

INTER-AGENCY PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT IN GREECE



Refugee children in Samos reception and identification centre, participate in refugee child-led groups where with the support of the implementing partner share their views, exchange opinions and empower themselves and their peers. © UNHCR/Despoina Anagnostou

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With acknowledgement
to all contributors





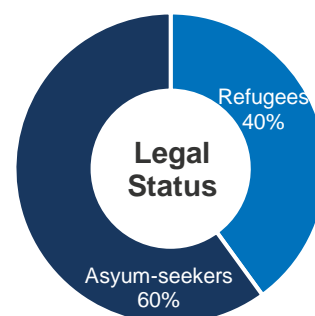
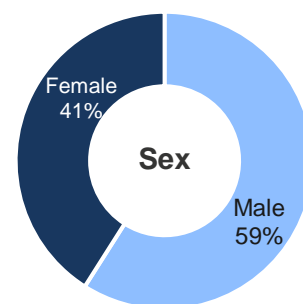
Omar, a twenty-four-year-old asylum-seeker from Afghanistan during a Greek language class at the Greek Language School of the Municipality of Neapolis-Sykeon. In parallel, he attends a Vocational High School with a specialty in Computer Science. © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.

Introduction

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, together with sister UN agencies, NGO partners, municipalities and authorities discussed with refugees¹ and asylum-seekers across Greece to identify their main concerns and key recommendations around protection and integration. A regular part of UNHCR's programming, the Participatory Assessment (PA) provides an opportunity for UNHCR and others to assess the existing humanitarian programmes and adjust future initiatives in line with refugees' feedback. In 2021, 600 asylum-seekers and refugees participated in the discussions.

They were residents of Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) on the islands and Evros, in mainland camps or urban cities across Greece.

Profile of beneficiaries participating in the assessment:



Source: UNHCR
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¹ In this report, the term refugees is used for recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.

Age and Gender	# Participants	# Male	# Female
■ Adults	442	250	192
■ Children	124	88	36
■ Unaccompanied children	57	57	-

Focus groups of specific background

Youth:

12 sessions
with a total of
59 youth aged
18-24 years old.



Persons with specific needs:

12 sessions with a total of **64** persons
with specific needs, including **older people**,
persons living with **disability** or with **chronic**
illness.



KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AS RAISED FROM REFUGEES AND ASYLUM- SEEKERS:

- **Recognized refugees** face challenges getting key documents and achieving self-reliance.
- **Women and girls** face specific dangers, which range from living in unsafe environments to risks of exploitation. Overall, women and girls have less access to information, services and social networks.
- **Greek language learning** is a precondition to integration. Participants believe that Greek language classes should be available to asylum-seekers upon arrival in Greece.
- **In-person and social media information:** there are gaps in the way information is disseminated to refugees. Refugee communities are best placed to advise how these gaps can be addressed and which communication channels should be used.



A young asylum-seeker sits outside a tent where the Greek language classes for adults are taking place in the Mavrovouni site on the island of Lesbos. © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.



Cecile, an asylum-seeker and GBV survivor from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, speaks with the subdeacon of the Catholic Church of the Assumption of Virgin Mary where she volunteers every week during Sunday mass. © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.

Security, including from gender-based violence

Residents in island RICs, mainland sites and urban areas, especially women and children, **expressed security concerns, including related to gender-based violence (GBV)**. Some refugees in RICs stated that security improved since the population in RICs reduced, and after the establishment of designated areas for single women. However, others noted that having fewer neighbours exposes them to greater risks as there is no one to intervene at night in case of an attack when there are no police night patrols.

Women and children are those found at most risk due to lack of adequate security and protection from exploitation. Security risks were reported as most severe in the city of Athens where drug dealers and human traffickers reportedly target vulnerable populations. The most common factors that increase the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) were the limited or complete lack of access to livelihoods and/or cash assistance, the limited response of authorities, poor security, uncertainty over one's future as a

“This initiative [to place women in a separate area] should have been taken earlier. Instead, many incidents had to occur for this to happen - and even then, the area was open, and men were trying to come in at night”

Cameroonian female asylum-seeker, Samos

result of unclear rights of one's legal status, and sub-standard living conditions.

