



HIAS

HIAS Greece Annual Report 2024



**Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.**

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A man walks into Katsikas refugee camp, Katsikas, Greece. (Getty Images)

General Context

In 2024, the global refugee context remained a pressing humanitarian challenge characterised by conflicts, political instability, and climate change. The total number of people in displacement now exceeds 122 million globally, signifying an increase of 4.5% compared to the previous year.

More precisely, the number of forcibly displaced individuals continues to rise, as almost 40 million people are seeking asylum and safety in neighbouring countries or beyond, and more than 67 million people are internally displaced — with 47 million of those being children. Protracted conflicts in regions such as the Middle East and Africa contribute significantly to this crisis as people flee violence and persecution. According to UNHCR statistics, nearly two-thirds of all refugees under UNHCR’s mandate and other people in need of international protection

come from just four countries: Syria, Venezuela, Ukraine, and Afghanistan.

The ongoing war in Ukraine, for instance, has resulted in a massive displacement of people, not only within Ukraine but also across Europe, leading to a complex interplay of national policies and international responses. In addition, the conflict in Sudan has resulted in nearly 9 million internally displaced people and more than 2.5 million refugees.

In 2024, countries hosting large numbers of refugees, such as Iran, Türkiye, Colombia, and Uganda, face immense pressure on their resources and infrastructure. Sustainable solutions, including legal pathways for refugees and opportunities for local integration, is essential to fostering social cohesion and economic stability.

At the same time, the fall of the Assad regime in Syria created uncertainty and confusion for millions of Syrian refugees residing in foreign countries about their asylum applications and current status.

Furthermore, climate change has emerged as a significant driver of displacement, with environmental degradation, natural disasters, and extreme weather events forcing communities to abandon their homes.

International cooperation and solidarity are crucial in addressing the global refugee situation. Multilateral frameworks, such as the Global Compact on Refugees, emphasise the importance of shared responsibility among nations to ensure the protection and well-being of refugees. However, political will and commitment vary significantly across regions, leading to disparities in treatment and support for displaced individuals.

Although the international community recognises the imperative to foster a more compassionate and comprehensive approach, prioritising human rights and dignity for all refugees and displaced persons, humanitarian groups and NGOs have faced significant reductions in their funding and have less capacity to provide adequate support and protection to the forcibly displaced population around the globe.



Lesvos, Greece. (HIAS)

Context in Greece

Greece is often challenged by political polarisation and corruption. It continues to recover from a severe debt crisis that has left lasting impacts, particularly in public institutions. Moreover, Greece has experienced decreased democratic values and the rule of law. Because of this, the rights of refugees and migrants are being questioned, and the organisations involved in their defence are targeted by governments and the media as threats to national security and the rights of Greek nationals.

Displaced populations experience tremendous human rights challenges exacerbated by extremely violent and well-documented pushbacks, constituting a “de facto general policy” of the Greek government. Prolonged arbitrary detention and restriction of movement are common, far-right extremism and hate crimes are rising, migration is criminalised, and the government targets human rights defenders. Militarisation of borders, restricted access to asylum procedures, violations of the rule of law and deterrence practices, and a significant increase in racism constitute the general operational context for CSOs.

In 2024, the EU voted for the new Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which will come into force in 2025-2026. The reformed CEAS, which humanitarian stakeholders, including HIAS Greece, heavily criticise, is expected to increase the administrative burden on border countries, such as Greece, which will likely lead to more border violations. In contrast, lower procedural safeguards at borders are expected to become the norm.

The new CEAS foresees removing appeal in a wide range of asylum cases. Border procedures and the “fiction of non-entry” introduced with the Screening Regulation, according to HIAS legal analysis, are expected to lead to widespread detention and appalling reception conditions. Further, derogation from the already lowered procedural safeguards is foreseen in crisis cases, “force majeure,” and “instrumentalization.” The use of the “safe third country concept” will expand, given the lower threshold for a country to be considered safe. Asylum seekers will have more need for legal aid to challenge their detention or inhuman and degrading reception conditions and submit

applications for “leave to remain” in addition to their appeals.*

Migration Flows

Although statistics from UNHCR and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum differ in absolute numbers, both show a rise in the number of people who arrived in Greece during the year. According to UNHCR statistics, the total number of people arriving in Greece in 2024 increased by 28%, reaching 62,119, while the total arrivals in 2023 were 48,721. According to the Ministry, the total number of arrivals this year was 56,066, an increase of 22% compared to 2023, when 46,095 people arrived in the country. Most arrivals this year have occurred over maritime borders (54,417), with most of them in the Dodecanese islands, followed by Lesbos, Samos, Chios, and Crete; while 7,702 arrived by land.

