



# Annual Report 2024



**GREEK  
COUNCIL  
FOR  
REFUGEES**

# Annual Report 2024







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# Message from the Board of the Greek Council for Refugees

In 2024, the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) was on a stabilisation path, although opposing forces regarding the protection of refugees and the rule of law continued to clash both in Greece and internationally.

At the European level, the most significant event was the adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which is to be implemented in 2026 which marks a serious shift away from the rule of law by institutionalizing violations in the field of refugee protection in Europe. Attempts to implement asylum externalization procedures and the creation of offshore asylum examination centers, such as the Italy-Albania Agreement, have failed, at least temporarily. However, in the same spirit of policies denying protection to refugees within the EU, as reflected in the Pact, the European Commission is already proposing that these centers operate as «hubs for persons to be returned,» with serious risks to the life and liberty of persons at risk. And while the Pact is not expected to provide any solution to the refugee flows arriving in Europe, it undermines the necessary consultation and solidarity between European states in managing them.

At the global level, the change in political leadership in the US has brought about an upheaval in international relations, the consequences of which are yet to be seen. With the advent of 2025, the change in strategy and the withdrawal of the US from providing support at the international level has become particularly evident, with the reduction of funding to the UN and other international bodies, which is being felt throughout the world and, consequently, in Greece and ultimately in the GCR. The armed conflicts in our wider neighborhood, both in Gaza and Ukraine, are showing signs of abating, but everything indicates that they will be particularly painful for the populations that will suffer the consequences of the new balance of power that is taking shape.

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In this context, in addition to several other cases, most notably interventions concerning border violations, reception centers on the islands and in the mainland, detention, and the protection of vulnerable persons (minors, women, LGBTQI persons, victims of torture or trafficking, etc.), two important cases defended by GCR before both Greek and international and European courts are worth mentioning.

One was the case of pushback, where, following a public hearing of two cases in June 2024 before the European Court of Human Rights, the Greek government was finally convicted of a Turkish citizen in 2019, after a systematic policy of pushbacks had been established over the previous years.

The second case concerned the designation of Türkiye as a safe third country, where, following a preliminary ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union, in a recent decision of the Plenary Session of the Council of State, it was ruled that this designation was not substantiated by the evidence in the case file and the recommendation of the Asylum Service, and consequently the Joint Ministerial Decision on the designation of Turkey as a safe third country was annulled.



However, beyond supporting emblematic cases, the GCR continues to provide support to asylum seekers and refugees in all areas of their lives. Last year, the problems of living conditions and service provision in the country's reception facilities were once again highlighted, exacerbated by both the slight increase in influxes and the absence of an adequate coherent policy that would provide solutions for the integration of refugees into Greek society. In particular, the transitional phase of the HELIOS program last year reinforced the inability to find solutions for recognized refugees in our country. However, we hope that the new phase of the program, with its integration into more stable funding from the country's regions, will contribute to better use of resources and the smoothest possible integration of refugees into Greek society.

The operation of the GCR's family reunification support program was also particularly important, enabling families to be reunited in a safe environment.

We cannot but be concerned about the continuing problems of hosting unaccompanied minors in all facilities across the country, after a period when the situation seemed to be improving.

In 2025, the GCR finds itself in an uncertain international environment. The economic destabilization of the UN and its agencies is now seriously affecting us and disrupting our operations. Nevertheless, we are hopeful that the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe will be able to address a humanitarian crisis whose future appears uncertain.

Last year, the GCR celebrated with joy and emotion, but above all together with all its people, staff, volunteers, friends, and beneficiaries, the 35th anniversary of its founding. We hope that in the years to come, the GCR will continue to be here to provide at least a minimal safety net for refugees and anyone who seeks refuge in our country and needs help. We hope that we will find all our partners, who are also being tested by the financial crisis, as well as all our supporters, small and large sponsors, donors, volunteers, and especially our members and employees who have contributed to the work of the GCR for so many years, whom we thank for their dedication.

**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

2024  
Our work in numbers



3.840

GCR beneficiaries  
in 2024



2.798

people received  
Legal Aid



1.445

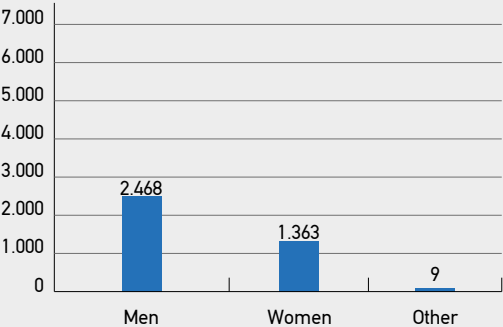
people received  
Social Support  
from GCR



< 3.007

new registrations  
of individuals

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
- Palestine
- Syria
- Turkey
- Ukraine



GCR's Presence on the Map

Presence	Offices	HELIOS ILC
<div><div></div><div>- Crete</div><div>- Kos</div><div>- Evros</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>- Athens Office (HQ)</div><div>- Thessaloniki Office</div><div>- PYXIDA</div><div>- Lesvos Office</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>- ILC Athens</div><div>- ILC Thessaloniki</div></div>



# Challenges and successes

## Challenges and successes in the past year

2024 was another year of challenges in the field of international protection and the protection of fundamental human rights. GCR, committed to 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, addressed the challenges, through judicial actions and advocacy activities, and achieved significant successes. The following are some indicative examples of the impact of our work:

### ECtHR landmark decision/ Pushbacks

On 4/6/2024, GCR lawyers represented, at an oral hearing before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), a Turkish asylum seeker who reported that in 2019 she had been subjected to pushback by the Greek authorities in the Evros region (A.R.E. v. Greece (ref. no. 15783/21)). We recall that the case concerns A.R.E., a Turkish refugee, who was forced to leave her country due to political persecution and entered Greece in 2019, through the Evros region, in order to seek asylum. This is the first case to be examined by the ECtHR in relation to a complaint of pushback in the Evros region by the Greek authorities.

### On 7/1/2025 the ECtHR in its Judgment condemned Greece and accepted:

- the "systematic practice of pushbacks by the Greek authorities of third-country nationals from the Evros region to Türkiye"
- that the pushback of A.R.E., a Turkish asylum seeker, by the Greek authorities took place
- that A.R.E. was illegally detained by the Greek authorities before the pushback
- that the Greek judicial authorities failed to conduct an effective criminal investigation and archived A.R.E.'s criminal complaint despite the prima facie evidence

A.R.E., legally represented by GCR, had filed a complaint before the Public Prosecutor of Orestiada, which was rejected at the second instance by the Prosecutor of the Appeals Court of Thrace, on the grounds that there was no evidence against the

police and that Greece, especially the Greek police, never conducts pushbacks to Türkiye.

Subsequently, A.R.E. filed an Application before the European Court of Human Rights, also legally represented by GCR, alleging violations of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). With the today's Judgment the Court accepted her Application and condemned Greece.

It is noted that to date the Greek authorities systematically deny the practice of pushbacks at the Greek-Turkish borders. The Court's Judgment confirms that pushbacks at the Greek borders constitute a systematic practice of the Greek authorities, as has been documented for several years in numerous reports by international, European and national organizations, as well as in the complaints of the victims of pushbacks our organization receives on a daily basis.

Specifically, GCR represented this year a significant number of cases of victims of informal and forced returns to Turkey (pushbacks), a phenomenon that continues to be recorded, following numerous reports, which national institutions and international organisations have assessed as well-grounded<sup>1</sup> and which is now recognised by the European Court of Human Rights as a systematic practice of the Greek authorities.

**Specifically:** In 2024, our Legal Service filed 55 applications for interim measures before the ECtHR,





all of which were granted, representing 419 asylum seekers from Syria, Turkey, Afghanistan, etc. Already since 2022 to date, GCR has filed a total of 100 applications for interim measures before the ECtHR. The ECtHR in all these cases has indicated to the Greek government not to remove the refugees from Greece and requested information on their access to the asylum procedure and legal assistance. At the same time, GCR sent over 369 interventions to the Greek authorities for assistance and access to the asylum procedure for 1,928 asylum seekers, the majority of them in the Evros region and the islands<sup>2</sup>.

Also, in 2024, we filed seven (7) appeals of victims of pushbacks before the ECtHR, which are still pending (in addition to the 16 appeals filed in 2021-2023).

In 2024, a total of forty (40) pushback cases were recorded in the Recording Mechanism of Informal Forced Returns by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)<sup>3</sup>.

19 of the aforementioned appeals in pushback cases, filed by GCR between 2022 and 2024 before the ECtHR, are presented in detail in two successive GCR reports, entitled «AT EUROPE'S BORDERS: BETWEEN IMPUNITY AND CRIMINALIZATION<sup>4</sup>» and «AT EUROPE'S BORDERS: PUSHBACKS CONTINUE AS IMPUNITY PERSISTS<sup>5</sup>», published in 2023 and 2024 respectively. The findings and conclusions of both reports were also presented at events in the

European Parliament in 2023 and 2025<sup>6</sup>(see details below).

#### Pylos Shipwreck

Just one year after the landmark decision of the European Court of Human Rights on the 2014 shipwreck in Farmakonisi (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, 63 of whom have already filed a lawsuit, before the Piraeus Maritime Court, against all those responsible from the Greek services and authorities involved.

The survivors reported that the Greek authorities failed to intervene immediately and to organize a timely and effective operation to rescue the people on board. This is despite the fact that they were obliged to rescue the passengers under International Law of the Sea, Human Rights Law, EU Law and National Law, even though they were informed from the outset and subsequently became aware of the imminent danger to life that the passengers of the obviously unsuitable and overloaded fishing vessel were facing. On the basis of these reports, the Greek authorities not only refrained from taking the necessary rescue measures as soon as the vessel was sighted, but

instead proceeded 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 decision<sup>7</sup>.

The preliminary examination before the Piraeus Maritime Court was completed in December 2024. After obtaining a copy of the criminal case file, we found that there are serious gaps and omissions and that the supervisors of the crew of the coast guard vessel were not investigated by the competent prosecutor for their potential accountability, despite the fact that they were in charge of the supervision and operational management of the incident. That is why we have filed a request to extend the investigation of accountability and criminal prosecution to the leadership of the Coast Guard. At the same time we filed a report against FRONTEX denouncing its responsibilities and asking for an investigation into the responsibilities of the organisation in relation to the tragedy.