Challenges

- Insecurity due to violence, drugs, alcohol, traffickers.
- Fear of retaliation and mistrust in the police to take action if GBV is reported.
- Fear of forced return/deportation.
- Lack of information on how to get support in response to a GBV incident.
- High risk of homelessness, in great part due to the discontinuation of assistance once one is recognized as a refugee.
- The limited access to assistance or employment may force single mothers to negative coping mechanisms to feed their children, such as exchanging sex for money.
- Lack of safe accommodation for GBV survivors.

Opportunities

- Refugee community members support each other to prevent or respond to security incidents, including GBV.
- There are refugee volunteers able to inform and advise their peers on GBV and on the available response services.

REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- For sites/RICs, women and children requested police patrols at night, more lighting, and locks.
- Justice for crimes committed in RICs/sites.
- Mental health support services needed as people have remained long in the RICs.
- Safe women/children's living space on-site. Allocation of women-only sections in all RICs, camps.
- Better access to services for GBV survivors, regardless of legal status or place of residence.
- Continuation of cash assistance and housing support until an alternative is found (HELIOS, state benefit, job).
- Women requested family counselling, GBV and women's rights information awareness at camps.
- Women requested support in filing a complaint for GBV at the police station.
- Refugees to be trained to provide information and support with referrals of GBV survivors.
- Recruitment of refugees who are professionals in areas related to GBV response (e.g., nurses, doctors, psychologists etc.) to strengthen the actors' services.



Syrian asylum-seeker Lana is part of a team of volunteers helping victims of sexual and domestic violence at the Vial site on Chios. © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.



Refugee volunteers at the COVID-19 information desk located in the Mavrovouni site on Lesbos. © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.

Community networks

Most communities have some level of self-organization. However, men are more likely to be aware of and participate in community meetings than women. Women, across all nationalities, are not aware of community networks, with the exception of women living in select RICs or sites where women-friendly spaces were created. ESTIA residents are more disconnected from their communities. Refugees in small communities, such as those in Kos and Leros, interact regularly with each other, therefore the need to self-organize is less necessary.

Refugee communities self-organize to support each other with information sharing, conflict management, and communication with authorities and service-providers. Refugee-led organizations in urban centres also host activities for communities to socialize and learn. They also provide food and non-food items to vulnerable households. Moreover, targeted support to refugees from individual Greeks was mentioned by asylum-seekers and refugees in many locations and of diverse nationalities.

“When I was at the RIC, everyone - women and men - always discussed issues affecting the community and tried to solve them. Even if there was a conflict within the community or between different [ethnic/national/religious] communities, we were trying to solve them”.

Male refugee from Togo/Cameroon, Kos

Challenges

- Locations with smaller or isolated populations do not have active community members.
- Refugee-led organizations in urban areas are not always representative of entire communities.
- Women are less likely to be aware of or involved in community networks.
- Self-appointed community representatives may abuse power and extort the population for free state services.
- Although relations with Greeks were overwhelmingly positive, some respondents also shared negative experiences, as well as challenges in forging closer ties with Greeks.

Opportunities

- Refugee communities are active in RICs, sites and urban areas.
- Trusted refugee community focal points support in conflict resolution amongst members.
- Individual Greeks do support refugees.
- Self-accommodated asylum-seekers and refugees have closer relationships with local, Greek communities.
- There are efforts within communities to meet often in-person or maintain contact through social media, exchange information, and mobilize community support to help families in need.

REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognize and support existing self-organized refugee communities, with frequent in-person meetings with camp management or municipal authorities.
- Assign separate/dedicated spaces for community meetings and activities in RICs, sites, municipalities.
- Greek families to host refugee families, to promote social cohesion.
- Recognize refugee community capacity at conflict management, protection identification and referral, and solutions.
- Encourage and support community initiatives and activities that promote peaceful co-existence and strengthen the sense of community.



UNHCR supports a group of asylum-seekers who voluntarily contribute to the COVID-19 prevention in Vial by sewing masks. © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.



A mobile team speaks with an unaccompanied child near the Thessaloniki train station about the Emergency Response Mechanism and the assistance it provides to unaccompanied children who are either homeless or living in precarious conditions. © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.

