



HIAS

Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

2022-2023 Overview
HIAS GREECE

HIAS Greece

Overview 2022-2023



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Protect the refugee.**

HIAS GREECE 2022

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Our History

From our beginnings in the 1880s in a storefront on the Lower East Side of Manhattan providing food and shelter to Jews fleeing antisemitism in Eastern Europe, to our work nearly 140 years later providing social, emotional, legal, and advocacy support to those in need around the world, HIAS has served as a pivotal force for displaced people for generations. Indeed, HIAS began its work even before the world had a legal concept of a “refugee.”

Having helped more than 4.5 million refugees and immigrants escape persecution, HIAS is uniquely qualified to address the modern refugee situation, which has become a global humanitarian crisis. After over 100 years of serving Jews fleeing persecution around the globe, HIAS, starting in the 2000s, expanded its work in the U.S. to include assistance to non-Jewish refugees devastated by the aftermath of conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Hungary, Iran, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Tunisia, Vietnam, and the successor states to the former Soviet Union.

HIAS began a new chapter in 2002 when it established operations in Kenya to provide protection to refugees from African countries plagued by conflict, to advocate on their behalf, and to resettle the most vulnerable. Soon after, we began work in Latin America, serving people displaced by conflict in several countries. Currently HIAS works in 16 countries including Aruba, Austria, Belgium, Chad, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Greece, Guyana, Israel, Kenya, Mexico, Panama, Peru, United States, and Venezuela. As the only global Jewish organization whose mission is to assist refugees wherever they are, HIAS continues to protect, empower, and resettle refugees of all faiths and ethnicities from around the world.



Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision

HIAS stands for a world in which refugees find welcome, safety, and opportunity.

Mission

Drawing on our Jewish values and history, HIAS provides vital services to refugees and asylum seekers around the world and advocates for their fundamental rights so they can rebuild their lives.

Values

Impassioned by our mission, we bring the lessons of HIAS' history and Jewish ethics and experience to our commitment to serve refugees and other displaced persons of concern around the world through the following values:

Welcome • Acogimiento • Hospitalité • הכנסת אורחים (Hachnasat Orchim)

We **Welcome** the Stranger

Justice • Justicia • Justice • צדק (Tzedek)

We Pursue **Justice**

Empathy • Empatía • Empathie • חסד (Chesed)

We Approach our Clients with **Empathy**

Partnership • Compañerismo • Coopération • חברותא (Chevruta)

We Believe in Changing the World through **Partnership**

Courage • Coraje • Courage • אומץ (Ometz)

We Act with **Courage** to Build a Better World

Resilience • Resiliencia • Résilience • רוח (Ruach)

We Adapt and Thrive, Continuously Demonstrating our **Resilience**



Photos: Glenna Gordon; Michael Datikash

Our Impact

Around the world, HIAS makes tangible changes in the lives of refugees and other forcibly displaced people, advancing their legal, social, and economic rights. Our experience and technical expertise, as well as our integration of international best practices, allows for our work to have real and sustained impact. We partner with government agencies and other humanitarian organizations to reach the greatest number of those in need. The core areas where we work include:

1. Legal Protection
2. Gender-Based Violence Response and Risk Reduction
3. Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
4. Economic Inclusion

Legal Protection

Refugees and other people forcibly displaced from home are fleeing persecution and violence. They need to be able to safely cross borders into countries where their lives are not at risk. Once over the border, they need information and legal representation to secure legal status and access their rights. Without that status, refugees are forced to live on the margins of society, sometimes for generations, without access to healthcare, education, dignified work, or safe shelter. HIAS begins by educating refugees about their rights, then secures protection by engaging in advocacy, legal representation, and strategic litigation, and working with government authorities.

Gender-Based Violence Response and Risk Reduction

Compounded by rampant gender inequality, forced migration and displacement quickly erode the limited protections women, girls, and LGBTQ populations have, even in times of stability. HIAS is driven by their voices and needs, working to empower them and engage the whole community to reduce the risk of gender-based violence. We raise awareness so survivors know where and how to get help after experiencing violence. We train advocates and support existing services so that no survivor—regardless of age, sexual orientation, or gender identity—suffers alone. We help communities begin the kind of transformative work

that leads to longer-term change. We stay connected to and raise our collective voice alongside those of displaced women, girls, and LGBTQ populations globally.

Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Violence, conflict, and displacement disrupt relationships and daily life, break down existing support systems, and have a devastating impact on mental health, overall wellbeing, and recovery. A supportive environment is essential to healing and recovery for refugees and other people forcibly displaced from their homes. One of the best ways to build a supportive environment is to strengthen existing relationships, networks, and practices which promote mental health and well-being and allow communities to cope and heal. We facilitate community support groups and psychological support from both lay and professional providers and ensure access to services for more intensive mental health support. Crucially, we sustain our efforts by building the psychosocial competence of HIAS personnel and stakeholders to respond to the acute distress of forcibly displaced persons.

Economic Inclusion

When refugees and forcibly displaced people arrive in countries of asylum, they often need to adapt their skills to earn sustainable and safe livelihoods. HIAS supports refugees on their road to self-reliance, helping them to find programs focused on poverty eradication, employment, entrepreneurship, and financial services. We advocate for the rights of both refugees and local host communities to access dignified, sustainable, and safe work, alongside economic development.

Emergency Response

In 2021, with the support of a transformational grant from MacKenzie Scott, HIAS embarked on an exciting new initiative to strengthen our global capacity to respond quickly to new humanitarian emergencies. HIAS' Emergency Department will work closely with country offices to create emergency preparedness plans and provide guidance to adapt core programs to emergency contexts. HIAS will also train a cadre of staff with specialized skills able to deploy quickly during emergencies for assessments, response activities, donor engagement, external communication, and advocacy. Through this multiyear initiative, HIAS will build the skills, systems, and organizational culture needed for effective coordination and response to emergencies.

Accountability to Affected Populations

HIAS' Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Framework ensures the inclusion of refugees, other forcibly displaced people, and vulnerable host communities throughout the program cycle. Informed by the Core Humanitarian Standards and the principle of "Do No Harm," the framework pillars are: communication and transparency; feedback and response; participation and inclusion; and learning and adaptation.

HIAS ensures that program design is based on evidence from needs assessments, including the annual UNHCR participatory needs assessment, and consultation with affected communities. HIAS shares information about its accountability commitments and available

services in all country offices. HIAS proactively invites affected people to provide feedback on planned and ongoing activities through context-appropriate, accessible channels, ensuring that all affected people can voice feedback, recommendations, and concerns safely and equitably. HIAS uses feedback received to adapt ongoing programs and shape the design and implementation of future programming.

Governance, Structure, and Policies

Globally, HIAS employs more than 1,300 staff in 16 countries, with headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland (U.S.).

HIAS' Board of Directors is made up of 22 members, including 10 women. It meets at least four times a year. The Board has three officers and operates with six active committees that meet regularly. Board members bring a wide range of professional and business experience to their service, including law, finance, education, and non-profit and refugee advocacy leadership.

HIAS staff are subject to a robust Code of Conduct and set of internal policies, including PSEA, Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment, Conflict of Interest, Privacy, Whistleblowing, Security and Emergency Preparedness, Information Security, Data Breach, Finance and Accounting, as well as others relating to procurement, travel, and reimbursements.



Refugees from the burned down camp Moria on Lesbos and from other Greek islands stand in the port of Lavrio near Athens. Greek authorities moved about 1000 migrants, mostly families and recognized refugees, to the mainland to improve conditions in the overcrowded island camps. **Photo:** Socrates Baltagiannis/picture alliance via Getty Images

Context for Vulnerable Refugees and Migrants in Greece

Greece hosts approximately 120,000 refugees, 40 percent of whom are under the age of 18. The Eastern Mediterranean route, from Turkey to the Eastern Aegean Greek islands and on to other European countries, is one of the most widely travelled by refugees fleeing violence in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and many other countries across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. There are close to 25,000 refugees on the Aegean islands, living in “hotspots”—designated reception locations where new arrivals to European Union (EU) borders are confined for processing. Meeting basic needs in these hotspots is difficult due to crowded and unsafe conditions.