According to data shared by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, in 2024, more than 12,000 people reached the shores of Lesbos alone.

The most common nationalities of sea arrivals are Syrians (35%), Afghans (26.1%), Egyptians (12.2%), Eritreans (3.9%) and Palestinians (3.7%). During the year, 125 people were reported dead or missing.

Challenges

Data published by the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum as part of parliamentary scrutiny showcase the severe reception deficiencies across Greece; persistent staffing and operational challenges, especially with regards to doctors, nurses, midwives, psychologists, social workers and interpreters, resulting in the

insufficient screening of people arriving within Greek territory; in a system built based on “vulnerability ranking” these deficiencies lead to inadequate protection and reception conditions in de facto breach of the relevant EU Directive. Adding to that, the cash assistance project is facing challenges; hence, asylum seekers have not been paid, impacting thousands of people, including families and vulnerable individuals, who are reliant on state-provided support while they live in remotely located camps far from urban areas and without reliable provision of transport by the state to allow them to access essential services such as hospital appointments and attend necessary appointments as part of their asylum procedures. Moreover, the reception sites, which turned into Closed Control Access Centres (CCACs) in 2021,[†] have been hugely criticized for not offering humane and dignified living conditions, including the latest report of the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT).

Greek authorities have continued to perform unlawful, violent pushbacks of refugees and migrants to Türkiye despite mounting evidence of flagrant violations of EU and international norms and strong condemnation of Greek policy, including by the European Border and Coast Guard (Frontex). This has led the Frontex Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO) to urge the withdrawal of the Agency’s operations from Greece due to systemic breaches of the EU acquis, to no avail. The Greek government’s ministers have subsequently construed Frontex’s continued presence as an indication of EU support for their border management policies.

Access to asylum on both the mainland and the islands remains highly problematic, with administrative regulations making it impossible for people needing protection to have effective access. Further to that, the notion of Türkiye as a safe third country continued to exist for

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asylum seekers originating from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia, even though no readmissions to Türkiye have taken place since March 2020. As a result, applications for international protection lodged by people impacted by this decision throughout the Greek territory (borders and mainland) are examined under the safe third country concept and not based on the individual risks they face in their country of origin (in-merits examination). Moreover, and as no readmission takes place, refugees whose applications have been/are rejected as inadmissible based on the “safe third country” concept end up in a state of legal limbo in Greece and are exposed to a direct risk of poverty and detention, without access to an in-merit examination of their application.

Even after obtaining the status of international protection beneficiary, they still face many challenges in Greece, including access to healthcare, accommodation, education, and the labour market.

* On 21/03/2025 the Greek Council of State has issued a decision annulling the relevant JMD.

[†] CCAC Kos, CCAC Leros, CCAC Lesbos, CCAC Samos, CCAC Chios



Drawings made by children hang in a window in the corner for children at the HIAS office in Mytilini, Lesvos.
(Loulou d'Aki for HIAS)

HIAS Greece

In 2016, HIAS Greece began its operation in Greece on Lesbos to provide legal support. Since then, we have established an experienced team representing hundreds of asylum seekers' cases before Greek and European authorities. In 2017, HIAS Greece opened an office in Athens to develop advocacy activities and provide services to asylum seekers and refugees on the mainland.

By 2020, following the fire that destroyed the Moria camp, HIAS Greece began providing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to asylum seekers and refugees in Lesvos, specifically to those living in or around the city of Mytilene. In 2022, HIAS Greece expanded its activities in Athens to address emerging needs in the urban setting.