Information to communities

The majority of respondents said that they are unaware of their rights, while many stated that they received **zero** information on the matter. The lack of information on rights in Greece was stated consistently across RICs, mainland sites, urban areas and rural municipal areas.

Despite efforts by UNHCR, partners and other actors, the lack of Greek language skills was seen as the main barrier to being informed. **The main channels for communication are in-person information from fellow refugees, NGO staff, social workers/lawyers, as well as social media.** Participants were largely unaware of complaints mechanisms or how to report inappropriate behaviour of staff providing services to asylum-seekers and refugees.

The preferred channels for communication, in order of preference, were in-person information from refugees or NGOs, social media,

“While I was at the RIC, the persons of my country had a WhatsApp group in which we chatted. I used to get all my information through WhatsApp”.

text messages, and websites. WhatsApp is used most frequently, followed by Facebook.

Challenges

- Information available is not always reaching asylum-seekers and refugees and there is a gap in the dissemination of information.
- Illiterate community members mainly rely on others for information.
- Social media groups run by communities are not always trusted and sometimes have incorrect information.
- IOM/UNHCR/ESTIA WhatsApp groups do not inform people of their rights. The information is mainly on developments.
- Although some refugees were informed of their rights upon receiving positive decisions, it was not clear how to access these rights.

Opportunities

- Ad-hoc refugee community WhatsApp groups exist in many locations, based on language/nationality.
- Trusted community focal points serve as reference points, and information-sharing among communities works well.
- Community members can support new arrivals by providing information on the procedures, their environment and explaining how to access available services.
- Refugees who speak Greek have a better understanding of their rights.

REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Authorities, including the Asylum Service, Public Municipal services, to lead in providing official, up-to-date, consistent information in the languages of origin of refugees and asylum-seekers on rights, including refugee rights after recognition, procedures, public services, and social benefits.
- Authorities, especially site management, to have regular, direct, two-way dialogue with communities.
- A common information booth to be established in RICs, to avoid people being referred between actors.
- Regular in-person group information sessions to be arranged by RIS, followed by written information in a WhatsApp group for reference.
- RIS to provide free internet access in the RICs and sites.
- RIS authorities to establish an effective complaint mechanism in the RIC. Information about the complaint mechanism to be shared through broadcast channels regularly.
- Information channels should be adapted to reach communities in urban areas. Decentralized information on local services should be available at Municipality level. Information, including online platforms, should be available in more languages including Turkish, Somali, Lingala.
- Develop audio-visual information material on asylum-seeker and refugee rights, including access to social benefits, in languages of origin, especially for the illiterate.





Asylum-seekers attend a Greek language class in the Mavrovouni temporary site on the island of Lesbos. ©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.

Greek language

Limited or complete lack of Greek language skills was mentioned as the main obstacle in finding employment, accommodation, gaining access to services and reaching self-reliance in general.

Participants overwhelmingly and unanimously requested access to Greek language classes upon arrival in Greece. In contrast, waiting for Greek language classes to start after receiving refugee status is seen as crippling and not conducive to integration.

“If you do not know the language, you are like a blind person. If you leave him in a mountain, he will not be able to find his way”.

Iraqi male refugee, Samos

“Many times, I think that a woman in my age should only sit still and pray; but then again, as long as a person breathes, s/he should keep learning, therefore, I take my book and I go to the park and start reading Greek again”.

Afghan older female asylum-seeker

Challenges

- Limited access to Greek language classes for asylum-seekers.
- In-person Greek classes stopped due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Lack of day-care options prevent women from attending Greek classes.
- Fee requirements in formal language institutes deter refugees from enrolling in Greek classes.
- High turnover of students delays students from progressing to intermediate level.
- Prolonged stay in RICs and sites, and uncertainty about one's legal status affects mental health and demotivates refugees from learning.

Opportunities

- Self-accommodated refugees are more likely to interact with locals and practice Greek.
- Urban refugee communities have initiated Greek classes for community members.
- Willingness of asylum-seekers and refugees to learn Greek.

REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Greek language classes should be available upon arrival in Greece.
- Professional Greek language classes to be provided by the state, including at Municipal level.
- RIS to offer Greek language classes for women in women-friendly spaces in RICs and sites, offering day care adjacent to the classroom.
- Refugee-led organizations in urban areas to be supported to deliver Greek language classes and host day care.
- Access to formal education for adults and children, including Greek language courses.
- Greece to follow the example of other European states, offering language classes, teaching skills, so that people are useful to society.
- Establish Greek language courses through the internet in case of COVID-19 restrictions, in which case, internet access and devices should be made available.



