

HIAS Greece Annual Report 2025

Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

HIAS stands for a world in which forcibly displaced people find welcome, safety, and opportunity.

Front cover: Two children at a temporary hosting site for refugees and migrants, Crete Island, Greece, 2025. (Gene Medi/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

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Global Context

In 2025, forced displacement remained at historically high levels, with UNHCR reporting 117.8 million people displaced by conflict, persecution, violence, and human rights violations worldwide. Displacement patterns grew increasingly complex.

While refugees receive significant international attention, most displaced people remain within their own countries. By the end of 2025, 68.7 million people were internally displaced, largely due to protracted conflicts, governance challenges, and the growing impact of climate-related disasters.[1] The intersection of conflict, poverty, and climate shocks has made displacement more prolonged and recovery more difficult.

The responsibility for hosting displaced populations continued to fall disproportionately on lower-income countries. In 2025, 73% of refugees and others in need of international protection were hosted by low- and middle-income countries, while 67% remained in neighbouring countries. This highlights the need for stronger international responsibility-sharing and sustained support for host communities.[2]

At the same time, refugee and IDP returns increased significantly, rising by 50% compared to 2024 and reaching 14.7 million people.[3] Large-scale returns were recorded among Afghans and Syrians, as well as populations displaced from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Ukraine, and Myanmar. However, many returns occurred under difficult conditions, raising concerns about their sustainability and the protection risks faced by returnees.[4]

A defining feature of 2025 was the sharp contraction of humanitarian funding. Despite record levels of displacement, available resources remained far below growing needs. Major reductions in foreign assistance, including cuts to USAID-funded programmes, affected critical services such as protection, legal aid, livelihoods, and mental health support.[5] As a result, humanitarian organizations faced increasing challenges in responding to displacement while supporting long-term integration, self-reliance, and durable solutions.[6]

Context in Greece

The refugee reception crisis in Greece entered the global media spotlight in 2015, when more than a million asylum seekers, mainly from Syria and Afghanistan, crossed the borders. That moment galvanized international attention, resources, and political focus, as Greece became a primary entry point to Europe for more than a million people fleeing conflict and instability.

Since then, global attention and funding have shifted to other crises. Despite this, migration remains a persistent and complex reality in Greece. In 2025, over 48,000 asylum seekers arrived in Greece, the majority by sea, and more than 60,000 asylum applications were registered.[7] Crete has become the main point of entry to Greece since the summer of 2025. Those arriving primarily originate from Afghanistan, Sudan, Yemen, and Egypt, with children accounting for nearly one-fifth of all arrivals; 32% of these were identified upon arrival as unaccompanied or separated, mainly from Egypt, with fewer from Sudan, Somalia, and Afghanistan.[8] At the same time, deterrence-oriented policies have intensified, including the deployment of ships along Greece's southern border and temporary suspensions of asylum procedures, resulting in prolonged administrative detention and reports of informal forced returns. The new legislation on migration emphasizes security and control measures, returns, accelerated border procedures, and prolonged detention of asylum seekers, which may lead to serious violations of fundamental rights, both at the borders and within the country. These strict policies are further exacerbated by the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Forcibly displaced people in Greece face a restrictive environment marked by prolonged asylum procedures, weak legal safeguards, inadequate reception conditions and lack of integration policies, resulting in heightened protection risks, mental health strain, and economic insecurity. Since January 2025, reductions in humanitarian funding have widened service gaps and deepened vulnerability, particularly for people facing compounded risks such as homelessness, disability, gender-based violence, lack of documentation, or family separation.

Refugees and migrants in Greece continue to encounter persistent protection risks driven by restrictive migration policies, serious obstacles to accessing the asylum procedure, and pressure from competent authorities to withdraw asylum applications and opt for voluntary return, including under the threat of prolonged administrative detention or criminal prosecution for irregular entry or stay. The ongoing policy

of pushbacks, including aggressive maritime interceptions, has also contributed to an alarming increase in shipwrecks and risks to life at sea. Many individuals, including children, lack timely legal information and representation at critical stages of the asylum, detention, and return processes, leaving them vulnerable to accelerated procedures, prolonged detention, and criminal charges related to irregular entry, stay, or exit. These risks are compounded by inadequate interpretation and insufficient procedural safeguards, particularly in reception and detention settings.

Forcibly displaced people in Greece face a restrictive environment marked by prolonged asylum procedures, weak legal safeguards, inadequate reception conditions and lack of integration policies.