Recognising individuals' diverse experiences, HIAS Greece implements its interventions following an interdisciplinary approach to provide personalised support to those in need, including prevention and response to gender-based violence, mental health, psychosocial support, and legal protection.

The primary goal of HIAS Greece is to provide high-quality legal and MHPSS support. HIAS Greece focuses on supporting asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, particularly the most vulnerable, including minors, survivors of torture, and individuals suffering from chronic mental health conditions. HIAS Greece plays a crucial role in protecting human rights in the country, given the limited legal aid available to asylum seekers and recipients of international protection and the gaps in their psychosocial support.

Legal Aid Support

Asylum seekers may approach HIAS through the duty phones available in Arabic, Farsi, and French or in person from Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. HIAS also receives referrals from organisations such as UNHCR, MSF, IRC, DRC, Lesvos Solidarity, Praxis, Iliaktida, Fenix, MIT, Metadrasi, BRF, SAO Association, RIS, Northern Lights, etc. In 2024, the HIAS screening team received more than 500 requests from persons of concern or other NGOs; refugees who had a good outcome for their case also referred their friends and family to us. Decisions are made based on the HIAS staff's capacity and the case's urgency and vulnerability. Individuals not selected for follow-up are immediately advised of the decision and referred to other agencies to meet their needs.

HIAS Greece undertakes critically essential legal and advocacy work to advance refugee rights through (1) legal representation of the most vulnerable refugees, including victims of torture, persons with severe health conditions, unaccompanied children, single-headed

families, and asylum seekers wrongfully detained and (2) legal information on refugee rights through group sessions to inform and empower asylum seekers and refugees; these sessions cover legal procedures and available services to support their needs. (3) litigation of strategically important cases to achieve critical legal precedents and, accordingly, provide the groundwork for advocacy initiatives to promote a positive narrative for the protection of refugee rights and a safe space for the work of human rights defenders; and (4) monitoring the asylum system and human rights compliance, through its presence at key border locations in Greece (Lesvos and Northern Greece) and participation in national, European and international advocacy networks.

The majority of the people who received HIAS Greece's services come from Afghanistan and Syria. Other countries of origin include Sierra Leone, Egypt, Palestine, and other countries in Asia and Africa.



A beneficiary from Syria meets with a staff attorney at the HIAS office in Mytilini. (Loulou d'Aki for HIAS)

In 2024, HIAS Greece managed to provide legal aid to 577 new individuals.

Furthermore, during this year, HIAS Greece continued its strategic litigation activities by supporting flagship cases in Greek and European Courts to create legal precedents in an array of topics, such as the criminalisation of CSOs, including the NGO Registry, the criminalisation of migration, hate crime, and violations of refugee rights, including pushbacks. Indicatively:

→ On 25/02/2022, HIAS submitted an annulment application against the relevant JMD 472687/2021, establishing a fee of 100 euros per person for all subsequent asylum applications after the first one representing two families of individual applicants before the Council of State. The case, initially scheduled

to be heard in June 2022, was postponed seven times in total and was finally heard by the Council of State on 14/05/2024. HIAS submitted a request to the Council of State for a preliminary reference to the CJEU at the hearing due to the incompatibility of the legislation in question with the EU law.

→ Due to the increased criminalisation of CSOs and the targeting of lawyers working in the refugee landscape, HIAS spearheaded advocacy efforts with the Athens Bar Association, which led to the issuance of their expert opinion, protecting lawyers and interpreters working with forcibly displaced people.

→ HIAS Greece, in collaboration with five CSOs, documented persisting deficiencies and emerging threats to the rule of law in Greece in our contribution to the European Commission's annual monitoring of Member States' systems through its [Rule of Law Report](#). In mid-March

2024, the six organisations submitted an addendum to the European Commission as part of its consultations with institutions and entities in Greece, where we highlighted new and ongoing violations of the Rule of Law principles **in the country that also affect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees in the country.** **The report was released during a press conference at the Athens Bar Association and was widely shared by the media.**

