external EU borders, such as the borders between France - Italy, Greece - Turkey, Croatia - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary - Serbia, Belarus - Poland, Belarus - Poland, Ukraine - Poland, Greece - North Macedonia, Slovenia - Italy, North Macedonia - Serbia and Lithuania - Belarus.

The reports are available [here](#).

H. Empowerment activities, trainings as well as interventions in schools

Capacity building on strategic litigation

Partner: Dutch Council for Refugees

Implementation period: 01/07/2023 – 01/06/2024

Implementation location: Nationwide

Objectives: Under this project, GCR aims to increase the capacity and expertise of its legal team in providing legal assistance to asylum seekers with regard to (a) border violence and refoulement and (b) violations of the rights of recognised refugees, including by undertaking and monitoring legal cases, in the context of a strategic litigation approach to the protection and promotion of human rights).

Activities: In cooperation with the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and the Dutch Council on Refugees (DCR) a training on strategic litigation was organised. Subsequently, strategic plans will be developed for the 2 themes, which the GCR will follow in the next period.

Results: Training and further specialisation of the GCR Legal Service's lawyers, increased number of cases supported for strategic litigation before national and European courts and enhanced protection of newcomers and recognised refugees.

Psychological support / supervision sessions for employees

Partner: Melissa - Network of Immigrant Women in Greece

Implementation period: 3/8/2022 – 31/12/2023

Place of implementation: Nationwide

Objectives: Provide psychological support for employees of the organisation.

Activities: Group and individual sessions with a psychologist.

Results: Support for the team of professionals handling particularly complex and vulnerable cases.

Climate Refugees

Partner: WWF Hellas

Implementation period: 1/7/2023 – 30/6/2024

Place of implementation: Nationwide

The planet is burning. The summer of 2023 saw the highest global temperatures ever recorded. Successive heat waves hit many parts of the world, from the US to China, while the climate crisis as a whole is causing unprecedented weather events, severe storms and disasters.

Climate migration will inevitably be one of the major impacts of the climate crisis at the global level, triggering, logically, a chain effect due to the mass movement of people. Since 2008, almost 320 million people worldwide have had no choice but to leave their homelands and migrate due to adverse climatic conditions and more frequent climate disasters. In 2020 alone, some 31 million people were displaced by disasters linked to abrupt changes in the environmental situation.

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the situation is expected to worsen in the coming years, with these numbers estimated to double by 2050. The World Bank estimates that climate change is expected to force more than 200 million people to leave their homes over the next three decades unless urgent action is taken to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions.

In this ominous global context, the Greek Council for Refugees and WWF Greece are implementing a joint research project on the critical issue of climate refugees. The aim of the project is to analyse the current situation and develop a policy proposal to address climate-induced migration from Europe and in particular the status of climate refugees

Advocacy



As we face the consequences of a migration/refugee policy that concerns human life and dignity, the GCR's advocacy strategy focuses on three key areas: access to territory, access to the asylum procedure and reception conditions

Access to the Territory

Access to the territory is the first and crucial step for refugees seeking safety. In this context, GCR works to highlight issues related to irregular refoulement and border violence with the aim of eliminating the corresponding illegal practices of deterrence. At the same time, it is steadily working to ensure policies that will facilitate access to the territory by creating legal channels. At the same time, it warns that the continued implementation of deterrence policies will in effect make migrants and refugees, are «pushed» in search of increasingly dangerous routes in the Mediterranean, often with tragic results (see the shipwreck off Pylos). In this context, GCR has published Reports and Press Releases shedding light on the issue, and since 2022 has represented 588 Syrian, 67 Turkish, 37 Iranian, 24 Palestinian and 15 Afghan refugees, including many children, before the European Court of Human Rights, filing 43 applications for interim measures (Rule 39), requesting that they be granted humanitarian assistance and access to the asylum procedure.

Access to Asylum

Protecting the right to asylum is vital to ensure human dignity and legitimacy. The Greek Council for Refugees is active in promoting measures that strengthen the asylum process, protecting access to the assessment procedures and providing support to asylum seekers during the process.