Following the refusal of the Coast Guard to conduct an internal disciplinary procedure, the Ombudsman<sup>8</sup> conducted its own investigation, with its special competence as the National Mechanism for the Investigation of Incidents of Arbitrariness, which was completed in January 2025, with the drafting of a relevant report, which was sent to the competent authorities.

According to the 3/2/2025 press release of the Ombudsman:

*The Report of the Independent Authority comes to clear indications for eight (8) senior officers of Hellenic Coast Guard regarding their knowledge and disregard of the risk to the life, health and physical integrity of the foreign nationals on board the fishing vessel Adriana, who are considered subject to investigation for deadly exposure, as well as for exposure to danger of the life, health and physical integrity of the persons on board the fishing vessel Adriana., punishable under article 306 of the Criminal Code.[...] while "[...] also assesses the allegations for the towing of the fishing vessel Adriana by the vessel of the Hellenic Coast Guard assigned to assist.[...]"*

*The Report of the Independent Authority was forwarded to the Minister of Shipping for the exercise of disciplinary jurisdiction on his behalf, and at the same time to the competent prosecuting authority of the Piraeus Maritime Court, for the evaluation of the objective and subjective substance of the relevant criminal offences.*

*The Ombudsman Mr. Andreas Pottakis stated that, for the Independent Authority, the transparency of administrative action and the attribution of responsibility, where there is any, for the deadly shipwreck of Pylos is an elementary legal demand, inextricably linked to respect for the rule of law, as well as the thorough investigation by the administration of any other incident associated with a violation of the right to life, health and physical integrity. The Ombudsman recalled the principles of the case law of*





*the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which, in the case of the Pharmakonisi shipwreck, noted that the authorities "did not take, within the limits of their powers, the measures that could reasonably be considered capable of preventing the danger". The primary issue in a search and rescue operation, according to the European Court of Justice, is whether the authorities' efforts were "sufficiently and appropriately focused on the lives" of the persons involved."*

We recall that, in the context of a press investigation, a report of the FRONTEX Fundamental Rights Office was leaked, in which, among other things, it is stated that: "the means mobilized 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, as well as on the basis of some migrants' testimonies, it appears that, prior to the shipwreck, rescue was not the immediate objective of the authorities" and blames the Greek Port Authorities for "delaying the launch of the rescue operation, which started 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"*<sup>10</sup> states inter alia in relation to the shipwreck: *"Any assessment of the facts of this tragedy is severely compromised by the absence of video or other recording of what took place in the hours and minutes leading up to the boat's capsizing, and the events that took place in the immediate aftermath when hundreds of people had fallen into the sea. It has emerged that recording equipment on board the HCG vessel had been switched off for reasons that are disputed..... Frontex had also not obtained permission from the Greek RCC for its surveillance aircraft to leave the other incident and head to the site of the Adriana before it sank. Had it done so, it may have been in a position to record what happened and possibly influenced the actions of the Hellenic Coast Guard. And the European Ombudsman concludes: "In view of these conclusions and the growing concerns about persistent violations of fundamental rights by a Member State in its border control operations, Frontex should consider whether the threshold has been reached to allow it to*

*terminate, withdraw or suspend its activities with the Member State in question. It should publicly clarify its reasons for concluding 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 Ombudsman calls upon the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission to establish an independent commission of inquiry to assess the reasons for the large numbers of deaths in the Mediterranean, to learn the lessons from incidents such as the Adriana shipwreck, and to make recommendations on how to protect fundamental rights and the right to life in the response to maritime emergencies.*

A full and effective investigation into the circumstances of the shipwreck has already been requested from the Greek authorities by 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 Parliament<sup>11</sup>.

#### **Türkiye as a safe third country - Preliminary question from the Council of State to the CJEU/ Decision of the CJEU**

Following a request for annulment by GCR and the organization "Refugee Support in the Aegean (RSA)", the Plenary Session of the Council of State in its decision (177/2023)<sup>12</sup> referred questions to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) for a preliminary ruling on the national list (KYA 458568/15-12-2021, Government Gazette B2425/17-12-2021), which includes Türkiye as a safe third country for asylum seekers whose applications are rejected as inadmissible, thus placing thousands of refugees who are not accepted by Türkiye in a precarious, undocumented, socially excluded, economically exhausted, in a state of stagnation, with the risk of even prolonged detention in our country.

In particular, the Council of State submitted questions to the CJEU regarding the influence on the legality of the national list by the fact that, for a long 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 a change in Türkiye position in the near future has been investigated.

The case (Case C-134/2022) was discussed before the CJEU at an oral hearing on 14 March 2024, at which GCR and RSA were present.

Already in a ruling issued on 4 October 2024, the Court of Justice of the European Union, inter alia, stressed that Union law does not allow Member States to reject asylum applications as inadmissible, in application of the concept of a safe third country, if that country does not in fact accept the readmission of those persons.

The decision of the CJEU is of major importance because it overturns an arbitrary and abusive practice of the Greek authorities which has been in force for many years, of wholesale rejecting asylum applications as inadmissible under the safe third country principle, and puts an end to the denial of the rights of thousands of applicants, by prohibiting their rejection when there is no possibility of their readmission to Türkiye and dictating their individual examination in accordance with the Directive.

Following the CJEU decision and the response to the preliminary questions submitted by the Council of State, the case was discussed on 7 January 2025 in the presence of legal representatives from GCR and RSA, and a decision is currently pending.

#### **Judgment of the European Court of Human Rights against Germany and Greece**

On 15-10-2024 the European Court of Human Rights published its Judgement in the case of H.T. v. Germany and Greece, a case supported before the Court by the Greek Council for Refugees.

The case concerns the return of a Syrian asylum seeker from Germany to Greece on 2018 within the framework of the so called "administrative arrangement agreement". This "agreement" was negotiated between the German and Greek authorities in 2018 and aimed to establish a fast-track procedure for the return from Germany to Greece of asylum seekers who had initially lodged an asylum claim in Greece, bypassing the guarantees of EU and international human rights law.

The Court, referring to its established case-law according to which it is the obligation of the State carrying out the return, to examine the conditions to be encountered by the person transferred to the

other State, condemned Germany for breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, finding that the return of the applicant from Germany to Greece was contrary to Article 3 of the ECHR.

#### **The ECHR condemns Greece for the degrading living conditions and illegal detention of minors**

On 3 October 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) convicted Greece for violation of Articles 3 (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment), 5&1 (right to liberty and security) and 5&4 (right to apply to a court) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), for the violations suffered in 2019 by two unaccompanied minor sisters from Afghanistan, who were found, despite their apparent vulnerability as minor girls, homeless and subsequently detained in an adult women's cell under «protective custody» at the Pre-removal Detention Centre of Taurus.

The unaccompanied minors were represented before the ECtHR by the Legal Unit of the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR). In their application, the minors complained, inter alia, of inhuman and degrading living conditions, their confinement and their placement in 'protective custody' in a detention centre resulting in their de facto detention, and their inability to challenge this decision.

#### **Protection from arbitrary detention**

TGCR has defended, before the Greek Courts, more than 20 cases of asylum seekers under administrative detention, challenging the legality of the measure imposed. In a significant number of cases, the competent Courts found the detention measure to be unlawful and ordered the lifting of the detention, including inter alia:

- cases of detention despite the absolute impossibility of return to the country of origin (e.g. Afghan citizens) and detention despite the suspension of readmission in Turkey,
- cases of detention of asylum seekers who have already followed the legal procedure for applying for asylum,
- cases of detention on the basis of abusive and/or unjustified invocation of public policy grounds,
- cases of detention of persons belonging to vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied minors, - in cases of detention of persons belonging to vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied minors.



These cases have contributed to ensuring respect for the law, including with regard to the imposition of detention measures against asylum seekers and persons in need of international protection in general, as well as to changing the administrative practices applied.

#### Significant decision of the Administrative Court of Athens safeguards the rights of children and persons underage assessment procedure in Greece

Jamal\*, a child from Pakistan, was repeatedly registered by different Greek authorities as an unaccompanied minor. After his arrest by the Greek police and his arbitrary registration as an adult, he was detained in order to be returned. Without reasonable doubt, as required by law<sup>[1]</sup>, an age assessment procedure was belatedly initiated while the child was already 3 months in detention in a Pre-Removal Detention Centre together with adults unknown to him and under conditions completely unsuitable for children.

For a total of six (6) months the child remained in detention, following a story of Kafkaesque proportions, during which the Greek authorities refused to apply the legal procedure that requires a person to be treated as a minor for as long as there is doubt about his age («presumption of minority»). It also requires that a Guardian is appointed and that the child will be placed in a shelter for unaccompanied minors.

#### Asylum cases

GCR provided legal advice to 750 asylum seekers on the asylum procedure and successfully defended asylum cases before the Asylum Service, the Appeals Authority and the Administrative Courts.

#### Indicatively:

**Cases on asylum applications**, that were examined in the context of a safe third country, namely Turkey, and were found admissible; cases on asylum applications that were examined on the merits and granted refugee status or subsidiary protection; and cases of revocation of refugee status that had a positive outcome and international protection was maintained:

- GCR supported the case of an asylum seeker from Afghanistan, who is deaf, as the Reception and Identification Service refused to register his asylum application because he is deaf and does not know

how to use sign language. Following interventions and support, from the GCR, his asylum claim was registered and he was eventually recognised as a refugee.