→ **Following a joint complaint by de:border** // migration justice collective, Legal Centre Lesbos, HIAS Greece, Equal Rights Beyond Borders, and Mobile Info Team, with the support of several investigative and research partners—including Dr Lena Karamanidou, Border Violence Monitoring Network, Forensic Architecture and Lighthouse Reports, the European Ombudsman opened an inquiry into how the European Commission ensures EU funds granted to Greece for border management do contribute to fundamental rights violations. The complaint demonstrates in detail how, since at least 2018, EU funds—primarily through the EU's Internal Security Fund (ISF)—were repeatedly allocated, mismanaged and misused by Greek authorities. Additionally, it highlights how these funds directly and indirectly contribute to serious and systemic breaches of EU law at the EU's external border in Greece. Since the Commission has known this for years and has failed to take appropriate enforcement actions to restrict or suspend funding, the complainants argue that it is responsible for maladministration.

→ **In 2022, HIAS Greece, in collaboration** with the Hellenic League for Human Rights, HomoDigitalis and the researcher/academic Niovi Vavoula, filed a complaint against the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum for the “Centaurus” and “Hyperion” systems deployed in the reception and accommodation facilities for asylum seekers. **In April 2024, the Hellenic Data Protection Authority identified**

significant GDPR violations in this case by the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum and decided to impose a fine of 175,000 euros—the highest ever imposed against a public body in the country. The detailed analysis of the GDPR highlights the significant shortcomings that the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum had fallen into in preparing a comprehensive and coherent Data Protection Impact Assessment and demonstrates the considerable violations of the GDPR that have been identified. These violations relate to a large number of subjects who are in genuine hardship in being able to exercise their rights.

→ **In November 2023, the European Court** of Human Rights published its communication of HIAS Greece's cases B.G.Y, H.K. and N.Y. v Greece to the Greek Government. The applicants are B.G.Y, an 83-year-old woman from Kunduz, Afghanistan; H.K., a Syrian Kurdish widow from Afrin; and N.Y., a Palestinian woman whose husband was a beneficiary of international protection in Austria. All applicants arrived in Lesbos, Greece, at the beginning of March 2020. H.K. was travelling with her five-year-old son, who drowned when their boat capsized off the island of Lesbos. The applicants were not allowed to apply for asylum due to Greece's decision to suspend access to asylum and were issued removal decisions. They were also immediately detained in a military vessel together with 500 other asylum-seekers, in disregard for their vulnerabilities and physical and mental health conditions, in extraordinarily filthy and overcrowded conditions, and without access to sanitation facilities and hygiene products, adequate food, clothing, and healthcare. Additionally, no COVID-19 measures had been implemented, exposing them to a heightened risk for COVID-19. Their inhuman and degrading conditions continued in Klidi (Serres) and the Malakasa Centre, where they were transferred. The applicants are complaining that, although in case of expulsion, they had an arguable claim that there existed



HIAS Greece staff discusses the Sappho case and HIAS' legal victory on television. (Kontra)

substantial grounds for fearing a real risk of treatment contrary to Art.3 ECHR, they had no access to an effective remedy (Art. 13 ECHR). They were detained in inhuman and degrading conditions (Art. 3 ECHR) with no information about the grounds for their detention (Art. 5(2) ECHR). In 2024, HIAS submitted its reply, and the decision is pending.

In September 2024, the European Court of Human Rights published its communication of HIAS Greece's *Muhammad v. Greece* (Application No. 34331/22) case to the Greek Government. The case concerns the death of Muhammad Gulzar, a Pakistani national who was allegedly shot by the Greek authorities at the Turkish-Greek land border on 4 March 2020. The applicants complain about the violation of Article 2 ECHR. HIAS Greece is collaborating with Equal Rights Beyond Borders and Forensic Architecture.

→ **HIAS Greece represented the victims of** the “Sappho case,” which refers to the Sappho Square Racist Attack in Mytilene, Lesbos. On 22/4/2018, once the standard ceremony of “flag lowering” was completed, around 150 people attacked more than 200 refugees gathered in Sappho Square, protesting about

the death of an Afghan refugee and about the conditions in the now-defunct Moria camp. The attackers threw, among other things, stones, building materials, and flares at those gathered and hurled threats and insults with racist characteristics. At least 30 refugees were injured during the attack, many of whom had to be hospitalised due to burns and head injuries. The events of this racist attack are well presented in the documentary “Wall of Shame,” to which HIAS Greece contributed.