Mental health needs among refugees and asylum seekers in Greece remain severe. Prolonged uncertainty related to legal status, combined with inadequate living conditions, homelessness, and repeated exposure to stress and trauma, contributes to high levels of psychological distress. Reductions in mental health programming have further widened gaps in care, leaving many trauma survivors and individuals with complex needs without consistent support. For many refugees and asylum seekers, securing stable and dignified livelihoods in Greece remains out of reach.

Civil society organizations working on migration and asylum in Greece operate in an increasingly constrained environment. International bodies, including the UN Special Rapporteur[9] and the Council of Europe,[10] have raised concerns about regulatory requirements and practices that undermine freedom of association and pressure organizations and human rights defenders who support migrants and refugees. These dynamics, combined with increasingly polarized public discourse that frames migration as a security threat, have narrowed the humanitarian space and complicated efforts to deliver protection and rights-based assistance. Greece is experiencing a deterioration in democratic norms, human rights, and the rule of law, with serious implications for refugees, migrants, and the CSOs that support them. The Greek government increasingly questions refugee rights and, alongside the media, portrays organizations working on migration and asylum issues as threats to national security. The operational landscape for civil society is defined by the militarization of borders, restricted access to asylum procedures, deterrence-driven policies, and a marked rise in racist rhetoric and far-right extremism. Despite repeated recommendations from the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations to end arbitrary restrictions on civil society, recent legislative reforms—including provisions bundled under a bill on the “promotion of legal migration policies”—have introduced measures that breach international, European Union (EU), and domestic law and directly undermine civic space.

HIAS Greece

HIAS Greece began its operations on the island of Lesvos in 2016 as a locally registered NGO, and over the years, it has built a highly experienced team that has supported asylum seekers and refugees throughout their time in Greece.

HIAS operates in Athens and Lesvos, settings that reflect two defining phases of the refugee experience: arrival and the effort to rebuild. Through legal assistance, strategic litigation, and advocacy for fair and lawful asylum procedures, HIAS addresses violations affecting displaced people and those who support them, including cases related to migration criminalization, hate crimes, and attacks on human rights defenders.

In response to these intersecting challenges, HIAS has developed an integrated protection approach in Greece that combines legal assistance with mental health and psychosocial support, complemented by economic inclusion activities that promote refugees’ longer-term stability, resilience, self-reliance, and integration.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 and individuals suffering from chronic mental health conditions. Given the limited legal aid available to asylum seekers and recipients of international protection and the gaps in their psychosocial support, HIAS Greece plays a crucial role in protecting human rights in the country.

At the end of 2025, HIAS Greece counted 16 staff members. The structure of the organisation comprises the following teams: Legal Team, MHPSS Team, Screening Team, and Finance & Administration, including fundraising.

Legal Aid Support & Strategic Litigation

HIAS Greece undertakes critical legal and advocacy work to advance refugee rights through:

(1) Legal representation of the most vulnerable refugees, such as victims of hate crime, shipwrecks and State crimes, survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and torture, LGBTQI+ individuals, persons with serious health conditions including mental issues, unaccompanied children, single-headed families, and asylum seekers wrongfully detained;

(2) Litigation of strategically important cases to achieve important legal precedents and, accordingly, provide the groundwork for advocacy initiatives to promote a positive narrative for the protection of refugee rights, legal framework and policies and a safe space for the work of human rights defenders;

(3) Monitoring the asylum system and human rights compliance and participation in different national, European and international advocacy networks. HIAS engages in systematic, coordinated initiatives to address the broader policy and social-narrative landscape, advancing the understanding that fighting for refugee rights is essential to protecting democracy and the Rule of Law.

Most people who receive HIAS Greece's services come from Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, South Sudan, and Egypt. Other countries of origin include Iraq, Somalia, and various countries in Asia and Africa. During 2025, HIAS Greece continued its strategic litigation activities by supporting flagship cases in Greek and European Courts in an effort 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:

HIGHLIGHTS

Secured acquittals in high-profile criminalization of migration cases, protecting the rights of refugees and asylum seekers facing serious criminal charges. Notably, HIAS Greece achieved three significant legal victories challenging the criminalization of migration, including:

→ Securing referral of a Sudanese minor's case to the Juvenile Court after demonstrating flaws in the age assessment process and ensuring recognition of child-specific safeguards.

→ Obtaining judicial recognition that a Sudanese defendant's involvement in navigating a vessel was a consequence of forced displacement, war, and exploitation.

→ Winning the acquittal of an HIV-positive woman charged with irregular exit after establishing that systemic barriers had prevented her access to asylum procedures and essential medical care.

