



# IRC Hellas in 2018



Ensuring access to clean water in the refugee camp of Kara Tepe on Lesbos

**HISTORY**

With nearly one million new arrivals to its shores, Greece witnessed an unprecedented number of asylum seekers entering – and mostly transiting – the country in 2015 and early 2016. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) launched an emergency assessment on the Greek island of Lesbos in June 2015, and by the next month had established IRC Hellas and its first operations in response to the developing humanitarian crisis. In March 2016, the closure of the “Balkan Route” and introduction of the EU-Turkey Deal led to a drastic reduction in arrivals and forced those who had arrived previously, but had not yet transited, to stay in Greece. Still, arrivals never ceased. During 2018, 50,508 people crossed into Greece, 32,494 via the sea borders and 18,014 via the land borders, a rise from the 36,310 arrivals of 2017.

As of December 2018, an estimated 71,200 refugees and asylum seekers, including over 3,700 unaccompanied children were in Greece. 14,600 stayed on the Greek islands and 56,600 on the mainland, of which about 20,000 in camps, 22,000 in state-provided urban accommodation and the rest were self-settled.

The IRC started operating in Greece in July 2015 and initially received refugees<sup>1</sup> at the shores on Lesbos and transported them to the island’s capital. The IRC was instrumental in establishing Kara Tepe, the major site on Lesbos that hosts the most vulnerable, by building and maintaining the major Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure and providing protection services (Child Protection, Women’s Protection and Empowerment, and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support). In October 2015, IRC and Mercy Corps set up Refugee.Info, an information platform providing refugees with necessary information adapted to the changing context. When the country borders along the Balkan route closed, the IRC started operating in sites in Northern Greece, again largely focusing on WASH and the three protection streams. Later on, the IRC opened operations in three sites in Attica (greater Athens area) with a similar portfolio. In 2016, the IRC was also among the first organizations to provide cash assistance to refugees, which it ended in 2017 when the UNHCR-led cash alliance was covering the needs of all asylum seekers and refugees.

Recognizing that the emergency was over but that asylum seekers and refugees would continue requiring sustainable services for reception and integration, the IRC adapted its portfolio in 2017 and 2018. Already in 2017, the IRC started offering integration services by supporting refugees to access employment. During the year 2018, the IRC stopped providing direct services in mainland sites, focusing instead on the urban areas only. By late 2018, the IRC’s portfolio was thus comprised of: Refugee.Info, Child Protection, Women’s Protection and Empowerment, and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, Integration support, and ongoing service delivery in Kara Tepe site.

**MISSION & VISION**

The mission of the IRC is to help people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control of their future. The vision of the IRC is to lead the humanitarian field by implementing high-impact, cost-effective programs for people affected by crisis, and by using our learning and experience to shape policy and practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless specifically mentioned (e.g. by contrasting refugee with asylum seeker, migrant, etc.), for simplicity sake, the term “refugee” is used in this document to refer to all types of migrants and legal statuses.

## 2018 PORTFOLIO REVIEW

**Outcome areas**

Outcome areas of the 2018 portfolio are broken down as follows:

1. Safety;
2. Health;
3. Economic & Resource Development;
4. Power.

**Safety**1.1 Child Protection

In 2018, the IRC ran a residential program that provided 24/7 care for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in two camps. These 'Safe Zones' had a total capacity of 60 spaces (30 children per location) and served children who would otherwise be in detention, considered in Greece as a protective measure in the absence of appropriate places. The program aimed to keep children in the Safe Zones for the time required to transition a child to a durable solution, whether that is placing them in shelters, in alternative care or facilitating their reunification with family. The Safe Zones include a range of nationalities (Syrian, Afghani, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, etc.) and all hosted unaccompanied children were male.



Unaccompanied children attend English language lessons at the Safe Zone

*“When the children first arrive at the Safe Zone they are often distant and angry. But as time goes on, I see them transform like butterflies...Some children are lonely. We try and not let them be secluded and integrate them with the team. Slowly, they start to open up. All of them show a desire to have new experiences.” – Ketty, IRC caregiver working with unaccompanied children at the Safe Zone*

As IRC is always trying to make sure our beneficiaries are protected, surveys are conducted to see how beneficiaries feel with the services provided. At the Safe Zones, such surveys indicated that 73% of the children when asked “how safe do you feel in this safe zone” answered that they feel ‘Very safe’ (73%) while 15% answered ‘Safe’. Additionally, 76% of the children surveyed said that they felt safer in the camp having an IRC caseworker as a reference person.