On July 9, 2024, the Court of Mytilene reached a decision regarding the Sappho case. While it sentenced the defendants differently, it recognised their racist motives in almost all of them. **This is the first time the Court of Mytilene has acknowledged racism as a motive.**

→ **In September 2024, HIAS Greece filed** an action for damages against the state for the case of M.M. This concerns the case of a minor who was killed by an allegedly 15-year-old (at the time) Afghan boy who also wounded two more minors within the Safe Zone of the notorious Moria camp. HIAS Greece has undertaken the case to showcase the inhumane conditions

of the Moria camp and highlight the state's responsibilities towards people in need of protection.

→ **On March 1, 2020, HIAS Greece represented** a photojournalist who went to the port of Thermi, Lesvos, to document the arrival of a boat carrying asylum seekers. A crowd of locals had gathered at the port, hurling racist insults and threats at the passengers on the ship, including threats to drown them at sea to prevent them from disembarking. At the same time, they publicly incited violence against them. Some of the gathered crowd even pushed the boat back toward open waters. While the photojournalist was filming the events, a group of young men violently attacked him, repeatedly kicking, punching, and slamming him against the concrete and stone surfaces of the seawall before forcing him to the ground, causing a severe head trauma with heavy bleeding while they continued their assault. They also threw his equipment into the sea, rendering it completely unusable. The photojournalist was eventually taken to Mytilene Hospital, though his transfer was significantly delayed due to roadblocks set up by vigilante groups on Lesvos. **On 1 November 2024, the Single-Member Misdemeanour Court of Mytilene convicted the four defendants of coercion with racist intent against 50 newly arrived refugees, as well as public incitement to violence against them, in violation of the Anti-Racism Law, while two of them were also convicted of dangerous bodily harm and property damage against the photojournalist.** It is worth noting that the attack occurred during a period of extreme violence in Lesvos, marked by daily incidents of vigilante attacks carried out with impunity, where self-appointed groups enforced their own rules and terrorized refugees and human rights defenders, exploiting local resentment over the containment of approximately 30,000 refugees and migrants on the island. **The ruling marks the first time that a Greek Court reached a conviction for public**

incitement to violence against refugees in a public space, which was also in violation of anti-racism legislation. HIAS Greece represented a father who had been accused of neglect and manslaughter after his minor son tragically drowned in the sea while residing in the Skaramagkas camp. The incident highlighted, once again, the inappropriate and dangerous living conditions in the camps as well as the responsibility of the Greek state. **The father was unanimously acquitted.**

→ **HIAS Greece spearheaded litigation** against nationality assessments conducted by FRONTEX in the reception and identification procedures framework. More precisely, HIAS Greece, in collaboration with DCR, submitted an annulment application, added reasons for annulment, an application for suspension of the negative decision and a complaint before FRONTEX FRO regarding the case of an Eritrean national following the assessment of his nationality as Ethiopian by FRONTEX during reception and identification procedures, through untransparent procedures and without legal reasoning, which led to the rejection of his application for international protection. The case was picked by HIAS Greece as strategic, reflecting the systematic practices of the Greek Authorities. We argued about Greek and EU law violations, the ECHR and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. All the remedies are pending.

→ **HIAS Greece represented an Afghan** refugee woman who was, among 13 others, accused of road occupation, obstruction of transportation, resisting authority, and causing simple and dangerous bodily harm. More specifically, the refugees were arrested during a peaceful demonstration that took place in 2020 in Levos against the living conditions in the infamous Moria camp. It is worth mentioning that the living conditions at the Moria camp at that time, with a population exceeding 20,000 asylum seekers, had been recognised as inhumane and degrading by both Greek and

European court rulings. This case highlights the excessive severity and criminalisation of the right to protest in instances involving refugees and asylum seekers. **The HIAS's client, as well as the other 12 refugees, have been acquitted of all charges.**

Lastly, HIAS Greece organised and hosted an international **Strategic Litigation Roundtable** in Athens. Over two days, legal experts, advocates, and academics came together to discuss new legal avenues to protect and promote the rights of people on the move.