The right to seek asylum is increasingly under threat in Greece. Punitive legislation now shortens deadlines for asylum registration and makes it more complex and difficult to provide legal assistance. Since the EU-Turkey migration agreement entered into force on March 20, 2016, the European Asylum Support Office has been conducting admissibility interviews in Greek hotspots to establish whether an asylum seeker is permitted to make a claim in Greece. These proceedings often violate asylum seekers’ right to a fair hearing. On June 7, 2021, Greece issued a Joint Ministerial Decision that designates Turkey as a “safe third country” for asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Bangladesh, compounding the existing challenges and threats these individuals face.



A scene inside the Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesvos, May 2018. **Photo:** Bill Swersey

The government of Greece and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency have been accused of conducting increased pushbacks at the sea borders with Turkey especially off the coast of Lesbos and Samos. There are also cases of illegal pushbacks that occur after asylum seekers have reached Greek soil, and there are even cases of recognized refugees that have been forcibly pushed back to Turkey. Greece will likely see a surge in arrivals in 2022, due to political and economic pressures within Turkey, making it vital that asylum seekers can access safety and fair asylum procedures.

The devastating fires of 2020 in the Moria Reception and Identification Center and the COVID-19 pandemic further destabilized the lives of refugees and migrants in Greece, cutting off access to income and increasing their vulnerability to violence. The Reception and Identification Center of Mavrovouni, the new “camp” housing former residents of Moria, is still not equipped with safe communal spaces or appropriate health and sanitation facilities. All of these conditions increase safety risks, especially for women, children, and persons with disabilities. COVID-19 related policies will continue to require close monitoring as refugees and other forcibly displaced people are often subjected to different rules and enforcement. Refugees generally face an unequal criminal justice system with heightened penalties and fines that are disproportionate to the alleged crimes. At the same time, racist attacks against refugees and asylum seekers continue unabated without adequate accountability for perpetrators.

HIAS Programs in Greece

HIAS’ primary goal in Greece is the provision of high quality public legal information and representation, as well as more recently, community-based mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programming. HIAS Greece focuses on refugees who are most vulnerable, including children and survivors of torture or gender-based violence (GBV). With limited legal assistance available for refugees and other forcibly displaced people across the country, HIAS Greece plays a critical role helping refugees secure legal status, the first step toward regaining control and stability in their lives. Currently, HIAS Greece serves refugees and asylum seekers mainly in Lesbos, with a smaller caseload in Athens. Some 70 percent of HIAS Greece’s clients are from Afghanistan, with other populations served including Syrians, Iraqis, and several nationalities from across Asia and Africa. In 2021 alone, HIAS Greece provided intensive legal services to 534 clients. HIAS realizes people carry a diversity of experiences and intersecting identities requiring unique support and solutions. As such, HIAS takes a holistic approach to its interventions and offers integrated programming in GBV prevention and response, community-based mental health and psychosocial support, economic inclusion, and legal protection.

HIAS Greece’s **legal protection** programs advance refugee rights through individual legal representation during asylum and family reunification procedures for: asylum seekers (including those in administrative detention), unaccompanied minors, survivors of GBV, and individuals with disabilities. Refugees have been wrongfully portrayed as the cause of crime and economic decline, resulting in widespread discrimination including ethnic profiling and xenophobia.



Vassilis Kerasiotis, HIAS Greece country director, speaks with refugees in a tent outside of Moria camp, 2018.
Photo: Bill Swersey

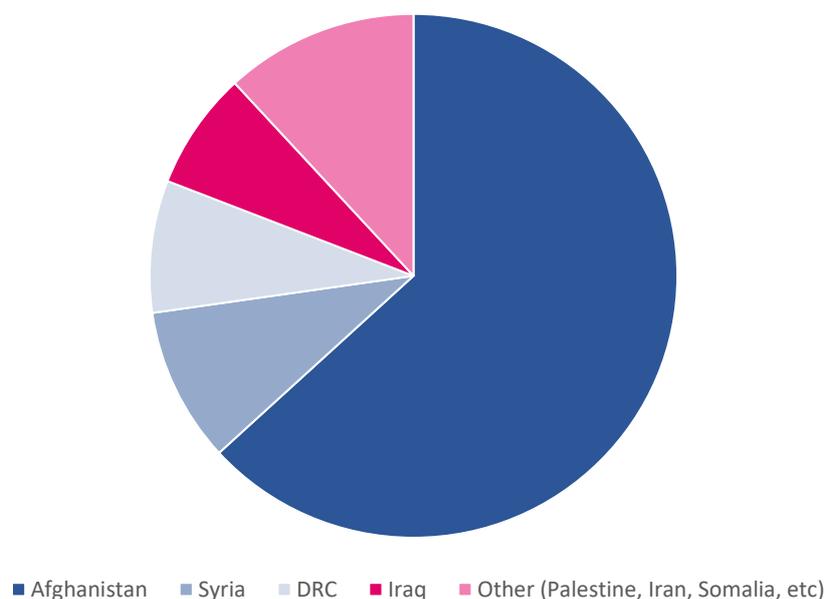
Because of this reality, HIAS Greece also represents refugees who have experienced discrimination or hate crimes, reports incidents to the Racist Violence Recording Network, and provides legal advice to victims. HIAS Greece actively participates in strategic litigation to increase refugees' access to social and economic rights and to hold accountable those engaged in hate crimes in local and national courts, the European Court of Human Rights, and other European and international institutions.