- Two asylum seekers from Pakistan, members of the LGBTQI+ community, who are in a relationship with each other. The first applicant, who had made a subsequent asylum application, following an age correction as he was a minor at the time of first examination, was recognised as a refugee, with the support of GCR, in the second instance, as a member of a particular social group facing persecution in Pakistan. A few days later, the second applicant was also recognised as a refugee in the first instance. This is an important case, as Pakistan is included in the list of safe countries of origin and the consequent presumption of safety.
- An extremely vulnerable Syrian man, suffering from visual impairment, was supported by the GCR, both in the preparation of his interview on the admissibility of his claim regarding Turkey as a safe third country, and with his representation during the interview before the Asylum Service and the submission of a memorandum. His asylum application was deemed admissible and he was recognized as a refugee.
- A recognized refugee of Turkish origin, who was subject to a procedure for revocation of his international protection status due to a criminal conviction in the past, was represented by the GCR already during the revocation stage and a decision was finally issued not to revoke his status.
- A Syrian family with a long-term stay in Turkey and serious health issues (end-stage renal failure) was represented in the context of a subsequent application regarding Turkey as a safe third country. Their request was deemed admissible, and their recognition as refugees is pending.
- A young man from Palestine, a recognized refugee who was subject to a revocation procedure due to a prior criminal conviction, was represented at the second-instance hearing before the Appeals Committee and received a positive decision, maintaining his protection status.
- A single-parent family from Ethiopia, where both the mother—a survivor of violence and human trafficking—and her son, who was diagnosed with Down syndrome, were recognized as refugees. Their initial asylum request had been rejected despite strong indications of, among other things, trafficking and violence in the mother's personal

history. The family was represented by GCR in the context of a subsequent application, which was deemed admissible, and they were ultimately recognized as refugees.

**Representation of asylum seekers before Administrative Courts**, where the Courts annulled and/or suspended the challenged decisions of the Appeals Authority, in cases such as those mentioned above, as well as in cases involving the application of reduced procedural safeguards. Indicative examples include:

- The Administrative Court of First Instance of Athens accepted the suspension request of a young Afghan man against the decision of the Appeals Committee, which had revoked his refugee status due to a previous criminal conviction related to substance abuse. The Court of Athens decided to suspend the execution of the Appeals Committee's decision (Decision No. AN 419/2-10-2024), accepting the argument that the applicant would suffer irreparable harm and that returning him to Afghanistan would violate Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, as he would be deprived of the detoxification and treatment services currently provided to him in Greece, which he continues to need—pending the decision on his annulment application against the Appeals Committee's decision.
- A single-parent family from Somalia (mother and minor son), whose asylum application was rejected as inadmissible due to their prior transit through Turkey, without the Asylum Service taking into account their extreme vulnerability during the assessment of their application. As a result, Turkey was considered a safe third country for their return. The Appeals Committee rejected their appeal. GCR submitted an annulment application and a suspension request against the Appeals Committee's decision, and the Administrative Court of First Instance of Athens, through Decision No. AND 157/2024, granted the suspension, reasoning that the applicant is a victim of torture and that the best interest of the child requires remaining in a safe and stable environment.
- The Administrative Court of First Instance of Athens, in its Decision No. 523/2024, accepted the suspension request (AND 226/2024) and granted a stay of removal to a woman survivor of sexual violence, who suffers from psychiatric issues and whose subsequent application for international protection had been rejected by the Asylum

Service. The Administrative Court ruled that her return would be detrimental to her health and living conditions, as it would interrupt her treatment and result in the loss of the support network she currently has in Greece.

#### Family Reunification of Recognized Refugees

Family reunification is a right of recognized refugees under international, European, and national law. In practice, the family reunification process is extremely time-consuming and complex. It requires continuous legal assistance and support, which is provided by GCR, with excellent results—particularly in terms of communication and cooperation with the competent Greek Consulates, refugee interviews before the Asylum Service, and family members' interviews before the respective Consulates. Interventions are also carried out before national supervisory authorities regarding systematic violations of the right to respect for family life, and legal representation is provided before Administrative Courts in cases of rejection of a family reunification application or denial of an entry visa for family reunification. In difficult and long-pending cases, GCR also files applications before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

In 2024, as part of the relevant implemented program, 482 refugees and their family members received support. It is noteworthy that in addition to the above, in 2024, GCR supported refugees residing in Crete, the majority of whom are Palestinians, specifically 116 refugees and their family members whose family reunification cases are pending.

It is also worth mentioning that 57 family members of recognized refugees were reunited with them in Greece during the year.

Among the cases successfully completed in 2024, we highlight the following due to the exceptional challenges we faced:

#### Family Reunification of a Stateless Refugee – Suji v. Greece

After a life full of dangers as a member of the Rohingya minority—the most persecuted minority in the world—and a life where no state recognized his existence, the stateless Mr. Suji, assisted by the Greek Council for Refugees, managed to reach Greece in 2017. In 2019, he was recognized as a refugee and immediately submitted his application for family



reunification to be reunited with his wife and their two children, who are also stateless.

Following the submission of an application to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) by the Greek Council for Refugees and five consecutive years of interventions, the Greek authorities issued a positive family reunification decision, and Mr. Suji reunited with his family in the arrivals hall of Eleftherios Venizelos Airport in November 2024.

This case, which is pending at the ECtHR, highlights some of the numerous problems that recognized refugees in Greece face in exercising their right to bring their family members to Greece.

#### **Family Reunification of a Refugee from Cameroon**

Three years after the family reunification application, following numerous interventions by GCR at the relevant Greek Consulate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ombudsman, the refugee was reunited with his wife and three children in December 2024. This marks the first case of a family from Cameroon reuniting in Greece.

#### **Family Reunification of a Refugee from Angola**

In July 2024, the refugee was reunited with his family members in Greece. This is the first successful family reunification case for a refugee from Angola, and the first time, based on GCR's experience, that the relevant honorary Greek Consulate agreed to validate family reunification documents.

#### **Family Reunification of a Refugee from Burundi**

In March 2024, the refugee was reunited with his wife and their three minor children, who had also fled their country of origin and were recognized as refugees in Rwanda. Due to their refugee status, the family members faced exceptional difficulties both in obtaining and validating the required family reunification documents and in securing entry visas. These difficulties were resolved only after multiple interventions by GCR.

#### **Family Reunification of a Refugee from Yemen**

In May 2024, the refugee was reunited with his wife. This case marks the first family reunification of a refugee from Yemen since the program began in 2021.

In July 2024, GCR submitted two (2) interventions accompanied by lists of family reunification cases to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece and the relevant Greek Consulates, concerning family reunifications of Palestinian refugees with positive family reunification decisions.

With the first intervention, GCR requested the prioritization of cases involving Palestinian refugees whose family members have fled from war zones. In the same intervention, GCR requested compliance with the law and the cessation of the demand for additional documentation beyond what is stipulated by law (Greek Council for Refugees, Intervention, prot. no. 380/09.07.2024).

With the second intervention, GCR requested the immediate facilitation of the safe passage of family members of recognized Palestinian refugees, either to Greece or Egypt, and/or the provision of any alternative solutions necessary to enable their family reunification in practice (Greek Council for Refugees, Intervention, prot. no. 381/10.07.2024).

As of today, GCR has not received an official response regarding the requests made in the interventions. It is noteworthy that all family reunification cases included in GCR's first intervention were successfully completed, and the family members legally entered Greece following the issuance of entry visas. However, a series of individualized interventions by GCR was required for their prioritization, and the request to refrain from requiring additional documentation was never accepted. We recall that in 2023, GCR filed three appeals before the ECtHR, which were prioritized by the Court as cases of exceptional importance and communicated to the Greek government

In 2024, written submissions were submitted by both sides for all the cases, and the issuance of decisions is awaited. Specifically, the cases are as follows: the first appeal concerns a stateless refugee from the Rohingya minority who was unable to obtain travel documents (ECtHR, Suji v. Greece, no. 13250/23). The second concerns an Afghan refugee facing particular challenges, as Greek diplomatic authorities do not accept documents issued after the Taliban took power (ECtHR, Dotani v. Greece, no. 31077/23). The third appeal concerns a refugee from Burundi, whose family members are asylum seekers in South Africa, preventing them from obtaining travel

documents (ECtHR, Ndikumana v. Greece, no. 41855/23). It is worth noting that interventions have already been submitted to the ECtHR by international actors for all three cases.

#### **Reports/Interventions/References to International Bodies**

For yet another year, GCR published significant reports<sup>13</sup>, interventions, and references to international bodies, and participated jointly with other organizations in reports, press releases, advisory forums, international conferences, and events concerning the situation in the field of asylum and the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as human rights defenders. Notable examples include:

- A new report by the GCR titled "At Europe's Borders: Pushbacks continue as impunity persists" was published in November 2024<sup>14</sup>. This report from the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) contributes to an existing body of extensive documentation of the Greek state's illegal pushbacks practice, by providing particularly detailed descriptions of twelve pushback cases at the Evros border region occurred in 2023 and legally represented by GCR before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). These victims' testimonies offer a disturbing insight into the organized and systematic nature of these illegal practices of the Greek authorities, in consistency with reports from national and international human rights bodies, institutions and organizations, documenting the same *modus operandi*. Furthermore, the report highlights the systemic issue of ineffective investigations into reports and complaints for pushbacks and rights violations at the EU's external borders, that contribute to an environment of total impunity, by presenting details on the investigation and recent judicial developments of three pushback cases, legally represented by GCR before the ECtHR, along with official statistics on Greek judicial investigations and cases brought before the ECtHR. In this context, the report highlights the systemic issue of ineffective criminal investigations into reports and allegations of pushbacks and rights violations at the EU's external borders, contributing to an environment of total impunity.

Following the publication of our report, judicial developments in the pushback cases – that



are presented within it and represented before the ECHR –reinforce the report’s conclusions. The most significant of these is the landmark decision by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in the case of the pushback of a young Turkish woman in Evros (case A.R.E. v. Greece, application no. 15783/21), supported by our Legal Service. This ruling condemned Greece, for the first time, acknowledging the “systematic practice of pushbacks by Greek authorities of third-country nationals from the Evros area to Turkey”. The report was presented at an open event in the European Parliament, as well as to representatives from the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, the Directorate-General for Justice of the European Commission, the office of the European Ombudsman, and the Fundamental Rights Office of FRONTEX.

This report builds upon the 2023 report by the Greek Council for Refugees titled *“At the Borders of Europe: Between Impunity and Criminalization”*. This series of reports was compiled as part of a project funded by OXFAM.

- The GCR report «Access to Justice for Refugees» was written as part of the research project «PROMISE VERSUS REALITY: ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR REFUGEES IN GREECE,» implemented under the program «InteGRation: Tackling Chronic Challenges in the Field of Integration of Refugees in Greece,» funded by the Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN), University of Oxford. The findings highlight the challenges and obstacles refugees face, from a lack of information about their rights to the high cost of legal representation and limited trust in the judicial system.
- The Greek Council for Refugees and Save the Children (SC) presented a groundbreaking report titled «It Does Not Feel Like Real Life»: The Daily Lives of Children in Greek Refugee Camps, which reveals the challenges faced by children living in refugee camps throughout Greece. The study provides an in-depth look at these children’s experiences, based on 32 interviews with children, their caregivers, and experts, including government officials. The report’s findings were presented at a special event in the European Parliament in October 2024, attended by MEPs and members of the European Commission, and at an open public

discussion in Athens in December of the same year, organized jointly by both organizations.