The discussions focused on the following topics:

- **Digital Rights and Migration:** The impact of technology and the interoperability of EU IT

systems on the human rights of people on the move, and ideas for litigation.

- **The New Pact on Migration and Asylum:** Ideas for strategic litigation and advocacy
- **Litigation Against FRONTEX:** Overview of the recent CJEU judgments on FRONTEX and ideas for future litigation and alternative legal avenues.
- **EU/National Funds Litigation:** How to use EU/national funds conditionality to protect the human rights of people on the move.
- **Refugee Rights Lawyering:** Exchange of insights on the unique challenges and the corrosion of basic principles of the legal profession faced by practitioners in this critical field.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

At the same time, HIAS Greece provides long-term mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to asylum seekers and refugees, such as individual and family counselling, group psycho-social support, social activities and referrals to national or other bodies, whenever needed, for more specialized services. HIAS Greece's services are available to displaced populations regardless of their demographic profile or legal status and address low, medium and high-severity psychological difficulties. They are offered a safe environment where vulnerable people, breaking away from the stigma and the discrimination, are empowered and regain a sense of who they were and who they want to become beyond their identity as a "refugee." HIAS Greece cooperates with other organisations to facilitate access of asylum seekers and refugees to services whose goal is to cover a broader range of needs.

In 2024, the HIAS Greece MHPSS team provided direct and indirect support to 360 new individuals.

Further, during the reporting period, HIAS Greece also engaged in community-based activities to contribute to the integration of vulnerable individuals and the social cohesion of the host community, in this case, Lesvos.

To that end, we proceeded with the below activities:

- **Visit to the Mytilene Archaeological Site:** In March 2024, women and children participated in the first activity aimed to familiarize the town of Mytilene to asylum seekers and develop cohesion, through a visit to the Castle of Mytilene and lunch in a restaurant in the centre of Mytilene, by the seaside.



An excursion at the Mytilene Archaeological Site. (Image Credit?)

- **Social Information Sessions:** In April, social information sessions were held by HIAS in our premises in Lesvos. HIAS caseworker structures the social information sessions to address the psycho-social aspects of recently recognised beneficiaries of international protection to provide information and empowerment in the transition from living in the camp and being entitled to reception conditions to the challenges of integration in Greece, where individuals need to be self-sustained as they are not entitled to any state provision. The sessions provide information and familiarization with documentation and procedures necessary to access employment, public services, housing, and health care as beneficiaries of international protection in Greece.
- **Workshops on the Notion of Home:** In May, 37 women attended two focus group

discussions on “Home.” They shared their perceptions of home (homes lost, new homes, etc.) and then used creative materials to present their reflections. In one group session, the primary forms of expression were collage and painting, while in another, women used photography and clay.

- **Craft Exhibition:** In June, HIAS, along with Diotima and the SAO Association, organised an exhibition in the Cultural Municipal Center of Mytilene to present the crafts created by women during the workshops mentioned above. The exhibition, which took place on 18 and 19 June, was endorsed by UNHCR Greece and visited by approximately 160-200 persons from the refugee and local communities.
- **Origami Workshop:** HIAS collaborated with a local tutor in June to provide an origami workshop for young children and youth.

Economic Empowerment

In the last months of 2024, HIAS initiated the design and provision of economic empowerment services to promote and facilitate the integration process of refugees based on international good practices and local context and needs.

The services incorporate the “prior to hiring, during hiring, and after hiring” approach and include activities such as CV creation, job matching, and referrals to vocational training.