In spring 2018, the IRC conducted a thorough process to identify a partner to whom we could hand over the Safe Zones. From October 2018, our partner the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) successfully continued operating the Safe Zones. In 2018, 195 children in total were hosted in the Safe Zones, while UASC living among the general population of the camp of Eleonas were also supported.

Moreover, the IRC provided case management to children in four camps in Greece (Eleonas, Skaramagkas Alexandria and Veria). In what is widely considered a protection emergency with exceptionally high levels of reported cases, in 2018, the IRC responded to over 249 children directly through case management, and increased the capacity of other actors to prevent and respond in the event of a case being identified.

In urban Athens, the IRC worked with its implementing partner, Faros, an organization doing street work with a social worker and a cultural mediator to identify UASC. Over the project duration, Faros reached a total of 389 UASC, many of whom were homeless or living in precarious conditions with unrelated adults, and 96 refugee and asylum-seeking family members that were also provided with key information. They were informed of their rights and of services they could access to cover basic needs and to receive free legal counselling, especially important for undocumented UASC. In addition, they were linked with the Faros Drop-In Center, where Faros staff was ensuring, among others, that referrals for accommodation to shelters were made with the relevant authorities.

## 1.2 Women's Protection and Empowerment

After delivering direct services from 2015 to 2017, in 2018, the IRC focused on developing and delivering capacity building for government institutions, municipalities and local organizations. The IRC delivered interdisciplinary gender-based violence (GBV) trainings that focused on case management and enhancing coordination between service providers. **Trainings were offered to 120 GBV front-line service responders** including professionals such as police officers, midwives, psychologists from governmental institutions, municipalities, hospitals and NGOs in Athens and Northern Greece. They focused among others on guiding principles, different types of GBV, legal framework, referral pathways, risk mitigation for women and girls, case management of GBV and LGBTI and male survivors of sexual abuse, as well as legal management of GBV cases.

*“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 the IRC's trainings*

With its implementing partner, the leading Greek GBV organization Diotima, the IRC offered support services, case management, legal aid and socio and empowerment activities to GBV survivors, both female and male, as well as to self-identified LGBTQI survivors, in Athens and Thessaloniki. 224 people were reached through this program.

Finally, in September 2018, the launch of the SURVIVOR project brought together key state institutions, namely the General Secretary for Gender and Equality of the Ministry of Interior and KETHI-Research Centre for Gender Equality with the civil society actors Diotima and the IRC to implement a joint project. The aim of the project is to **strengthen existing GBV services in Greece—on the islands and mainland—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 and access of services for refugee and migrant

GBV survivors in Greece and to strengthen GBV programming through transnational dialogue and sharing GBV best practices, resources and tools in Greece and Europe.

The action directly benefits women and adolescent girls (14+, for informed assent) from refugee and migrant communities through partner services while men, boys, and LGBTQI from refugee and migrant communities also benefit through training of, and links to, other organizations. Beneficiaries include frontline providers, social workers; law enforcement; NGOs/ CSOs; child protection professionals; mediators; civil servants; gender quality experts; and a wider European audience of GBV-related public bodies, NGOs and practitioners working with refugee/migrant communities. Some of the main activities of the project are to expand and train female cultural mediators, train public social services staff on specialized support for GBV survivors, design and implement pre-service seminars for professionals, create a regional online platform for resource sharing and conduct exchange visits to boost cross-border learning, and European skills sharing on GBV best practices.

## Health

### 2.1 Mental Health

The IRC provided direct Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services in Eleonas, Veria and Alexandria camps and in urban Athens and Thessaloniki and in the site of Skaramangas until September 2018. The IRC and Society of Social Psychiatry & Mental Health (SSP & MH) provided services jointly, with mixed staff teams, in urban settings until May 2018. SSP & MH continued the provision of services until the end of 2018.

In total 647 women, girls, men and boys benefitted from comprehensive and client-centered counselling sessions (individual and group), psycho-education sessions and outreach activities. Awareness topics included self-harm and suicide, perceptions of mental health and coping, puberty, stress, and parenting skills.

In March 2018, the IRC started to offer its tested and comprehensive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support program on the Greek islands. Its target beneficiaries are asylum seekers that reside in the Reception and Identification Centers (RIC, also known as ‘hotspots’) of Moria on Lesbos and of Vial on Chios. They are forced to live in sub-standard, overcrowded camps, where tension and violence is a daily occurrence. These living conditions and the uncertainty about the future trigger or exacerbate pre-existing trauma.