Advanced strategic litigation against unlawful pushbacks and impunity at Greece's borders. Following the dismissal of several criminal complaints concerning pushback incidents, HIAS Greece filed a criminal complaint on behalf of a family of three who were forcibly returned to Türkiye despite having entered Greece and initiated procedures to seek international protection. After exhausting domestic legal remedies, the HIAS legal team lodged an application before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

Advanced accountability for systemic failures in the protection of unaccompanied refugee children by representing the family of a child killed in the 2019 Moria RIC "Safe Zone" and a surviving victim, and by filing a civil action for damages against the Greek State.



Children participate in "Exploring the Heart of Our Community," an activity led by HIAS Greece at the 2025 Refugee Week in Athens. (HIAS Greece)

The litigation challenges systemic failures in the protection of unaccompanied children, including unsafe accommodation, inadequate supervision, and delayed intervention despite prior warnings and police notification, seeking redress for the family and greater accountability for the State's failure to safeguard vulnerable children in its care.

Protected access to international protection through precedent-setting asylum litigation. HIAS Greece successfully represented a Syrian national who was granted subsidiary protection, reinforcing individualized assessments in asylum procedures amid calls for blanket restrictions on Syrian asylum claims.

Strengthened protection against unlawful detention and removal, obtaining interim measures suspending the return of a Sudanese asylum seeker who had been unable to access asylum procedures during the asylum suspension. Building on this intervention, HIAS Greece jointly supported seven additional detained individuals from Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen, safeguarding access to protection and due process.

Advanced strategic litigation on privacy, data protection, and fundamental rights. Following a complaint filed by HIAS Greece and partner organizations in 2022 concerning the deployment of the "Centaurus" and "Hyperion" surveillance systems in reception and accommodation centres, the Hellenic Data Protection Authority found significant GDPR violations by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and imposed a €175,000 fine, the highest ever issued against a public authority in Greece. Following the Ministry's challenge to the Authority's decision in 2025 at the Council of State, HIAS Greece, alongside coalition partners, submitted a third-party intervention to defend the landmark decision and support the enforcement of data protection standards in migration management systems.



Another glimpse of "Exploring the Heart of Our Community," an activity led by HIAS Greece at the 2025 Refugee Week in Athens. (HIAS Greece)

The case continues to represent an important opportunity to reinforce accountability and rights-based oversight of surveillance technologies used in migration contexts.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

HIAS Greece provides long-term Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to asylum seekers and refugees, including individual and family counselling, group psychosocial support, social activities, and referrals to national or other bodies, as needed for more specialised 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 collaborates with other organisations to facilitate access to services for asylum seekers and refugees, aiming to cover a broader range of needs.

During 2025, HIAS Greece strengthened its capacity to identify and respond to the mental health needs of highly vulnerable individuals by enhancing screening tools and implementing earlier detection protocols. By strengthening internal assessment processes and adopting a more systematic psychosocial triage model, HIAS Greece enhanced its capacity to identify complex cases and prioritise them for timely intervention. This approach was reinforced by robust interdisciplinary collaboration, which enabled seamless internal referrals across various service areas. As the broader support system in Greece continued to shrink, HIAS saw a growing number of individuals in acute situations of vulnerability. The team adapted to these changing needs by prioritizing urgent cases, providing emergency social support where possible, and connecting individuals with external services and partner organizations. By working closely with other organizations, HIAS Greece was able to better understand the situation of camp residents, monitor living and reception conditions, and ensure that the most vulnerable individuals were referred for support.

HIGHLIGHTS

HIAS Greece appropriately and effectively responded to an increased number of referrals concerning individuals facing homelessness or living in precarious housing conditions. This responsiveness demonstrates the team's capacity to adapt to shifting needs in the field

CLIENT STORY

M.M.

M.M., a 35-year-old woman, arrived in Greece with her husband and their two children and was initially supported by the organization's legal service before being referred to the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) team. During the course of support, it became evident that she was living in an abusive relationship with her husband. At the same time, M.M. discovered that she was pregnant and decided that she wished to terminate the pregnancy; however, as she was uninsured and lacked the necessary documentation, she faced significant barriers to accessing healthcare through the public system. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the social service team mobilized to identify alternative solutions and, through extensive networking and advocacy efforts, secured the support of a private doctor who provided all required medical examinations free of charge and personally performed the procedure at a symbolic cost. This coordinated intervention enabled M.M. to safely access essential healthcare despite the administrative and financial obstacles she faced, while ensuring she received not only medical care but also dignity, compassion, and emotional support. Beyond addressing her immediate needs, the assistance provided helped her feel seen, respected, and cared for during an exceptionally vulnerable period of her life.