Advocacy

In 2024, HIAS published a Policy Brief on [Tracing the Effects of Legal Status on the Mental Well-Being of the Forcibly Displaced People in Greece](#) and an Opinion Article on [“Forming new references for mental health: perceptions of forcibly displaced people in Greece.”](#) HIAS also submitted a report for the 114th session of CERD, and co-signed and submitted to the relevant authorities joint statements and letters on the following:

- [Disruption of cash assistance to asylum seekers in Greece](#)
- [Disruption of interpretation services in Greece](#)
- [Right to access to public information](#)
- Ratification of the OPIC (Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure) on behalf of the Greek Government
- Lack of effective investigations into cases of fundamental rights violations at Greek borders

- Greek Civil Society Concerns and Recommendations for the European Rule of Law Mechanism
- Barriers to justice, effectiveness of investigations and work of lawyers
- Renewal of identity documents of beneficiaries of international protection
- Registry of Greek and Foreign NGOs and Registry of NGO Members of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum
- Suspension of free legal aid in the second instance for asylum seekers
- Issuance and operation of the SSRN (Social Security Registry Number) and ensuring social rights of beneficiaries of international protection
- Recording of the identity data of applicants of international protection
- On issues affecting beneficiaries of international protection in Greece



Our Impact

During the grant period, HIAS Greece provided mental health and psychosocial support through individual and group sessions, as well as legal aid to asylum seekers and refugees through legal information sessions, consultation, and representation throughout their asylum procedure but also other civil and penal cases, all these activities contributed to people being aware of their rights and having access to them before the national and European judicial system. HIAS Greece's services were mainly focused on Lesvos and Attica region, while a small part of its activities was carried throughout Greece, including Dodecanese islands, Serres, Kavala and Ioannina.

A beneficiary from Sierra Leone poses for a portrait by the sea in Mytilini. (Loulou d'Aki for HIAS)

HIAS Greece: 2024 By the Numbers



It is worth mentioning that the quality of mental health services is reflected not only in the individuals who receive services, but also in the frequency and targeted nature of the services themselves. The framing of individuals with severe mental health difficulties has led to over 80 follow-ups in the first two months of 2025, including psychotherapeutic and counselling work to address severe symptomatology, interdisciplinary meetings with beneficiaries, monitoring and evaluation of social needs, and ongoing interdisciplinary meetings that involve the beneficiaries in the case planning process. The impact of this approach is also evident through well-being measurement tool (WHO-5 pre and post score wellbeing scale) used by the beneficiaries themselves, with 95% reporting an increase in mental health symptoms. The improvement in one individual's symptoms has been observed to indirectly benefit the wider community and family.

In addition, one of the key achievements we have observed is the prolonged engagement of men, particularly refugees, in our services. Despite the fact that mental health issues in men, especially in the refugee population, are often accompanied by a strong stigma that leads them to question the importance of or even demonize seeking help for their mental health symptoms, the men who engage with our services show increased commitment and willingness to stay in treatment. This has been achieved through a personalised (person-centred) approach, which focuses on understanding the social needs of individuals and recognising the systemic inequalities that affect them. Migrant and refugee men, especially

single men, are one of the most neglected social groups in terms of social and care policies. Through individualized care, we aim to make men aware of the connection between social factors and mental health symptoms, thus reducing the negative perceptions about seeking psychosocial support. In this way, men who participate in therapy understand that their mental health needs are directly linked to their social conditions, which strengthens their trust and commitment to treatment.

Finally, further to the direct legal assistance, HIAS Greece focuses on high-profile cases to combat hate crimes, the growing shrinking of civic space by representing cases of prosecution of human rights advocates, the criminalisation of migration and solidarity, or the use of EU funds in an attempt to create legal precedents, to uphold the rule of law and ultimately change the landscape that we are working in. Although immediate, visible changes are challenging to secure, this work is essential in building a foundation for lasting change and safeguarding rights on a larger scale rather than case by case.

We have made an informed decision to focus on such topics, knowing that they are often overlooked by other actors in Greece due to funding constraints and limitations and the possible impact on the very existence of CSOs. By pursuing this path, we seek to protect civic space, amplify marginalized voices, and ultimately shape a fairer, rights-respecting environment for migrants, asylum seekers, and advocates alike.

HIAS Greece Donors and Supporters

- Islamic Relief USA
- AMNA
- Open Society Foundation
- US Embassy in Athens
- Rockefeller Brothers Foundation
- Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung
- Dutch Council for Refugees
- US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
- US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
- Antonis Shwartz

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