*“I would like to thank you for your services. God bless you. Even if I was feeling awful at the beginning, I feel very well now. I recovered my hope.”*  
- Refugee client of the IRC mental health program on Lesbos

In 2018, this program supported 285 of the most vulnerable people. 55% of cases were either survivors of torture or GBV or both, with a variety of severe symptoms like depression, post-traumatic stress and suicidal ideation. Nearly 60% of IRC’s clients have considered committing suicide and half of this group (33%) have actually attempted suicide. Most clients significantly improve during the time they receive

treatment from IRC: 90% indicate that their mental health conditions have improved at the end of the treatment compared to the beginning. In addition to treating clients directly, IRC advocates for individual cases to be moved out of the hotspots and for the conditions in the hotspots to be improved. A September 2018 report “[Unprotected, Unsupported, Uncertain](#)” which was based on the findings of the mental health program was circulated among Greek and European policy-makers and it was picked up by Reuters, the New York Times, the Guardian, and the Independent. These media articles were part of the pressure on the Greek government to move refugees out of the overcrowded hotspots, with significant transfers occurring following its release.

## 2.2 Environmental Health

Since early on, the IRC committed to environmental health (EH) service provision in sites across Greece. Through a combination of hardware, distributions, and community information sessions, the IRC directly contributed to increased safety and dignity of residents. In 2018, the IRC implemented WASH activities in the Eleonas camp in Athens, benefiting in total over 2,215 residents. The IRC undertook significant infrastructural upgrades, including the rehabilitation of shelters, [installation of kitchenettes](#) and A/C units and an upgrade of the internal low voltage electrical network. Having achieved its goal of raising the level of infrastructure to meet appropriate humanitarian standards, the IRC handed over its responsibilities to the SMS agency of Eleonas in July 2018, culminating in a complete exit from the EH sector in mainland Greece.

In Lesvos, the IRC continues to lead on the provision of EH services in the municipal camp of Kara Tepe. Throughout 2018, the IRC has ensured access to critical quality WASH and shelter assistance, as well as Site Management Support services (SMS), for a total 3,787 people hosted temporarily in the site. Additionally, almost 200,000 non-food items were distributed to the refugees hosted in Kara Tepe, while transportation services also provided for the most vulnerable. The IRC has also provided cleaning, guardian services, small-scale care and maintenance of ‘Stage 2’, at the Northern shore of Lesvos that receives most of the new sea arrivals from Turkey.

A/C units at shelters of Eleonas camp, installed by IRC



### Economic Recovery and Development (ERD) Programming:

The IRC’s ERD programming in Greece started with providing emergency cash to refugees to meet their most basic needs. As the crisis persisted, and more refugees moved to cities in Greece, the IRC has focused on interventions to prepare refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable Greek people to enter the labor market. IRC works in partnership with partner organizations to deliver training and support services to help clients become employed or self-employed. IRC provides technical support to partners, including through conducting training of trainers, sharing tools and curricula, and providing guidance on best practices for project implementation.

The IRC also co-chairs the Livelihoods Committee and supports the Athens Coordination Center for Migrants and Refugee issues (ACCMR) that houses it, in close collaboration with the Athens Municipality to provide co-ordination among NGOs and community organizations for livelihoods interventions.

### 3.1 Employability programs

Since July 2017, with the support of the *Stavros Niarchos Foundation*, the IRC, together with its partners Generation 2.0 and Organization Earth, has provided market-relevant employment services to refugees and asylum seekers residing in broader Attika. Services include individual career counseling, help with job search, and employability workshops that develop crucial employability skills (for example creating CVs and cover letters, job search techniques and preparing for job interviews), as well as an introduction to labour rights and familiarisation with Greek work culture.

In addition, participants develop critical hard skills such as English, Greek language and digital skills through the provision of direct services and relevant referrals to other organisations. The development of beneficiaries' hard skills is also supported through non-formal vocational training and qualifications that can also boost self-confidence and lead towards increased access to jobs and self-employment initiatives. Between November 2017 and November 2018, 450 refugees attended the IRC's services provided by our partner Generation 2.0.