A teacher at the Greek Language School of the Municipality of Neapolis-Sykeon during an online class with her students. ©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavalis.



Boye, a refugee from Ghana, arrived in Greece as an unaccompanied child in 2018 and is currently studying Biomedical Sciences at Deree, The American College of Greece.
© UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis

Livelihoods

The majority of participants reported that only informal work is available to them, and that even refugees with skills are not working in their professions.

Work opportunities are identified through community networks including middlemen, referrals from site managers, social media and while waiting in public squares for day labour opportunities.

“For two months now I haven’t received cash assistance. I don’t have another option. I go with my children to collect plastic bottles just to survive”.

Female asylum-seeker, Athens

“Many of us are teachers, but our diplomas are not recognised. Many refugees from our community work at restaurants”.

Male refugee, Athens

Challenges

- Limited knowledge of Greek language.
- Lack of day care for mothers.
- Labour exploitation, substandard work conditions, long hours, no work contract.
- Discrimination and racism.
- Lack of opportunities and certifications to work in own profession.
- Bureaucratic and financial obstacles to opening own business.
- Lack of documentation for legal work.
- Lack of network to find work.
- Lack of vocational training opportunities.
- Some refugees work for food, not for pay.
- Lack of information on labour rights, available jobs, and obligations

Opportunities

- Refugees and asylum-seekers have skills and qualifications that could cover gaps in several sectors in Greece such as tourism, agriculture, construction.
- Refugees and asylum-seekers are willing to work and become self-reliant.
- Community members share information on job offers and job conditions.
- Self-accommodated refugees are autonomous enough to approach competent services.
- Some refugees have been able to establish businesses.
- Seasonal job opportunities exist in the agriculture and tourism industries.

REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide Greek language classes, with flexibility in hours and modalities or sector-specific Greek classes.
- Information booths in RICs and sites on available employment based on skills and qualifications; CV support; available job opportunities in the local market.
- Information provision on labour rights, the necessary documentation to access the labour market, protection of refugees from labour exploitation and support refugees in finding legal work.
- Day care or access to day care for women with children, or support of child enrolment in schools, to enable single mothers to work.
- Support refugees in qualifications certification, accreditation of diplomas, certification of skills
- The support of social services (social workers) to be more accessible and support refugees' access to the labour market.
- Clear view of what is needed in the market, so that any attempt to set up a business will be sustainable.
- Vocational training (in community hub, include refugees as trainers) and technical skills courses providing certification.
- Targeted support to set up small businesses, mentorship from successful refugee businessmen, pilot project.



Adjara, an Ivorian refugee, meets with her employability consultant at the Blue Refugee Centre in Thessaloniki. ©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.



Ahmad Zakit, a 39-year-old asylum-seeker from Afghanistan, poses for a portrait along with his six-member family in their ESTIA house in Tripoli.
© UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

Accommodation

Participants found it extremely difficult to find and keep affordable accommodation, even through HELIOS. Many found housing through other community members. Being self-reliant and knowing Greek are preconditions to find and maintain housing, and support is requested to link refugees to livelihoods opportunities so that they can afford rent and be self-reliant.

“A single woman without accommodation is at high risk. To live independently we need around 1,000 euro a month [but] we can afford apartments for around 200 euro rent. (...) When the owners understand that we are refugees they ask for higher prices. They think that an organization will pay for us and not ourselves”.

Afghan female refugee, Athens

Challenges

- Communication with landlords.
- Lack of necessary documentation.
- Discrimination by landlords.
- Risk of homelessness following recognition/exit from HELIOS.
- High prices of apartments versus low salary.
- Lack of means to cover initial expenses for rents (deposit, agents).
- Self-reliance is a pre-condition to stable accommodation, however there is lack of state support.
- Discontinuation of cash assistance due to refugee status means many families are destitute, living informally in RICs and sites.

Opportunities

- Self-reliant refugees have been able to find accommodation.
- Community members support each other in finding accommodation.

REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop supportive housing services which help communication to find apartments.
- Provision of individualized assistance to access documentation needed to find work, for the obtainment of financial capacity for self-accommodation.
- Greeks to host refugees.
- HELIOS to facilitate cohabitation of beneficiaries.



5-year-old Bahar with her father, Mohammad, 35, in the balcony of their house in Thessaloniki. ©UNHCR/Yorgos Kyvernitis



Abdul Basir Qasemi, a 53-year-old asylum-seeker from Afghanistan, takes a picture of his children as they hold their Honorable mention awards in Greek and English language, at the Learning and Education Centre - SOS Children's Village, in Heraklion city in Crete. ©UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

Documentation

Participants were mostly – but not always – aware of basic documentation requirements such as the tax registration number (AFM), residence permit and AMKA or PAAYPE for health care.

However, they were largely unaware of state social benefits, their rights to access state social benefits or the procedures to gain access to these benefits. Lack of a physical address, Greek language, and other issues were mentioned as main barriers to obtaining documentation.

“We know nothing about benefits. We lack information on documentation issuance and access to benefits. After we get the residence permit, we will look into these”.

Palestinian female refugee,
Kos

Challenges

- Language barrier at public services.
- Lack of physical address.
- Gaps in services during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in delays in documentation including renewal of legal documents by the Asylum Service, residence permits and travel documents.
- Continuous amendments of laws, several interpretations of the law and differences in implementation. No clear messages by the public services.
- Lengthy procedures to access residence permit, travel documents, state benefits.
- The naturalization procedure is very heavy, lengthy and demanding.

Opportunities

- Self-reliant refugees have been able to obtain documentation.
- State service Helplines exist (EODY, tax office) and could be strengthened to provide guidance to refugees.

REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Offering individualized help for refugees to access documents – a prerequisite for employment.
- Targeted and regular information sessions for refugees, including a booklet on social and other vulnerability income allowances.



An internet access point inside the Blue Refugee Centre in Thessaloniki which provides comprehensive assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in the broader region of Thessaloniki in Northern Greece, including employability services, non-formal education and recreational activities, cultural mediation, legal counselling and psychosocial support. ©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.



Unaccompanied children seen at a park near the Thessaloniki train station. ©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.

Discrimination

During the participatory assessment, individuals often referenced discrimination as well as physical violence. **They were largely unaware of their rights or their right to report hate crimes.**

Discrimination and racism were reported in various everyday situations, e.g., when looking for accommodation, employment, when accessing services, in public transport, in schools, and in shops. Women wearing headscarves were reported to be disproportionately targeted. Police discrimination against refugees was also raised frequently.

“There is a lot of discrimination on the island, many shops, kiosks, restaurants refuse to sell us goods or serve us, they say “fyge, fyge”. The Albanian lady working on the kiosk calls (the restaurant) and places the order for us, to eat souvlaki”.

Afghan, Iraq, Palestine male refugees, Samos

Challenges

- Daily discrimination against refugees across various service sectors and daily life.
- Negative media and political rhetoric on refugees, affecting public opinion.
- Few refugees and organizations are aware of the Racist Violence Recording Network.

Opportunities

- Refugees desire to interact with host community and have peaceful relations.
- The existence of the Racist Violence Recording Network.
- Refugees believe that discrimination and racism would decrease if they spoke Greek.



REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Organize discussions between refugees and the host community to strengthen awareness and mutual understanding.
- Change in rhetoric of Greek state and media portraying refugees in a negative manner.

Unaccompanied child seen at a park near the Thessaloniki train station. ©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.



Two young Afghan asylum-seekers fish at the edge of the sea in the Mavrovouni temporary site on Lesbos. ©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.

Child Protection

Children reported concerns with regards to their safety and security, often linked to the poor living conditions in State sites and to the behaviour of law enforcement staff. In contrast, better living conditions were reported by unaccompanied children (UAC) living in shelters or in supported independent living (SIL) apartments.

Difficulties in accessing services were also reported as among the main challenges faced by children and their families, with a particular focus on health and education. Many children reported not being able to attend school due to bureaucratic barriers. The children highlighted how these factors, along with the lack of certainty about their future linked to lengthy asylum procedures, have taken a toll on their mental health, causing symptoms of anxiety, stress, insomnia, inability to plan and set goals.