- The Greek Council for Refugees and WWF Greece published the report “Climate Refugees: Addressing Climate-Induced Mass Migration Before It Happens.” Through this report, the two Greek organizations aim to encourage a dialogue that offers civil society a shared understanding of the challenges and the need for a robust protection system for climate refugees based on human rights.
- The annual AIDA (Asylum Information Database) 2023 report for Greece provides information on key changes that occurred in the national asylum system during the year and the early months of 2024. Among other things, the report documents recent developments regarding the asylum process, reception conditions, the administrative detention of asylum seekers, and the scope of international protection.
- The report “Enhancing the Voices of Those Affected by EU Migration and Asylum Policies,” written by GCR with support from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, highlights the human cost of deterrence imposed by European policies through interviews with refugees. It clearly illustrates how the complete lack of safe pathways to asylum exposes those seeking protection in Europe to significant risks.
- The report *“The Pushback – Disconnect: Current and Anticipated Practice”* by Protecting Rights at Borders (PRAB), in which GCR participated, records how pushbacks and rights violations remain widespread and have evolved into an accepted tool for border management.

#### References to International Bodies

- Third Party Intervention by GCR before the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Muhammad v. Greece, application no. 34331/22, regarding the ineffectiveness of criminal investigations into pushback cases by Greek courts.
- Submissions by GCR and ECRE before the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe concerning the effectiveness of judicial oversight of the administrative detention of returnees and



asylum seekers (Objections to Detention) in the group of cases MD v. Greece

- Submissions by GCR to the UN Human Rights Committee for its 142nd session (October 14 - November 8, 2024). This submission focuses on Greece’s compliance with its human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), particularly regarding migration and asylum issues. GCR provides information on pushback practices, the detention of migrants, degrading living conditions, and the lack of effective investigations into rights violations.
- Contribution from GCR to the LANDINFO report on the situation of recognized refugees in Greece. GCR responded to a request for data regarding the conditions of recognized refugees in Greece. This information was sought by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, Landinfo, an independent entity based in Norway that collaborates with Norwegian immigration authorities.
- “Greece in Institutional Decline: Civil Society Documents the backsliding of the Rule of Law” joint report to the European Commission by GCR along with Vouliwatch, Refugee Support Aegean (RSA), HIAS Greece, the Greek Union for Human Rights

(HLHR), and Reporters United. This report outlines chronic deficiencies and new threats to the rule of law in Greece. It contributes to the annual review of national systems conducted by the European Commission through its Rule of Law Report.

#### “News from the Field”

GCR provides monthly updates on significant developments in the field of asylum and human rights.

#### “Information Note on Pushback Cases”

Since 2022, the GCR has been providing regular updates on its interventions with Greek authorities and the interim measures granted by the European Court of Human Rights in cases supported by its Legal Service concerning pushback allegations. This Information Note is also included in the ELENA Weekly Legal Updates from the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), of which the GCR is a member.

#### New Issues of the Asylum Case Law Report.<sup>15</sup>

In collaboration with Refugee Support Aegean (RSA) and HIAS Greece, GCR published two new issues of the Asylum Case Law Report in 2024, featuring excerpts from 141 decisions of administrative courts, Independent Appeals Committees, and the Asylum Service on matters such as the interpretation of «safe third country,» the assessment of the applicant’s credibility and the substance of the application, procedural guarantees in the asylum process, the functioning of administrative appeals and judicial protection for asylum seekers, the rights of recognized refugees, administrative detention, the right to family reunification, and the criminal treatment of refugees.

Additionally, in June 2024, the Annual Report 2023 of the Recording Mechanism of Informal Forced Returns, established by the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR), was published. GCR participated in this mechanism and contributed to the report by documenting incidents of informal forced returns (pushbacks).

#### Living Conditions and Housing

The Social Service of GCR in Athens and Thessaloniki welcomed and assisted a significant number of requests throughout 2024, with 2,637 actions taken

for 1,243 individuals. Nearly one-third of these requests required assistance with housing issues, both for asylum seekers through the relevant State Agency of the Ministry of Migration and for recognized refugees, including housing advice and support.

Additionally, the Social Service highlighted, referred, and addressed issues related to the living conditions of vulnerable cases already residing in open structures who were unaware of or unable to find services to turn to. The testimonies and evidence from these individuals significantly contributed to the necessary interventions with the relevant authorities to resolve the respective issues.

The requests received by the Social Service in 2024 mainly concerned counseling support for mental and physical health issues, asylum procedures, housing, employment, material support, and other social issues.

In 2024, collaboration continued with individuals experiencing difficulties and trauma, such as women refugees—single mothers with children, LGBTIQ+ individuals, survivors of torture, sexual abuse, and harassment, people with serious or chronic health issues, lacking access to food, basic hygiene conditions, and health services, living in undignified circumstances.

Individuals whose mental health deteriorated and who were cut off from psychosocial support services experienced significant setbacks due to difficulties in accessing psychological, psychiatric, and medical care.

At this point, it is worth noting that our Service played a crucial role in supporting individuals in detention, collaborating and referring housing needs to the respective department of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. This included direct communication with Presiding Judges to facilitate their release and provide post-release support. Additionally, we worked with the Ministry on new requests and issues related to the housing program and the relocation of individuals to camps.

Support for asylum seekers in housing continues only in structures outside urban centers, even for the most vulnerable cases. The majority are unable to accept the housing placements offered by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum due to distance and isolation, resulting in families and individuals

seeking alternative living arrangements, which carry increased risks, insecurity, and a rise in overcrowded living conditions and homelessness in urban areas.

In many cases, individuals cannot cover transportation costs to open housing structures (tickets and taxis), as these are located outside urban centers. Last year, we managed to cover some of these transportation expenses, as, despite our appeals, in most cases neither public nor private entities responded.

It is also particularly important to note that in 2024, there were significant delays in state reception and registration processes, resulting in many individuals remaining in conditions of homelessness and food insecurity for extended periods. From May until the end of the year, there was a delay in the monthly financial assistance for those residing in camps. In response to this situation, the Social Service strengthened donations from individuals, NGOs, and companies, primarily providing children's food items, clothing, and gift vouchers, with a priority given to single-parent families. Insecure living conditions and homelessness led to daily exposure to risks, abuse, and exploitation, increasing the likelihood of gender-based violence and human trafficking. These conditions resulted in re-victimization and the experience of abusive and traumatic incidents

Many individuals who accepted placements in open structures lost their jobs and supportive social networks in their neighborhoods. People with chronic illnesses, pregnant women, and families with newborns lost access to hospitals and doctors due to the relocation of housing, leading to significant insecurity, distress, and further exclusion.

**As an Afghan father of a minor child shares:**  
"I have been waiting with my son to be registered for almost a month. We have no documents, we cannot apply for housing, and we are living on the street or in abandoned buildings in Athens. I feel ashamed towards my child. We fled danger in our country, and now I am exposing him to other dangers here."

**Burden of Daily Life Due to Difficulty Accessing Public Services and Basic Rights**

One of the main challenges faced by the population daily is the overwhelming bureaucracy in asylum services, public agencies, and health structures,

which hinders access to basic rights such as healthcare, education, and employment. The processes are complex, opaque, and involve delays, from submitting asylum applications to medical appointments via call centers or websites that provide information only in Greek and English. Additionally, the lack of interpreters in state services exacerbates racist behaviors and marginalizes the population, further excluding them and undermining the integration process.

**A 19-year-old from Egypt, survivor of the Pylos shipwreck notes:**  
"Now I have to live on my own. I left the shelter where we were with the other kids since I turned 18 last year. I still don't know the language, and everything I need to do seems very difficult. I can't go to the doctor by myself; they don't understand me, and all these things about getting a tax ID or setting up a bank account—I have no idea how to do them. I feel despair. I'm glad I have you to help with all of this".

Last year, there was a significant increase in negative decisions at both the first and second levels, with serious consequences for the mental health of those served, resulting in considerable burden and dramatic changes in their daily lives. These decisions created difficulties in accessing healthcare, education, and employment. Professionals provided counseling and practical assistance, collaborating with organizations and state authorities such as the Ombudsman, the Children's Ombudsman, and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. The Social Service played a crucial role in providing continuous support to asylum seekers

**A 39-year-old father from Iran shares:**  
"As soon as we learned about the second rejection of our application, I felt like I was losing everything again. Back on the street with the kids, without documents, without medication. I had just started to earn some money, and my wife had a stable doctor at a hospital, thanks to your help with the interpretation. She is due to give birth in two months. How will I take care of them? Where will we stay?"

The broad network of collaboration with organizations and initiatives such as breadlines, housing structures, and specialized support organizations, combined with the Social Service's partnership with the Interpretation Service, ensured ongoing support for all asylum seekers,

regardless of age. Accompanying clients to hospitals and public services strengthened the counseling and therapeutic relationship and contributed to their empowerment and sense of belonging. The Social Service focuses on skill development, promoting autonomy, and creating an environment of acceptance and inclusion for beneficiaries.

Young adults (18+), a vulnerable group within the general refugee population, have significant engagement with social services but remain unsupported, facing considerable gaps in access to the national healthcare system, education, employment, obtaining necessary documentation for benefits, and psychological support.

**Recognized Refugees**

Recognized refugees face numerous difficulties in the Greek context, particularly in recent years as services and programs decline. The connection between employment and the activation of the AMKA (Social Security Number) for both adults and dependent minors creates significant barriers, especially for single-parent families without a support network, elderly individuals, those with health issues, or those struggling financially to cover childcare costs, as well as for people who do not know the language or English.

A significant number of recognized refugees, particularly those not supported by social services, are completely excluded from access to healthcare, medications, medical examinations, and psychiatric support. Without legal employment, access is immediately cut off.