> **"For the first time in a very long time, I felt cared for, even if only for a little while. I had to undergo surgery for someone to finally look after me.**

CLIENT STORY

Omar

Omar, 25, reached Greece alone after surviving torture and severe violence in Sudan. After leaving a camp in Thessaloniki for Athens, he was sleeping on the streets. When he first came to HIAS, he did not ask for housing, cash, or material aid; he asked for a safe place to sit, talk, and be heard, and he was not ready to discuss what had happened to him. Through regular psychosocial support sessions, HIAS built trust at his pace. Omar agreed to see a psychiatrist, began treatment for anxiety and fear, and was connected to additional services. As his confidence grew, he developed healthier routines, began exploring employment, and eventually felt stable enough to move into a reception centre, ending his homelessness.

> **“ I will never forget you. You helped me get back on my feet.**

and highlights HIAS Greece’s approach to more inclusive, informed, and contextually appropriate mental health care.

Furthermore, as part of its Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) approach, HIAS Greece implemented activities designed to foster connection, inclusion, and emotional resilience among refugees, migrants, and members of host communities.

Empowered refugee and migrant mothers through peer support and capacity-building. In partnership with INTERSOS Greece and the Greek Forum of Migrants, HIAS Greece facilitated an experiential workshop on parenthood that provided a safe space for refugee and migrant mothers to discuss challenges related to parenting, education, cultural adaptation, mental health, and community support. The activity promoted mutual learning, strengthened social networks, and enhanced participants’ access to information and support mechanisms.

Elevated refugee and migrant voices in urban inclusion and advocacy efforts. During Refugee Week 2025, HIAS Greece collaborated with four civil society organizations to develop the Emotional Map of Athens, a participatory initiative capturing the lived experiences of people with refugee and migrant backgrounds across the city. By documenting personal stories, emotions, and perceptions associated with specific urban spaces, the project fostered a sense of belonging and community participation while generating evidence-based insights for advocacy. The resulting map will serve as a tool for dialogue and consultation with the Municipality of Athens, contributing to more inclusive and responsive urban policies.

In parallel, HIAS Greece contributed to strengthening the broader response system by training more than 59 professionals across different sectors. Trainings covered key areas such as trauma-informed care, gender and intersectionality in humanitarian practice, nonviolent communication in field work, and psychotherapeutic work with Survivors of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Additionally, HIAS Greece initiated a joint activity, “Social Breakfast,” in collaboration with STEPS “Social Dining Program. The initiative uses the shared experience of preparing and sharing a meal to bring people together, creating a welcoming, informal space for connection, social interaction, and psychosocial support. Sharing food provides an opportunity for participants from refugee and migrant backgrounds to build social networks, reduce isolation, and strengthen their sense of belonging in a safe and non-stigmatising environment. Within the framework of group psychosocial support activities, participants also receive information and guidance on labour rights and workplace-related matters. The initiative targets individuals from refugee and migrant backgrounds, combining social inclusion, psychosocial support, and employment-related awareness.

Economic Inclusion

During 2025, HIAS Greece initiated and successfully piloted a light-touch economic inclusion intervention.

Through this, HIAS Greece supported asylum seekers and refugees to facilitate their integration into Greek society. Given that HIAS Greece works with a particularly vulnerable population, priority was placed on providing psychosocial and social support services to strengthen beneficiaries’ resilience, improve their overall stability, and enhance their capacity for integration.

These interventions were complemented by employment support activities, including CV preparation, job-search guidance, and interview preparation.

In addition, asylum seekers and refugees were connected with a range of integration services, including English and Greek language courses, access to essential goods, and information on the functioning of key public institutions such as the Public Employment Service (DYPA), the Social Security Institution (EFKA), and the Independent Authority for Public Revenue (AADE). These activities sought to empower participants and promote their autonomy and self-sufficiency.

As a result of these efforts, 12 clients secured employment during 2025.

In parallel, HIAS Greece, in collaboration with partner organizations, designed informational events focused on employment counselling and legal employment procedures in Greece. The events provided participants with practical guidance on accessing the labour market and created a space for them to share their experiences, concerns, and challenges. Through open dialogue and tailored guidance, participants received valuable information and support on employment-related issues affecting their integration.

Finally, the HIAS Greece team developed a training resource for employers focused on fostering and managing multicultural workplaces.