“There is a great issue of criminality and stealing at the camp, we are constantly afraid and uncertain on whether to hide our personal belongings in the tent or carry them with us”, “I am scared because there is no light: at night it is dark everywhere and there is a lot of criminality and violence”.

Syrian and Afghan unaccompanied boys, Lesbos

Challenges

- Language barriers worsened by the lack of interpretation in public services and limited to no knowledge of Greek or English among the refugee communities.
- Poor living conditions in state camps and uncertainty about the future leads many children to hopelessness, feeling stuck in a limbo and losing motivation.
- The solution to several of the issues raised by the children requires action mainly from the authorities. The children however feel that they have little to no voice or influence on this.
- On education, there is limited support by the State to assist refugees access formal education. Most schools in central Athens are at full capacity and there are no alternatives. As a result, children do not go to school.

Opportunities

- The appointment of the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors (SSPUAM), the abolition of protective custody of unaccompanied children and other positive legislative developments enhance the protection of children in Greece, especially unaccompanied children.
- Children are eager to be informed and actively participate in decisions concerning their future, as well as access education and build a future either in Greece or in other EU countries. Children understand risks and problems and can play a significant role in advocacy and in the implementation of solutions.

REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish fora to give refugee children a voice in decisions affecting their welfare.
- Develop information tailored to children and disseminate it through child- and adolescent-friendly channels, including social media and apps, also in consultation with the children themselves.
- Invest in peer-to-peer learning and mentorship programmes, involving both refugee and Greek volunteer educators and mentors.
- Have dedicated interpreters in health facilities, or have interpreters accompany children to medical appointments.
- Strengthen preparatory and support courses for refugee children, to facilitate integration into public schools.
- Increase the number of available slots in formal education by appointing a sufficient number of experienced teachers in public school with special training on refugees to provide private lessons.
- Children proposed mandatory training of police both inside and outside State facilities to improve behaviour in respecting privacy and avoiding discrimination.



Members of a mobile team look for unaccompanied refugee children who are either homeless or living in precarious conditions near the train lines at the outskirts of Thessaloniki. ©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.



Ninety-year-old Syrian refugee, Linda Ilanjian, receives the first dose of her COVID-19 vaccination at the Hospital of the Hellenic Red Cross (Korgialenio Benakio) in Athens. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

Health

Access to healthcare remains a challenge for both asylum-seekers and refugees. Many recognized that some challenges are common also for Greeks, **while others perceived as discrimination the cancellation of appointments, the late arrival of ambulances, and rudeness of some healthcare staff.**

Access to specialized services is particularly difficult, and interpretation remains a barrier to accessing any medical service.

“My daughter has been admitted to the hospital multiple times and we did not know what was happening to her. It was torture not knowing what is going on with your child”.

Female youth. Samos

Challenges

- Delays in obtaining or renewing legal documents that are linked with AMKA and PAAYP.A.
- Delays in assistance for urgent medical care (delay in ambulance, urgent medical visits).
- Access to healthcare deteriorated during the pandemic.
- Lack of interpretation for healthcare.
- General delays and long waiting times (up to ten months) to make medical appointments.

Opportunities

- Local Greek community members support refugees to make medical appointments.

REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ambulance available on site in RICs, mainland sites.
- Advocacy for state support to persons in need of special medical treatment, especially when the service is not available in the location.
- Advocacy for interpretation in public hospitals (including to accept remote interpretation).



Abdoulaye Amadou, an asylum-seeker from Cameroon, supports medical services for refugees on Lesbos. ©UNHCR/ Marios Andriotis - Konstantios



An Afghan asylum-seeker with a broken foot stands near a cluster of tents in the Mavrovouni temporary site on Lesbos. ©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis

Persons with specific needs

Refugees mentioned the challenges they face in using public medical services including finding specialized doctors and accessing medication. The challenges were also due to the language barrier and the lack of interpreters. Persons with specific needs (PSN) on the islands mentioned that even when they have a critical health issue, they need to wait for their transfer to the mainland to receive appropriate treatment or therapy. Persons living with disabilities complain about the lack of support for assistive devices for their specific needs. Those living in the RICs reported having no access to basic services, including WASH facilities.