**A 20-year-old recognized refugee from Afghanistan shares:**  
"I had been in Greece for only three months and was just recognized as a refugee when I was told I had to leave the camp on the island in two days. I hadn't had the chance to learn the language, and I don't speak English. I am homeless in Athens, surviving in very difficult conditions, and I am on a waiting list for one of the few shelters available. I'm trying to learn Greek quickly so I can find a job."

Additionally, access to public service platforms (banks, tax offices, DYP, etc.) remains extremely challenging, as they are exclusively in Greek or difficult to navigate due to required procedures





(electronic or phone appointments), while the population lacks the necessary technical resources. Due to data protection regulations, in some services, a third party is not allowed to make appointments, complicating already difficult processes. Social workers are often required to accompany individuals to these appointments to mediate and explain requests, as bureaucratic procedures can depend on how an employee interprets the law or the operational regulations of the service.

A major issue remains the lack of interpretation services in the national healthcare system, social welfare, and government agencies. It is important to understand that in some cases, an individual's life is at risk when they have no one to accompany them.

**A 26-year-old from Pakistan shares:**

"I am facing a very serious heart issue. If I didn't have all these people from GCR—the lawyer, the interpreter, and the social worker—supporting me, talking to my doctors, and accompanying me to the hospital, I don't know what condition I would be in right now. I wouldn't know basic information about my health, and I certainly wouldn't have been able to make the application at the hospital's protocol department".

The HELIOS program stopped all its activities at the end of August 2024, with the only exception being the continuation of rent subsidies for existing beneficiaries until the end of November 2024. The program is scheduled to resume in early 2025; however, it is important to note that it was the only program for recognized refugees, resulting in their lack of alternative support. Consequently, recognized refugees also experienced exclusion, impoverishment, danger, and housing insecurity. Furthermore, rising rental prices in urban centers create a literally hopeless situation.

Finally, it should be noted that material support programs from NGOs and other organizations have significantly diminished, resulting in unmet basic livelihood needs for many people. Despite this, our service has managed to place the most vulnerable cases in shelters through exceptional requests to the relevant ministry and after considerable pressure.

It is important to emphasize that both asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection

continue to face multiple exclusions due to the lack of a comprehensive national policy, from reception to integration. For beneficiaries of international protection, the absence of a viable support framework and integration policy leads many to feel compelled to leave for other EU countries, risking their return to the host country. Unfortunately, there were several cases of returns in 2024.

**A 24-year-old mother of three from Cameroon states:**

«From the HELIOS program, I managed to receive only two months of rent assistance. I owe over five months, and fortunately, the landlord allows me to pay her in small amounts. My relatives abroad send me money; otherwise, I would be on the street. The clothes, milk, and diapers for the children, as well as medication and meals that you provide, has literally saved me».

**Psychosocial Support**

In 2024, the Social Services Department provided daily counseling support, assistance with medical and bureaucratic matters, as well as issues related to integration and everyday life. It also offered appropriate information tailored to each request and, in particularly vulnerable cases, accompaniment to ensure better or urgent access to services.». Social workers prepared social reports to support asylum applications, helping to present the individual's vulnerable situation. Additionally, the Social Services Department collaborates and mediates with many community services to ensure comprehensive service provision according to each case's needs

For example, there is consistent and ongoing collaboration with physical and mental health services, hospitals, health centers, NGOs, volunteer organizations, schools and educational institutions, other community organizations, and the relevant authorities (such as Ministries, the Ombudsman, the National Centre for Social Solidarity—EKKA, the police, anti-trafficking services, the Competent Referral Mechanism, the Child Ombudsman, etc.)

The Social Services Department receives multiple and diverse requests from individuals in various circumstances. For example, it supports former prisoners, asylum seekers, and recognized refugees that need information and counseling on integration





issues, survivors of torture, domestic violence, trafficking, homeless individuals, unaccompanied minors, single-parent families, and people with disabilities, while primarily collaborating with the relevant authorities on asylum matters. In 2024, there was close cooperation with the Intercultural Center of GCR "Pyxida", with referrals for language courses and remedial teaching, as well as collaboration with a child psychologist on issues related to children's mental health and the well-being of their families. Additionally, the Social Services Department supports individuals through representation and advocacy within services and within the community, providing personal assistance and training to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how each service operates, aiming for the autonomy of the individual. The professional social workers of the Department responded, as every year, to urgent requests that come either in person to the organization's offices or as internal referrals (from the Legal Service or the Interpretation Service), from the UNHCR or community services. For example, their collaboration with survivors of the shipwreck in Pylos continued this year, providing counseling support, addressing integration issues, and assisting with job placements in some cases. The counseling

and therapeutic relationships established with the beneficiaries, as well as the creation of a stable point of reference, play a crucial role in defending and supporting individuals' rights.

**Somali young man, 21 years old:**

"I've been living on the streets for two months, and my mind is playing strange tricks on me. No hospital would accept me because I can't speak English well, and they send me away. It's probably also because of my appearance. Fortunately, you let me stay in your space for a few hours. I feel safe and dignified here. You treat me very well, and the conversations we have every week help me feel less lonely. The medication that the psychiatrist you referred me to has given me has helped me a lot."

**Education**

According to Greek legislation, children seeking asylum must attend public schools under the same conditions as Greek citizens. Despite the provision for the creation of reception classes, they often do not start on time due to understaffing or an insufficient number of teachers. This results in the exclusion of

children who do not understand Greek, as they face difficulties in comprehending lessons, leading to increased school dropout rates throughout the year. Additionally, poor living conditions in accommodation facilities, along with the isolation of these facilities in remote areas with inadequate transportation, further hinder access to public education.

The closing of the ESTIA accommodation program and the relocation of families to camps far from the city had serious implications, such as the abrupt change in school, social, and friendship environments, as well as the disruption of daily activities. This had a negative impact on the mental health of the children and the family balance, creating a sense of despair and undermining the integration process. Integration can only be achieved within urban environments and neighborhoods, not in remote camps.

GCR contributes significantly to the facilitation of the enrollment of children in public schools at all educational levels throughout the year. Families often struggle to prove their residence with official documents, which are considered necessary. The Social Services Department, through continuous interventions and collaboration with schools and educational authorities, has made this process easier for a significant number of children. Additionally, successful enrollments and applications for younger children (infants and toddlers) have taken place this year in childcare centers. Within the framework of the Intercultural Center "Pyxis," children received remedial teaching and support throughout the year for their school subjects.

**As a Syrian mother of two minor children notes:**

"If you hadn't helped me with the Principal of the Elementary School and accompanied me to the school, my children wouldn't have been placed in a class. I had gone many times, and they kept telling me either that there were no spots available and that I had to come back later, or that documents were missing. Thank you very much for taking care of my children. May God bless you."

**As an Intercultural Center "Pyxida"**

In the past year, "Pyxida" provided psychological support services, adult and youth education, as well as theater play groups. The psychosocial and educational services of PYXIS benefited 306 children and 41 parents/guardians.

**Psychological Support and Counseling**

The child psychologist at the Intercultural Center "Pyxida" offered psychological support through individual sessions. The challenges faced by the children and families were numerous and multifaceted, including:

- Anxiety, phobias, and emotional instability as a result of traumatic experiences and uncertainty
- Difficulty adapting to the new environment and social isolation
- Language barriers and learning difficulties affecting school integration
- Sleep disturbances and somatic symptoms of anxiety
- Family difficulties such as lack of stability, parental burnout, and limited support networks

Through these individual sessions, children were able to express their worries and emotions, develop coping mechanisms for anxiety, and enhance their mental resilience. At the same time, parents received guidance to better understand their children's needs and strengthen their parenting skills.

The collaboration of the Intercultural Center «Pyxida» with other organizations has been crucial for providing comprehensive support to children and their families.

Through networking and collaboration with other NGOs, social services, schools, accommodation facilities, and health agencies, we managed to ensure immediate and personalized psychosocial support for families in need, enhance the school adjustment of children, and provide medical and psychiatric referrals for children with more serious psychological or developmental needs.

**Additionally:**

- Theater workshops were held with 367 participants.
- Book workshops were organized with 114 participants.
- Visits to 3 museums and several art workshops were conducted within the Pyxida facility.
- Specially designed workshops on children's rights were conducted, with the participation of 43 teenagers.
- Adult and children's education in Greek at PYXIS was carried out with the help of volunteer teachers and students as part of their internships. In total, 3 Greek language classes for adults, one remedial teaching class, and one English class were held.





## Employment

The Social Service provided job counseling, enabling many individuals to prepare for their job search and integration into the labor market. This support was crucial for their survival, social inclusion, and enhancing their optimism for the future, both for themselves and their families. According to the Asylum Code (Article 26, Law 5038), recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have full and automatic access to the labor market, under the same conditions as nationals, without the need for a special work permit. Nevertheless, in practice, their integration into the labor market faces significant obstacles, such as the lack of essential identification documents (e.g., activated AMKA), high unemployment rates, and increased competition with workers who speak Greek.

Third-country nationals are disproportionately represented in unemployment rates. According to the Public Employment Service (DYPA), the number of registered unemployed third-country nationals reached 124,992 in 2024. Meanwhile, the process for activating the AMKA (social security number) for beneficiaries of international protection has become stricter. As per the Joint Ministerial Decision that came into effect in December 2023, proof of residence must include either an employer's certificate, a registered employment contract in the Ministry of Employment's Information System (ERGANI), or a certificate of registration for self-employment from the tax office. This complicates access for this population to the unemployment card issuance process and related benefits.

The employment office further developed job counseling tools, expanded the network of employers, and increased the number of available safe job positions in various sectors, ensuring future collaborations for 2025. At the same time, it strengthened communication with employers, focusing on ensuring the quality of job positions. Additionally, it has extensive knowledge of the latest developments in the legal framework concerning the service's target group.

However, significant challenges were encountered, such as beneficiaries living in remote areas, which made it difficult to meet basic needs (nutrition, clothing, healthcare) and often hindered or interrupted their preparations (job counseling appointments, Greek and English classes, medical care) or even starting work. Additionally, time-consuming bureaucratic processes for obtaining legal documents, such as AMKA and AFM (tax identification number) for new workers and activating AMKA after recognition, caused serious difficulties for many clients who possess the necessary qualifications for stable employment.

### A 25-year-old from Cameroon states:

"You helped me find my dignity again as a person with this job. Thank you very much".

