



# Women's Protection and Empowerment Greece programme

## Context

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) among refugee populations is quite prevalent in humanitarian emergency situations<sup>1</sup> and available data represent only a small fraction of the actual number of incidents. GBV against refugee and migrant women and girls in Greece includes early and forced marriage, forced sexual exploitation, domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment and physical assault<sup>2</sup>.

The national public support services for GBV survivors in Greece have been faced with the challenge of providing support, adjusted to needs of culturally diverse populations. To help address this challenge, NGOs, including women's organisations, have created targeted services for migrant and refugee GBV survivors.

## IRC Hellas Women's Protection and Empowerment Programming

Between 2015 and 2017, IRC Hellas operated women's safe spaces in refugee camps across Greece. Since 2018, the IRC has focused on building the capacity of government institutions, municipalities and local organisations to provide support to GBV survivors.

Since 2018, trainings have been offered to more than 140 GBV front-line service responders, such as police officers, midwives, psychologists from government institutions, municipalities, hospitals and NGOs, in Athens, Lesbos and Northern Greece. The trainings cover guiding principles, types of GBV, legal framework, referral pathways, risk mitigation for women and girls, case management of GBV and LGBTQI and male survivors of sexual abuse, as well as legal management of GBV cases.



*Training to front-line service responders in Athens, 2019*

During 2018, the IRC and its implementing partner, Diotima, also offered support services, case management, legal aid and empowerment activities to refugee GBV survivors, both female and male, in Athens and Thessaloniki. 280 people were reached through this programme.

In September 2018, the launch of the SURVIVOR project for engaging refugee and migrant women and girls survivors of GBV, brought together key state institutions, namely the *General Secretariat for Family*

<sup>1</sup> [Gender-Based-Violence in Emergencies](#), Commissioned and published by the Humanitarian Practice Network at ODI Number 60 February 2014

<sup>2</sup> [UNHCR Initial Assessment Report: Protection Risks for Women and Girls in the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis](#). Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2016

*Policy and Gender Equality* and 'KETHI' (National Research Centre for Gender Equality) with the civil society actors *Diotima* and the IRC, to implement a joint project. They were joined by EU consortium partners *Alliance for Protection from Gender-based Violence* in Bulgaria, *Forum Réfugiés – Cosi* in France, the *social services of Municipality of Palermo* in Italy and *Agisra*, a GBV organisation in Germany.

The aim of the SURVIVOR project is to strengthen the existing national GBV prevention and response services in Greece, such as counseling centers, safe shelters and the SOS hotline for women survivors of GBV and their children, by building their capacity to reach GBV survivors from the refugee and migrant populations. The overall objectives of the action are to enhance the quality of and access to services for refugee and migrant GBV survivors in Greece and to strengthen GBV programming through transnational dialogue, as well as sharing of GBV best practices, resources and tools in Greece and Europe.

## Lessons Learned & Best Practices

The lack of reliable and comprehensive data, both in respect of GBV in general and among the refugee and migrant populations in particular, hinders policy design and replication of effective policy measures, as well as credible evaluations, based on measurable outcomes. What is still needed in Greece, is the establishment of networks among state agencies and NGOs, together with the appointment of a national coordinator to facilitate communication and sharing of information. These steps can ensure that the services for survivors of GBV are more easily accessible and that each person in need of services, is properly guided through a functional, non-bureaucratic and efficient referral pathway.

Available data indicate the need for a gender sensitive approach among all professionals who are usually the first contacts for GBV survivors, such as police officers, medical practitioners, helpline staff and the personnel of counseling centres and shelters for women experiencing different forms of GBV. It is common knowledge, corroborated by relevant research and NGOs' field experience that the police often discourage women from lodging complaints about GBV and that medical practitioners may fail to support GBV survivors who come up with unlikely excuses to explain their injuries.

*"It is crucial that professionals supporting survivors of gender-based violence such as social workers like myself, police officers and health professionals are aware and informed of how to safely locate and help refugee and migrant women"*

Eleni, social worker who participated in IRC trainings

Migrant survivors of GBV often face additional obstacles such as stereotypes, which prevail even amongst professionals, who may connect the violence with cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and appear more tolerant towards the violent incidents described by migrant survivors, compared to Greek ones. The lack of gender and cultural sensitisation among front line professionals, often limits their capacity to respond to the needs of refugee and migrant survivors of GBV.

Moreover, programmes to enhance empowerment and build life skills for survivors of GBV are, by large, inadequate. Encouraging the participation of migrant and refugee women and girls, as well as the community -refugee and local- to stand up for their rights, should become a central component in GBV response programmes in Greece.

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