The majority of PSN say they receive no information regarding their specific rights, the existing specialised services, and relevant administrative procedures. PSN express their frustration about their life in Greece, the inhumane conditions in the RICs that make them feel ‘useless’ and ‘imprisoned’, as well as homelessness. PSN insist to have access and attend Greek language courses, vocational training, improve their skills, knowledge and find jobs to become productive citizens.

“There is no real infrastructure for persons living with disabilities inside or outside the camp”.

Asylum-seeker with specific needs, Lesbos

Challenges

- Limited capacity of the national health system, including mental health, to respond to persons with specific needs, especially on the islands.
- The limited interpreters/cultural mediators in the National Health System prevent asylum-seekers and refugees from accessing medical services easily. The problem is particularly acute for women who need to access healthcare for sensitive issues, as female interpreters are even fewer in numbers.
- Persons with disabilities rely on NGOs' limited capacity to offer assistive devices.
- PSN on the islands report inhumane conditions in the RICs and those with disabilities have no access to basic services, including WASH facilities.
- Lack of information about PSN rights and specialised services.
- Lack of language courses and vocational training for PSN.
- Lack of state assistance to older people.

Opportunities

- The appointment of a Deputy Minister for Mental Health Issues will help focus more attention on the issue.
- A pilot project in Athens to support persons living with disabilities will enhance cooperation between competent authorities and improve referral pathways by highlighting gaps and challenges to address.
- The refugee community's ability to help PSN.
- A proposal for a Community Psychosocial Worker scheme is under consideration to be adopted by the State.

REFUGEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure efficient and direct access to public health services with the accompaniment of cultural mediators or interpreters in hospitals and other public services (regardless of legal status).
- Provide official information on the specific rights of PSN, the relevant specialised services with digital means and through repetitive and frequent information sessions.
- Accelerated procedures for PSN including legal support for asylum and administrative procedures. Move PSN from the islands to the mainland to live with proper basic conditions and ensure access to specialised services.
- Provide integration projects for persons with specific needs, training programmes with job placements after the training; and provide support and incentives to learn Greek.
- Train and support refugee community members to help each other, and PSN, in particular.
- Ensure that people with mobility difficulties have access to basic services; create disability-friendly WASH facilities in the camps and ensure that assistive devices are provided according to specific needs.
- PSN recommended that training should be provided to the police authorities and RIC staff on PSN specific needs.
- Provide a basic pension for elderly, or other kind of multipurpose financial assistance to ensure they can cover their basic needs, including food and medication.



Forty-six-year-old Palestinian refugee Mahmoud Hamad is blind and lives in an apartment in central Athens. ©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis

Methodology

Participatory Assessments involve holding separate discussions with refugee and asylum-seeking women, girls, boys, and men, including adolescents, so as to gather accurate information on the specific protection risks they face and the underlying causes, to understand their capacities, and to hear their proposed solutions. The main methods used were focus group discussions, as well as participant observation and household-level interviews in some locations.

Participants represented different demographic profiles, including the following particular target groups that were covered through specific questionnaires:

- Persons with specific needs (PSN)
- Unaccompanied children
- Accompanied children
- 18+ former unaccompanied children

The findings of the participatory assessment are primarily qualitative. The main theme of this Participatory Assessment was concerns and recommendations around integration of refugees and asylum-seekers. Nevertheless, the findings also included references to health, GBV, education, security and discrimination. However, as these themes were only secondary, there were only a question or two in the discussions – thus collecting limited feedback. The exercise did not address refugees' intentions to stay in Greece or move on.