### A 43-year-old mother of five from Syria shares:

"Through this job, I am insured and can think about the future for myself and my children as a single mom. I have made friends at work, something I have never had in my life. I am grateful to you".



1. Among others: Ombudsman, National Commission for Human Rights, Council of Europe, Committee against Torture, United Nations Commissioner for Migrants' Rights, UNHCR, International Organization for Migration, etc.
2. GCR Information Note, updated up to 18/2/2025, <https://gcr.gr/en/news/item/1984-information-note/>
3. National Human Rights Commission, <https://nchr.gr/index.php/mixanismos-katagrafis.html>
4. GCR, "At Europe's Borders: Between Impunity And Criminalization", March 2023, <https://www.gcr.gr/el/ekdoseis-media/reports/item/2110-at-europe-s-borders-between-impunity-and-criminalization>
5. GCR, "At Europe's Borders: Pushbacks Continue as Impunity Persists", November 2024, <https://gcr.gr/en/news/press-releases/item/katadiki-tis-elladas-gia-proti-fora-gia-pushback-ston-evro-apo-to-eyropaiko-dikastirio-dikaionaton-toy-anthropoy/>
6. Summary of the judgment, as published by the Court of Justice, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%7B%22site%22:%5B%22003-7380289-10089391%22%5D%7D>
7. THE PYLOS SHIPWRECK: A CLONE CASE 1 YEAR AFTER THE ISSUANCE OF SAFI JUDGMENT? [https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/GCR\\_ECRE\\_Submission\\_on\\_SAFI\\_and\\_others\\_application\\_no\\_5418\\_15.pdf](https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/GCR_ECRE_Submission_on_SAFI_and_others_application_no_5418_15.pdf)

8. <https://www.tovima.gr/2023/11/09/society/nayagio-stin-pylo-aneksartiti-ereyna-apo-ton-synigoro-tou-politi/f>
9. <https://twitter.com/EleonoraVasques/status/1752762391605965185>
10. <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/el/doc/correspondence/el/182671>
11. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/pylos-shipwreck-the-greek-authorities-must-ensure-that-effective-investigations-are-conducted>  
[https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/video/exchange-of-views-on-the-migrant-boat-shipwreck-off-the-coast-of-greece-extracts\\_1243537](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/video/exchange-of-views-on-the-migrant-boat-shipwreck-off-the-coast-of-greece-extracts_1243537)
12. ΣτΕ ΟΛ 177/2023 (Ακυρωτικό) Νομική εκπροσώπηση: Ελληνικό Συμβούλιο για τους Πρόσφυγες (ΕΣΠ) & Υποστήριξη Προσφύγων στο Αιγαίο (RSA) Εθνικός κατάλογος ασφάλων τρίτων χωρών - GCR  
[https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/video/exchange-of-views-on-the-migrant-boat-shipwreck-off-the-coast-of-greece-extracts\\_1243537](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/video/exchange-of-views-on-the-migrant-boat-shipwreck-off-the-coast-of-greece-extracts_1243537)
13. <https://gcr.gr/en/gcr-reports/>
14. <https://gcr.gr/en/gcr-reports/item/sta-synora-tis-eyropis-epanaproothiseis-ypo-kathestos-atimorisi-as/>
15. Greek Council for Refugees, 2nd Issue of the Asylum Case Law Bulletin 2023, available at: [Δημοσιεύθηκε το Τεύχος 2/2023 του Δελτίου Νομολογίας Ασύλου - GCR](#)



# GCR Interventions

## A. Legal Assistance

### Provision of legal and psychosocial support through reception groups

Partner: UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Implementation Period: 1/1/2024 – 31/12/2024

Location: Attica, Thessaloniki

The project aimed to provide legal assistance to asylum seekers and refugees at all stages of the asylum process and other procedures related to their legal status. The type of assistance included providing information, counseling, and representation before the authorities during the asylum process at both first and second instances, during family reunification procedures under the Dublin III Regulation, and support for recognized refugees. Additionally, the project included providing psychosocial support to ensure individuals' access to rights and services. The assistance included providing information, support during the asylum process, counseling, and relevant interventions for medical, educational, and housing issues, among others.

During this project, 726 asylum seekers and refugees received legal assistance in Athens and 398 in Thessaloniki. Correspondingly, 613 individuals received psychosocial support in Attica and 260 in Thessaloniki. Many cases were supported before the European Court of Human Rights, as well as Civil and Administrative Courts, with positive outcomes, and many individuals obtained refugee status.

### Provision of Legal Support to Individuals in Detention

Partner: UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Implementation Period: 1/1/2024 – 31/12/2024

Location: Athens and Thessaloniki

The project aimed to provide legal assistance to individuals in detention, ensuring their access to rights and the asylum process. The team conducted regular visits to detention facilities and police stations in Attica and Thessaloniki, as well as missions to other detention centers (Korinthos, Paranesti, Xanthi, Orestiada). The assistance included support at all stages of the asylum process through counseling and representation, as well as appeals before administrative and judicial authorities for the release

from detention. Additionally, the detention team carried out institutional interventions and submitted reports to Independent Authorities and International Human Rights Protection Mechanisms, both to support cases and to address systemic issues.

In total, 240 individuals in detention received legal support in Attica and 164 in Northern Greece. The team filed objections against detention for 115 individuals before the Police and for 27 before the Courts. Furthermore, many cases were supported before the European Court of Human Rights. Following the team's actions, at least 48 individuals in detention were released. The team's interventions not only benefited the supported cases but also contributed to addressing systemic problems.

### Provision of Legal Support on the Islands, Evros, and Crete

Partner: UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Implementation Period: 1/1/2024 – 31/12/2024

Location: Lesvos, Kos, Evros, Crete

The project aimed to provide legal assistance to asylum seekers and refugees during all stages of the asylum process and other procedures related to their legal status. Specifically, the key actions included counseling and representation before the authorities during the asylum process, family reunification procedures, interventions for the removal of detention and geographical restrictions, and actions to assess vulnerability.

In 2024, a total of 1,366 asylum seekers and refugees received legal assistance. With the support of GCR, among other outcomes, over 90 individuals managed to obtain refugee status, and a significant number of those in detention were released. Many cases were supported before the European Court of Human Rights, as well as in criminal and civil courts. Additionally, the team conducted institutional interventions to address systemic issues identified on the islands.



## B. Support for Vulnerable Individuals

### Restoration of Torture Victims

Duration of Implementation: 1/1/2015 – 31/12/2025

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

Location: Athens

**Objectives:** The project aims to provide various forms of support exclusively to victims of torture and their family members, through the provision of individualized rehabilitation services for torture victims by professionals.

**Expected Outcomes:** a) Detailed documentation of 50 cases, b) Development of 50 individualized rehabilitation plans, c) Provision of legal and social services to 50 torture victims.

### HEROES – Novel Strategies to Fight Child Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking Crimes and Protect their Victims

Duration of Implementation: 1/12/2021 – 30/11/2024

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID, UNIVERSITY OF KENT, VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL, UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DE CAMPINAS, Universidade de Brasília – UnB, INSTITUT NATIONAL DE RECHERCHE EN INFORMATIQUE ET AUTOMATIQUE, CENTER FOR SECURITY STUDIES, INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR MIGRATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT, International Center for Missing and Exploited Children Switzerland, OPTIMIZACION ORIENTADA A LA SOSTENIBILIDAD SL, DATA CENTRIC SERVICES S.R.L., TRILATERAL RESEARCH LIMITED, Centre for Women and Children Studies (CWCS), KOPZI, ASSOCIACAO PORTUGUESA DE APOIO A VITIMA, Fundación Renacer, ESPHERA – CULTURAL, AMBIENTAL E SOCIAL, Associação Brasileira de Defesa da Mulher da Infância e da Juventude, MINISTERIO DEL INTERIOR, GREEK POLICE, IEKSLIETU MINISTRIJAS VALSTS POLICIJA STATE POLICE OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, GLAVNA DIREKTSIA BORBA S ORGANIZIRANATA PRESTUPNOST, Israel National Police, Secretaria de Inteligencia Estratégica de Estado – Presidencia

de la República Oriental del Uruguay, Policía Federal, Federal Highway Police, Policía Nacional de Colombia

Funding: European Commission (H2020)

**Objectives:** The project aims to develop technological tools for better prevention and response to human trafficking and the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. It also aims to create tools for providing improved services to victims of such criminal acts. These tools are targeted at judicial and police authorities, civil society organizations, and the general public.

**Activities and Results:** Within the framework of the project, the Greek Council for Refugees has conducted research on the educational and pedagogical needs of the end users of the technologies and strategies to be developed by the project and has compiled a relevant report. GCR also participated in other aspects of the research, co-organized informative workshops with other partners, and contributed to the communication and dissemination of the project results.

### DIRECT: Develop Coordination with Migrants to Enhance Inclusion of Trafficked Persons

Duration of Implementation: 01/04/2023 – 31/05/2025

Partners: ASSOCIAZIONE DELLA CROCE ROSSA ITALIANA (Coordinator), ASSOCIAZIONE IROKO ONLUS, INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE IRC DEUTSCHLAND, HET NEDERLANDSE RODE KRUIS, STICHTING FAIRWORK, CRUZ ROJA ESPANOLA

Funding: AMIF-2022-TF1-AG-THB

**Objectives:** DIRECT aims to prevent human trafficking and promote the inclusion of third-country nationals who are considered victims of trafficking. The project is implemented by a transnational consortium of organizations active in Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, and Greece, which host a significant number of third-country nationals and are experiencing an increasing flow of migrants and refugees through the Mediterranean and Balkan routes. In light of identified gaps in the national state mechanisms of the participating organizations, the project aims to facilitate the timely identification of trafficking victims while promoting their socio-economic inclusion.

**Activities and Expected Results:** To achieve these objectives, partners will provide specialized training in technical professions and social skills aimed at empowering individuals. They will also target communities and frontline professionals for awareness-raising and training.

### Results:

- Risk assessment and evaluation for 129 individuals at risk of trafficking, including specialized legal counseling and support, as well as additional services for their broader social needs.
- Individualized career counseling for 39 individuals, job orientation, and connection to the labor market, offering empowerment workshops and social skills development based on the methodology to be developed within the project.
- Awareness-raising and community education through targeted meetings and skill development workshops for 133 individuals, along with an information campaign that reached over 3,000 people through social media interactions.