### 3.2 Self-employability programs



The IRC, together with partners Solidarity Now and Knowl, has adapted the IRC's 'Learn to Earn' business and life skills curriculum to provide youth with entrepreneurship, budgeting, financial literacy, and social and emotional skills to prepare them for self-employment. Based on business plan competitions, the IRC also provides cash grants to clients who are starting their journey to entrepreneurship. Moreover, the IRC and partners connect youth entrepreneurs with private sector mentors to provide guidance and support as they start their own businesses. One of the

beneficiaries of IRC's self-employability program Moussa (photo left) aspires to set up the [first Ivorian restaurant in Athens](#).

*"Everyone has ideas – refugees, citizens – it's important to have help to make your dream come true."*

*-Moussa, refugee, chef and entrepreneur.*

### 3.3 Working together with Municipalities and other Actors

In 2018 the IRC supported the Athens Partnership and the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR) to assist other Municipalities that are part of the ad hoc "Cities Network for Integration" to develop tools and procedures to enable and facilitate the integration of refugees and migrants within their territory. The network was set up initially by the municipalities of Athens and Thessaloniki, inviting all the municipalities who were implementing accommodation programs under the UNHCR ESTIA Accommodate scheme to participate.

The team organized bilateral meetings with ten Municipalities from the Cities Network, namely the municipalities of Thessaloniki, Tripoli, Trikala, Karditsa, Livadeia, Larissa, Nea Filadelfia, Ioannina, Piraeus and Heraklion, introducing the tools and processes already developed by the City of Athens and providing support in the form of coaching and mentoring on how to develop similar and tailored tools and processes.

The IRC also supported the Municipality of Piraeus to develop its Strategic Action Plan for the integration of migrants and refugees as well as the Municipality of Athens to develop its Emergency Preparedness Plan.

## Power

Refugee.info started as a cross-border initiative covering Greece and the Balkans, which evolved to currently cover Greece and Italy. It has three platforms, a Facebook account, a Blog, and an online platform accessible via mobile phone. People can engage directly with the Refugee.Info team in their language of choice and receive a response directly. In 2018 the Refugee.info had 96,000 unique users in Greece. Its Greece-focused Facebook page is followed by more than 115,000 people.

Through Refugee.Info, the IRC provides information on a number of available services, including education and cash assistance. The platform is trusted by its users and includes information on protection-specific issues. Additionally, provision of procedural information and refugee and migrant rights, with links to external service providers has allowed people to navigate bureaucratic processes and make choices on where to live.

*“I would love to thank your team so much. You are really great. I benefited from a lot of news and information you published, like “the European Qualification Passport for Refugees” and the “Business for Youth” workshop. Also, I asked you many questions and you helped me a lot. Saying thank you is not enough for what you did.”*

*-Beshar Alkhatib, Refugee.Info user*



Data analytics show that there are still key information gaps on relocation and reunification and frequent mistrust of official communications from the government and INGOs. Recent posts advertising language classes produced 1,200 enrolments in language.

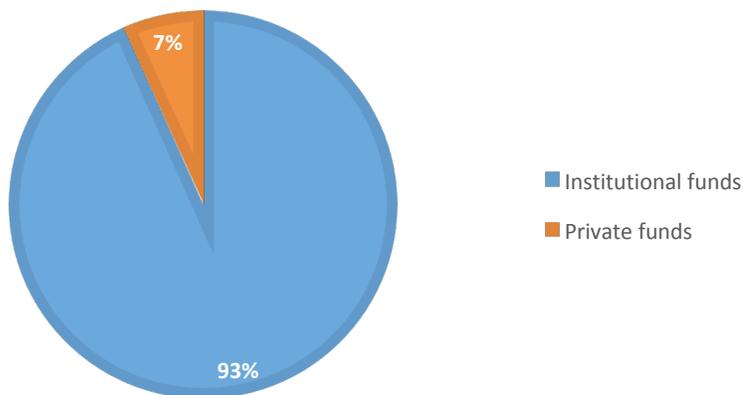
Access to education is very important for refugee children, and it is one of the many topics refugees have questions about. The Refugee.Info platform

helps refugees and asylum seekers navigate through the Greek system. You can find out more on the [questions refugees ask when they arrive in Greece](#).

**BUDGET**

During the 2018 IRC's budget reached €10,328,587. Of that €9,637,333 was from Institutional funds and €691,254 from private funds.

**2018 FUNDING**



**The IRC in Greece**



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[Rescue.org/Country/Greece](https://rescue.org/Country/Greece)