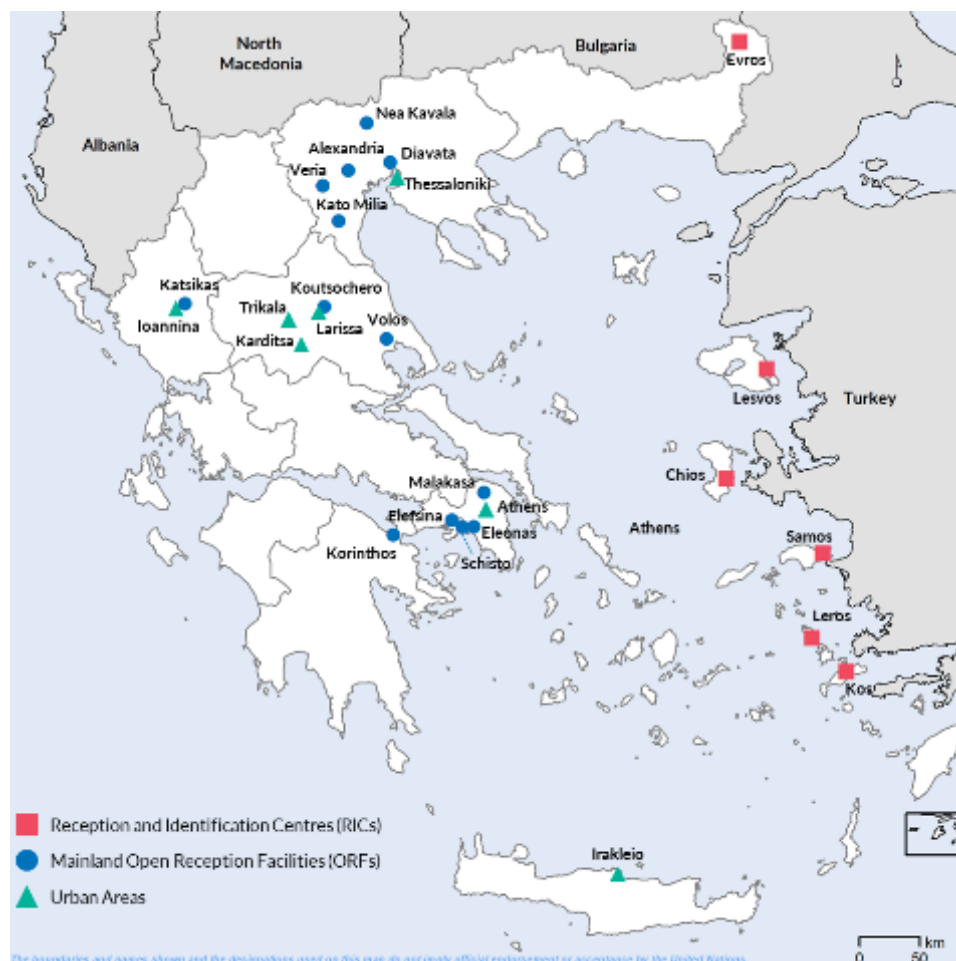
Refugee children in Samos reception and identification centre, participate in refugee child-led groups where with the support of the implementing partner share their views, exchange opinions and empower themselves and their peers. © UNHCR/Despoina Anagnostou

Background and demographics

Focus group discussions were arranged to gather inputs per nationality, age, and gender.

UNHCR and partners conducted a total of **116 sessions** involving a total of **566 participants**, disaggregated per location as follows:

Location	# Sessions	# Participants	# Male	# Female
■ Athens	19	91	49	42
■ Thessaloniki	8	24	18	6
■ Other urban areas in North Greece	7	42	26	16
■ Mainland sites	31	164	94	70
■ Evros	4	18	18	0
■ Lesbos	11	90	46	44
■ Samos	13	45	25	20
■ Chios	10	55	40	15
■ Kos	5	10	6	4
■ Leros	3	9	5	4
■ Crete	5	18	11	7



Out of 116 sessions, **15 were organized and conducted in partnership with local municipalities**: two in Athens, one in Thessaloniki, seven in other cities in North Greece (Ioannina, Larissa, Karditsa and Trikala) and five in Crete. Participants included asylum-seekers and refugees from various countries of origin:

- Afghanistan
- Syrian Arab Republic
- Iraq
- State of Palestine
- Somalia
- Pakistan
- Bangladesh
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Burkina Faso
- Sierra Leone
- Guinea
- Cameroon
- Togo
- Egypt
- Morocco
- Islamic Republic of Iran



A child takes part in a 2.5-km run marking World Refugee Day on the Greek island of Leros on 17 June 2021. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS:

- Limited number of participants.
- COVID-19 restrictions limiting upper number of participants in focus group discussions.
- Participatory Assessment interrupted by heat wave and fires in August 2021.
- Hesitation of some refugee community members to participate.

INTER-AGENCY PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT IN GREECE

UNHCR Greece

26 July – 20 August 2021



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