### WomEn CARE

Duration of implementation: 1/01/2024–28/02/2025

Funding: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons

The project aims to provide immediate assistance and protection to vulnerable victims of trafficking (women and girls) and their children. Improving health and well-being, facilitating social integration, and preventing the re-trafficking of vulnerable victims of human trafficking.

### Results:

- Provision of legal services to 50 victims/potential victims of human trafficking.
- Provision of psychosocial support to 50 victims/potential victims of human trafficking
- Provision of training and integration services, including vocational counseling.
- 330 interventions for liaison and referral to public services and other civil society organizations.
- 100 victims/potential victims of human trafficking were provided with access to legal services
- 100 victims/potential victims of human trafficking

## C. Integration

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

Duration of implementation: 01/01/2022 – 31/8/2024

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

Place of implementation: Athens, Thessaloniki

The aim of the project is to enhance the prospects of independence and autonomy of the beneficiaries by making them active members of Greek society and to create an integration mechanism for these groups that will also constitute a rotational housing mechanism in the already existing temporary housing system of Greece. The activities of the program include integration courses, housing support, employment support, monitoring of the integration process and awareness-raising in the host communities.

GCR implements the HELIOS integration program supporting beneficiaries of international protection and beneficiaries of temporary protection by conducting courses in Integration Training Centers in Athens until October 2023 and in Thessaloniki until March 2023, where each course lasted 6 months and included modules related to Greek language learning, cultural orientation, work readiness and other soft skills. At the same time, GCR implements activities to support beneficiaries for independent housing in apartments rented in their name, providing them with contributions for rental (for a period of 12 months) and moving expenses as well as networking opportunities with apartment owners.

495 beneficiaries have participated in the Greek language and soft skills courses conducted by GCR teachers. Thirteen beneficiary students passed the May 2023 Greek Language Proficiency Certificate Examination 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 Centers.

More than 3,000 beneficiaries have received services related to their housing, through access to the available apartments of the Program (more than 200

apartments have been checked all over Greece by the Housing Officers, whose details have been posted on the heliospiti.com platform to which all beneficiaries of the Program have access), with interpretation support before and during the signing of the lease contract, with the verification of the monthly rent subsidy documents, as well as communication with public services. During the Program, organized weekly visits are carried out by mixed teams of GCR and IOM employees to Shelter/Temporary Reception Facilities in Attica, Central and Eastern Macedonia and Central Greece.

Providing legal support to refugees during the family reunification process

Partner: UNHCR  
Implementation period: 1/1/2024 – 31/12/2024  
Implementation location: Athens

The project concerned the provision of legal assistance to recognized 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 activities included legal advice, interventions and representation before the competent authorities (services, Consulates, Administrative Court, etc.), assistance with the issuance of the necessary travel and other documents, certificates and tickets for the transfer of family members to Greece.

Under the project in 2024, 108 cases were supported involving 483 persons (120 refugees in Greece and 363 members in their countries of origin or in third countries outside the EU). For most cases, multiple interventions were made before the competent authorities. In addition, the team supported three cases before the European Court of Human Rights.

It is worth noting that the process has many structural and systemic problems, multiple legal actions are required, and most cases are ongoing for many years before they are concluded. However, with the assistance of the GCR, 19 cases have been successfully concluded, and 57 persons have been brought back to Greece and reunited with their families.

“Thesaurus IV” - Engaging the Community  
Funding: Alta Mane Foundation

Duration of implementation: 1/1/2024 - 31/12/2024  
Funding: Alta Mane Foundation  
Place of implementation: Athens, Intercultural Centre Pyxida

The project THESAURUS IV - Engaging the Community has been successfully completed, achieving significant results in enhancing the cultural and social integration of refugee and migrant children. The project included theatre workshops, book workshops, museum visits and art workshops, creating a wide range of educational and creative opportunities. A total of 500 children aged 7-18 participated in at least one of the activities (195 unique participants).

**Theatre workshops:** They promoted self-confidence, emotional expression and teamwork. Children developed communication and empowerment skills through experiential activities.

**Children rights workshops:** Children and adolescents were informed about their rights through creative methods and participatory dialogue.

Visits to museums & art workshops: TChildren were exposed to cultural heritage and contemporary art, enhancing their sense of inclusion and cultural recognition.

Despite challenges such as language barriers and varying levels of participation, the project succeeded in creating safe and creative spaces for children’s development. Positive feedback from participants confirmed the necessity and value of these activities, laying the groundwork for their continuation in the future.

D. Monitoring / Advocacy

EU Funds for Fundamental Rights – FURI

Duration of Implementation: 1/1/24 – 31/12/26  
Partners: Bridge EU, Awen Amenca, European Network on Independent Living, Stowarzyszenie Instytut Niezaleznego Zycia, Nezavisima Ekspertna Mrezha Nie Sdruzenie, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, Validity Alapitvany, Partners Hungary Alapitvany and GCR as lead partner.  
Funding: EACEA, CERV-2023-CHAR-LITI-CHARTER

The project aims to ensure that European Union funding is used in a way that respects the rights of vulnerable groups such as Roma, people with disabilities and refugees/migrants. By working with organisations, public authorities and the media, the project will help protect the rights of these groups in EU-funded projects. FURI, aims to empower, raise awareness and prevent discrimination, in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, by implementing capacity building actions to address violations of fundamental rights as set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

- These actions include:
- Workshops.
  - Advocacy activities
  - Legal tools, such as amending relevant policies and/or legislation, judicial procedures, and filing complaints with national and European authorities.

**Outcomes:** The outcome of the FURI project is to support socially vulnerable groups, such as Roma, people with disabilities and refugees/immigrants, whose rights may not be adequately protected in the context of projects and policies funded by the European Union.

The project aims to improve their access to quality services and facilitate their social inclusion.

RELEASE Project – pRotEcting migrant chiLdrEn AgainSt detention through the EU Charter

Duration of Implementation: 03/2024 – 02/2026  
Partners: International Commission of Jurists  
European Institutions, Aditus Foundation (aditus)

– Malta, Défense des Enfants International (DEI Belgique) – Belgium, Forum for Human Rights (FORUM) – Czech Republic, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR) – Poland, Foundation for Access to Rights (FAR) – Bulgaria  
Funding: European Union (CERV-2023-CHAR-LITI)

The project seeks to deepen with a particular focus on strategic judicial processes and alternatives to detention (AtD) for migrant children who are at risk of being subjected to unlawful detention or whose rights may be violated in alternatives to detention. The main objective of the project is to contribute to an enabling environment in the EU for the protection of migrant children from detention by:

- Increasing the capacity of specialized lawyers for migrants, civil society and NHRIs from the six selected EU Member States to develop and implement effective litigation strategies in relation to (alternatives to) the detention of migrant children in order to promote and protect their rights under Article 24 of the EU Charter and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- Raising awareness of the harmful effects of detention on children among lawyers, civil society and public authorities in the target Member States.

**Results:** The primary long-term intended impact is to ensure that the principle of the best interests of the child becomes a more significant element of the jurisprudence of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the European Court of Human Rights, and the Court of Justice of the European Union, while exploring other avenues for appeal (e.g., ESC, ECHR, CAT).

Advocacy Actions for the Protection of Children’s Rights

Duration of Implementation: 01/03/2021 – 31/3/2025  
Funding: Save the Children International  
Location: Throughout Greece

Providing documented information regarding the humanitarian situation of refugee/migrant children in Greece to support stakeholders with influence at the EU level (Brussels, EU member states).

**Results/Objectives:** Publication of a bimonthly newsletter on the protection of children in Greece.



Creation of a network of civil society organizations and public entities working on child protection in Greece to further amplify the voices of refugee/migrant children and their families. Reports focusing on access to education and asylum.

Advocacy and Claiming Rights for Beneficiaries of International Protection

Funding: Oxfam Novib  
Duration of Implementation: 01/01/2022 - 30/06/2025  
Location: Throughout Greece

**Objectives:** a) Promotion of a fair and effective asylum and reception system that respects the rights of individuals seeking international protection in Greece and the EU, b) Seeking legal and political avenues to challenge the current situation at both the Greek and European levels.

**Activities:** a) Joint public statements and announcements in response to significant/unexpected developments, b) Report drafting, c) Preparation and dissemination of a bimonthly newsletter, d) Visits by the advocacy team of the ECR to islands or the mainland for gathering information and supporting material to be included in the newsletter and other joint advocacy products.

Keeping the Unwanted Away: Irregular Practices at the Borders and Informal Cooperation Among Member States to Bypass Legal European Frameworks and Human Rights

Funding: EPIM, 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 Duration: December 2020 - December 2024  
Implementation Countries: Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary

The Protecting Rights at Borders (PRAB) initiative is a collaboration of protection and legal aid organizations dedicated to monitoring the respect for human rights

at the external and internal borders of the EU. The PRAB partners have a strong presence in the field, ensuring immediate access to victims of pushbacks and leveraging their extensive experience in strategic judicial intervention.

During 2024, GCR, in collaboration with its partners, published four reports documenting the practices applied at the borders of several countries. These reports are based on monitoring protection activities and referrals of incidents for legal appeals, providing valuable insights into ongoing violations and systemic challenges at European borders.

The reports confirm that pushbacks continue to be used as a means of border management, despite clear violations of international and European law. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, states are obligated to allow people to seek asylum and uphold the principle of non-refoulement. States are legally bound to examine each case individually and treat each person with dignity, in accordance with European and international legal frameworks.

The PRAB reports serve as a crucial documentation tool, revealing human rights violations at EU borders and reinforcing the urgent need for compliance with legal obligations. These findings contribute to ongoing efforts to ensure accountability and the protection of asylum seekers.

**Reports:**  
[Prab Report January 2024](#)  
[Prab Report January-October 2024](#)

Climate Refugees

Implementation Duration: 1/7/2023 – 30/11/2025  
Partner: WWF Greece  
Funding Source: European Climate Foundation  
Implementation Area: Nationwide

The planet is burning. The summer of 2023 saw the highest global temperatures ever recorded. Successive heatwaves are impacting many parts of the world, from the USA to China, while the climate crisis is causing unprecedented weather phenomena, severe storms, and disasters.