Advocacy

HIAS Greece maintained a strong advocacy presence throughout 2025, engaging with European institutions, national authorities, civil society networks, and international human rights actors. Advocacy efforts focused on asylum procedures, reception conditions, EU migration



HIAS Greece Fundraising and Development Manager, Anna Michalakeli, speaks on a panel organised by the Greek Council for Refugees, on funding cuts and their impact on Greek civil society, Athens. (HIAS Greece)

policies, fundamental rights, and the shrinking civic space for organisations that provide legal support to refugees and asylum seekers.

HIAS Greece worked closely with key partners, including ECRE, the Aegean NGOs Network (ANN), Refugee Support Aegean (RSA), the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Amnesty International, and other civil society organizations. These partnerships strengthened collective advocacy efforts in response to legislative and policy developments affecting asylum access, refugee protection, and civic space. HIAS engaged with the European Commission, the European Ombudsman, and the European Parliament, while maintaining dialogue with national authorities and international monitoring bodies.

Alongside stakeholder engagement, HIAS Greece produced a wide range of written advocacy interventions, including submissions to UN Special Rapporteurs, policy inputs, legal analyses, reports, complaints, access-to-documents requests, public letters, and joint statements. Many of these interventions addressed restrictions on access to asylum, unlawful detention practices, gaps in legal aid, fundamental rights violations, and concerns regarding the use of EU funding in migration management. HIAS also advanced transparency and accountability efforts by submitting strategic complaints and requests for access to documents to EU institutions and oversight bodies.

A key advocacy priority during 2025 was responding to the suspension of asylum procedures and the increasing pressure on organizations providing legal assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. Together with partners, HIAS documented the impact of these developments, raised concerns with policymakers, and pursued legal and institutional remedies through coordinated statements, complaints, legal analyses, and submissions to national and international human rights mechanisms.

During 2025, HIAS Greece continues to be part of the NGO coalition11 submitting a joint report to the European Commission on the state of the rule of law in Greece. During the year, we continued issuing the Greek Asylum Case Law Report, a collaborative initiative of RSA, GCR and HIAS Greece for the biannual collection of decisions from courts, Appeals Committees and the Asylum Service in the area of refugee protection.

Beyond legal and policy advocacy, HIAS Greece contributed to public awareness and research initiatives on anti-racism, gender equality and refugee homelessness. HIAS promoted dialogue on the links between homelessness and mental health through an opinion article highlighting the psychosocial impact of housing insecurity on refugees and migrants and the barriers they face in accessing support. Through research collaborations, consultations, and awareness-raising activities, the organization expanded its advocacy agenda to promote social inclusion, dignity, mental health, and the protection of refugee rights.

Overall, 2025 was marked by extensive and multifaceted advocacy action. Through policy engagement, coalition-building, legal advocacy, international reporting, and public awareness initiatives, HIAS Greece worked to defend access to protection, strengthen accountability, and promote respect for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers at both national and European levels.

Coordination & Collaboration

HIAS Greece continued to receive referrals from an array of organizations such as UNHCR, Network for Children's Rights, Solidarity Now, Melissa, Babel, Medical Volunteers International (MVI), MSF, Praksis, Movement on the Ground, Diotima, European Lawyers in Lesvos (ELIL), Equal Rights Beyond Borders (ERBB), FENIX, ASAM, Meraki, BVMN, as well as from the Registration and Identifications Centres.

HIAS Greece is a founding member of the Recording Mechanism of Incidents of Informal Forced Returns of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) and a member of the Racist Violence Recording Network, which operates under the auspices of UNHCR and the GNCHR.

Furthermore, HIAS continued to co-chair the Lesvos Legal Aid Working Group in collaboration with UNHCR and participated in all relevant Working Groups operating in Lesvos and at the national level, including the MHPSS Working Group, the National Legal Aid Working Group, and the Protection Working Groups.

Finally, HIAS Greece participates in several European networks, including ECRE, the Facing Facts Network and the Global Mental Health Network.

Endnotes

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2025 at a Glance

774
people helped to access protection, stability, and services

700
new unique clients

695
people supported to claim rights and access protection through legal services

191
people supported to stabilise and recover through MHPSS services

61
people supported toward employment readiness

12
secured employment

59
professionals trained by HIAS

22
advocacy meetings conducted

42
written advocacy interventions

The 774 people reached reflects unique individuals supported during the year; service-line figures overlap because many clients received integrated legal, psychosocial, and/or economic inclusion support, while professionals trained and advocacy outputs are reported separately. HIAS closed 2025 with 16 staff across Athens and Lesvos.



2025 Refugee Week in Athens. (HIAS Greece)

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Islamic Relief USA | Jones Day Foundation | Antonis Schwarz | The Rockefeller Brothers Fund | Anne Germanacos | Desmos

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