Reception conditions

The quality of reception conditions has a direct impact on the well-being and safety of refugees. GCR works to improve living conditions in reception centres by promoting initiatives to provide appropriate health, education and psychosocial support services. In this context, and in parallel to lobbying through press releases and questionnaires, it also represented two Afghan women who appealed to the ECtHR about the absolutely unacceptable conditions in the Closed Controlled Access Center of Kos (CCAC). Finally, on 12-12-2023, the ECtHR, applying Article 39 of its Rules of Procedure, granted the application for interim measures. In its judgment, the Court orders the Greek authorities to ensure that the applicants **"have full access to reception conditions that respect human dignity and take into account their multiple vulnerabilities"**.

Through this advocacy strategy, the Greek Council for Refugees seeks to promote rights and strengthen humanity, always acting with respect for human dignity and the protection of the well-being and rights of all those seeking refuge.

Financial data



The audit of the Balance Sheet and the Financial Statements was completed on 20/03/2023 and was carried out by SOL, a company of chartered accountants. The financial statements were approved by the Board of Directors on 22/03/2023 and by the General Assembly of the association on 23/04/2023.

| Funders / Programmes / Other sources | Amount |
|---|-----------------------|
| International Organization for Migration | 1.728.806,13 € |
| UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees | 1.336.549,99 € |
| Sigrid Rausing Trust | 208.225,34 € |
| EU Commission Co-Funded Projects | 42.406,43 € |
| Save the children International | 135.299,51 € |
| EEA GRANTS | 64.257,42 € |
| Open Society Foundations | 57.229,86 € |
| UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture | 66.976,50 € |
| OXFAM | 37.299,92 € |
| HELP | 92.980,60 € |
| Solidarity Now | 47.600,22 € |
| Dutch Council for Refugees | 6.242,95 € |
| Private donation from America | 19.666,05 € |
| DLA Piper UK LLP | 24.479,74 € |
| International Committee of Red Cross | 7.022,35 € |
| State Lottery | 5.000,00 € |
| Alta Mane | 28.024,80 € |
| Defence for Children | 15.619,19 € |
| AIGEAS AMKE | 13.439,77 € |
| Positive Voice | 8.107,27 € |
| WWF | 10.500,00 € |
| Stavros Niarchos Foundation | 14.987,00 € |
| Donation from Australian expatriates | 16.096,85 € |
| Greek American Foundation | 9.053,23 € |
| ECRE | 6.811,84 € |
| Danish Refugee Council | 6.265,14 € |
| European Network on Statelessness | 573,86 € |
| Donations - Subscriptions | 45.526,41 € |
| TOTAL | 4.041.321,91 € |

Thanks to

GCR warmly thanks all its supporters, charitable organizations, companies and individuals, who contributed in a substantial way to the implementation of actions for the protection and provision of essential services to refugees and asylum seekers throughout Greece.

Thank you very much:

- The Sigrid Rausing Trust Foundation for its significant contribution over the three years 2020-2023 to the organisational development of the organisation, to support the emergency needs of refugees, to cover the costs of training of staff and to carry out missions at the entry points, covering unexpected funding gaps in programmes and key posts, and generally supporting the smooth running of the organisation in an unstable, competitive and constantly changing economic and social environment.
- Mrs. Diane T. Coulopoulos who supported for the third consecutive year, the psychological support service for children and their families.
- The Dutch law firm DLA Piper, which strengthened the legal service of the GCR.
- AIGEAS AMKE for the valuable support it provides to the integration activities of Pyxida.
- The voluntary organisation INGO Global Brigades for its support to the actions of the GCR's legal service.
- Mrs Marie Goosens and all her friends and colleagues who ran a 10 km race in Antwerp to collect donations for GCR.

- The family and friends of Penelope Koumoundouros, who offered a donation in her memory.
- The family and friends of Anthousa Amoys-uropoulou, who offered a donation in her memory.
- Mr. Dimitris Kraniotis for his kind donation.
- Mrs Domini Mirasgezi for the donation she made in favour of GCR.
- The Greek America Foundation for its valuable support and cooperation.

The members and donors of our organisation for their commitment and practical support.

Also, a big thank you goes to the volunteers, who support our work with enthusiasm and consistency.

Finally, we thank all the GCR employees who with zeal and professionalism stand by the side of the beneficiaries.



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