Climate migration will inevitably be one of the most significant consequences of the climate crisis globally, triggering, as expected, a chain reaction due to the mass movement of people. Since 2008, nearly 320 million people worldwide have had no choice but to leave their homelands and relocate due to adverse climatic conditions and increasingly frequent climate disasters. In 2020 alone, around 31 million people were displaced by disasters related to abrupt changes in environmental conditions.

In this grim global context, the Greek Council for Refugees, together with WWF Greece, implemented a joint research program on the highly critical issue of climate refugees. The goal of the project’s first phase was to analyze the current situation and develop a policy proposal to address climate-induced migration from Europe, particularly regarding the legal status of climate refugees. At the end of the first phase, a report was published titled: *“Climate Refugees: Addressing climate-induced migration before it happens”*.

Since December 2024, the second phase of the project has been underway, focusing on the urgent need to understand and advocate for the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Greece who may have been forced to flee their countries due to climate-related factors.

The research focuses on analyzing the real drivers of displacement through data collection and documenting the perspectives of the refugees themselves. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the climate-related reasons that contributed to their decision to leave their countries of origin.

This phase of the project aims not only to scientifically document the phenomenon but also to strengthen efforts to protect affected individuals, while simultaneously promoting the inclusion of the issue of climate refugees in Greek and European migration policy.

Capacity Building on Strategic Litigation

Implementation Period: 01/07/2023 – 31/12/2024  
Partner: Dutch Council for Refugees  
Implementation Area: Nationwide

Within the framework of this project, the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) enhanced the capacity and expertise of its legal team in providing legal assistance to asylum seekers regarding border violence, pushbacks, and violations of the rights of recognized refugees. This was achieved, among other methods, through the undertaking and monitoring of legal cases as part of a broader strategy for the protection and promotion of human rights (strategic litigation)..

In collaboration with the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and the Dutch Council for Refugees (DCR), a training session was organized focusing on themes and cases of strategic litigation. Subsequently, strategies were developed for both areas of focus.

InteGRation: Tackling chronic challenges in the field of integration of refugees in Greece

Implementation Period: 1/8/2023 – 30/9/2024  
Partner: Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN)  
Implementation Area: Nationwide

The project “InteGRation: Tackling Chronic Challenges in the Field of Refugee Integration in Greece” marked a new approach to addressing critical integration issues for refugees in the country. Funded by the Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN) of the University of Oxford, the project supported collaboration between the international research network Border Criminologies and the Greek Council for Refugees.

The collaboration resulted in a report focusing on the effectiveness of access to the Greek justice system for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. The report was based on research that included thirty interviews with refugees from fourteen countries, as well as with members of the judiciary and lawyers specialized in asylum and migration law.



The findings highlight the challenges and barriers refugees face — from a lack of information about their rights, to the high cost of legal representation, and limited trust in the judicial system.

**The report is available [here](#).**

[Pushbacks at European borders: A reality ignored despite growing challenges - GCR](#)

### **Stop Pushbacks at European Borders and Protect Refugees**

Implementation Period: 1/6/2023 – 31/5/2026

Partner: Open Society Foundations

Implementation Area: Nationwide

The project aims to strengthen the protection of asylum seekers by ensuring their access to asylum procedures and supporting them in cases of rights violations at the borders.

### **Greek Media Discourse on Migrants and Refugees – a qualitative study**

Implementation Period: 2024

Partner: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-Office in Greece

Implementation Area: Nationwide

The study examines the portrayal of migrants and refugees in the Greek media, focusing on how migration is framed in public discourse. Greece has transformed from a country of emigration to a frontline host country for migrant flows, particularly following the geopolitical changes in Eastern Europe and the ongoing crises in the Middle East and Africa. Applying framing theory, the research examines how media narratives shape public perception. Through the analysis of 160 articles from four agenda-setting Greek media outlets—two conservative and two liberal—this study investigates the coverage of four key events related to migration: the 2016 EU-Turkey statement, the Greek-Turkish border crisis in 2020, the case of 38 migrants stranded in Evros in 2022, and the shipwreck in Pylos in 2023. The findings reveal a dominant contrast between nationalist and humanitarian arguments, with an increasing



securitization of the migration discourse since 2020. Media portrayals often present migrants as a threat to security, particularly in conservative media, while liberal media emphasize humanitarian concerns. This pilot study highlights the evolving media landscape and its role in shaping migration debates in Greece, indicating the need for further research to capture a broader range of media narratives.

**The study is available [here](#)**

### **Survey Research on why refugees were forced to leave their homes in search of protection in Greece**

Implementation Period: 2024

Partner: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-Office in Greece

Implementation Area: Nationwide

In recent years, the European Union (EU) and its member states have increasingly prioritized restricting the movement of refugees and migrants, both toward and within the EU, at the expense of their rights. This shift is reflected in agreements with third countries, such as Libya, Türkiye, and more recently Albania, Egypt, and Tunisia, aimed at halting

refugee movements. It is also evident in widespread reports of irregular forced returns (pushbacks) and a persistent lack of political will within the EU to fairly share responsibility for refugee protection. The European Pact on Migration and Asylum, agreed upon in December 2023, further reinforces these trends by externalizing asylum responsibilities and imposing stricter regulations on movement within the EU, disproportionately impacting border states.

This study seeks to assess the implications of these policy shifts through the lived experiences of refugees, emphasizing the reasons behind their movements and the choices they make. It is structured around key themes, including the motivations for leaving home countries, the conditions of transit, and the factors driving onward movement within the EU. While this research does not claim to offer a comprehensive or representative account, it provides initial insights into the effectiveness of current EU migration policies. By centering refugee voices, this study aims to contribute to a broader discussion on sustainable and rights-based policy solutions, urging EU policymakers to consider the realities faced by those affected.

**Read the full briefing [here](#)**



# Advocacy



In 2024, the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) strengthened its advocacy strategy with interventions, reports, and actions at the national and international levels, focusing on three main areas: access to territory, access to asylum, and reception conditions.

## Access to territory and reporting pushbacks

The GCR published its new report, “At Europe’s Borders: Pushbacks under Impunity,” which documents 12 cases of pushbacks in Evros, highlighting the organized and systematic nature of these practices. The report was presented to the European Parliament and European institutions, strengthening the international advocacy on the issue.

Furthermore, the landmark decision of the ECtHR in the case of A.R.E. v. Greece confirmed for the first time the systematic nature of refoulement.

## Access to asylum

The protection of the right to asylum is vital to ensuring human dignity and the rule of law. The Greek Council for Refugees is actively working to promote measures that strengthen the asylum process, protecting access to assessment procedures and providing support to asylum seekers throughout the process.

## Reception Conditions

The quality of reception conditions has a direct impact on the well-being and safety of refugees. The GCR works to improve living conditions in reception centers by promoting initiatives to provide adequate health, education, and psychosocial support services. Beyond the Report «It’s not like real life,» in partnership with Save the Children, which outlines the difficult daily life of children in refugee facilities, the GCR highlighted the gap that exists for both accompanied and unaccompanied children. We also highlighted, through a joint press release by the member organizations of the Child Rights Advocacy Network (Child Rights Advocacy Network– CRAN) the appalling conditions prevailing in the Safe Zones, while it is a priority to systematically monitor how children will be treated under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.





# Financial Information

The audit of the Balance Sheet and Financial Statements was completed on 18/03/2025 and was conducted by the certified public accounting firm SOL. The financial data was approved by the Board of Directors on 21/03/2025 and by the association's General Assembly on 29/04/2025.

Funders / Programmes / Other sources	Amount
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	1.423.590,94 €
International Organization for Migration	557.849,43 €
EU Commission Co-Funded Projects	824.946,66 €
Sigrid Rausing Trust	188.212,27 €
Oxfam	109.802,32 €
Save the children International	93.051,36 €
OSF	89.412,57 €
Other small projects (HELP & WAVE)	10.700,00 €
UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture	60.645,00 €
Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN)	46.244,69 €
Alta Mane Foundation	44.519,98 €
UN Office on Drugs and Crime	38.148,20 €
Donations - Subscriptions	35.076,09 €
WWF	24.500,00 €
Region of Attica	24.400,00 €
Private donation	23.719,11 €
Dutch Capacity Building	10537,48 €
Danish Refugee Council	10.082,51 €
AIGEAS AMKE	10.000,00 €
DLA Piper UK	9.701,14 €
Rosa Luxemburg Foundation	6.716,91 €
State Lottery	6.000,00 €
International Committee of Red Cross	5.977,65 €
European Climate Foundation	2.017,79 €
Έκτακτα Έσοδα (OVERHEAD Αποσβέσεις 2024)	87.200,00 €
Danish Refugee Council	6.265,14 €
European Network on Statelessness	573,86 €
Donations - Subscriptions	45.526,41 €
TOTAL	3.743.052,10 €



# Thank you note

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.

We kindly thank:

- The Sigrid Rausing Trust for its significant contribution during the 2020–2024 period to the organization’s development, the support of emergency needs of refugees, funding for staff training and field missions to entry points, covering unforeseen funding gaps in programs and key positions, and for its overall support in maintaining the organization’s uninterrupted operation amid an unstable, competitive, and constantly shifting socio-economic environment.
- Ms. Diane T. Coulopoulos, who for the fourth consecutive year supported the psychological support services for children and their families.
- DLA Piper UK, for strengthening GCR’s legal services.
- AIGEAS Non-Profit Civil Company, for its valuable support of integration activities through the Pyxida program
- The volunteer organization INGO Global Brigades, for its support of GCR’s legal services.
- The Greek America Foundation, for its valuable support and collaboration.
- Ms. Eleni Fergadi, honorary member of the GCR Assembly, for her generous donation

- The family and relatives of Georgios Nannos, for their donation in his memory.
- The students from HAN University of Applied Sciences (Amsterdam), for their generous donation.
- The company Universal Travel Group, for its valuable donation.

Special thanks go to Thomas Sideris, who generously made his film « Gas Station or the Pigeons of Lahore» available free of charge for a special screening event for GCR supporters at the Greek Directors’ Guild screening room.

We also thank the members and donors of our organization for their trust and tangible support.

A heartfelt thank you goes to our volunteers, who enthusiastically and consistently support our work.

Lastly, we thank all GCR staff, who, with dedication and professionalism, stand by the side of our beneficiaries.



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