HIAS Greece provides **community-based mental health and psychosocial support** programs for forcibly displaced people and refugees who suffer adversity and extreme stressors, such as loss of loved ones, violence, and disruptions in daily life. Refugees benefit from services such as individual assessments, counselling, psychosocial support, and referrals as needed. These services are provided in a safe and secure environment where vulnerable people, who are often fleeing stigma and discrimination, can begin to be reminded of who they were and who they want to become beyond the "refugee" identity. HIAS Greece collaborates with other services to facilitate access and referrals to services ranging from basic needs and security to more specialized treatment for people who have been forcibly displaced.

HIAS Greece implements HIAS' global **Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Framework** and staff are trained on AAP principles and standard operating procedures. HIAS Greece displays the Code of Conduct in each office location and shares information about its accountability commitments and available services through written information and through standard operating processes for case management with clients. HIAS Greece uses feedback and response mechanisms that are accessible and context appropriate, including a dedicated email address, and an online reporting platform for submission of feedback, concerns, and suggestions. HIAS often conducts focus groups with community leaders in Lesvos to receive updated information, and to create a link to the community ensuring that all affected people can access services.

Looking ahead at programs, HIAS Greece will continue to provide high quality legal aid and MHPSS services to refugees and other forcibly displaced people, while advocating for a fair asylum system, initiating strategic litigation, and working at the European level through engagement with regional refugee advocacy networks. Following the fires in Moria, HIAS Greece modified its services, implementing remote support and developing other innovative solutions. HIAS Greece will continue to strengthen its capacity to respond to future emergencies, building on these experiences. With additional resources, HIAS Greece plans to open new offices in Samos and Evros to meet growing needs. HIAS Greece would like to expand the scope of MHPSS services by adapting an integrated model of service delivery and enhancing MHPSS advocacy, as well as launching community and capacity-building initiatives in the coming years. HIAS Greece will also design a phased-in strategy for addressing GBV that is relevant to the context and evolves over time. HIAS Greece will partner with existing organizations working in this area and seek out opportunities to resource and implement GBV-related activities. Finally, HIAS Greece hopes to establish integrated MHPSS and GBV risk reduction and response programming, along with economic inclusion programs.

Graph 1: Populations Served in 2021



Coordination: Partners and Peer Networks

HIAS Greece maintains and will grow strong working relationships with relevant local, national, and international stakeholders to advance protection for refugees and asylum seekers. HIAS Greece's strategic partners include refugee community leaders, international and national non-governmental organizations; civil society groups; government agencies; UNHCR; schools; universities; women's groups and networks; lawyers; and other professional groups. HIAS Greece participates in all relevant coordinating bodies in Athens and Lesvos, including the child protection, GBV, legal aid, MHPSS, protection, and advocacy working groups. HIAS Greece was also one of the founding members of the recently launched Recording Mechanism to Document Cases of Informal Forced Returns. HIAS Greece is a member of the Centralized European Asylum System (CEAS) Working Group of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and the European Integration Network. HIAS Greece participates in the CEAS sub-working group of Athens Advocacy Working Group, and in the bi-weekly Working Groups organized by ECRE on CEAS and the New Pact on Asylum and Migration. HIAS Greece also participates in a coordination group concerning the NGO Registry and shrinking space for civil society, as well as a monthly meeting organized by the National Mechanism to Prevent Trafficking.

Moving forward, HIAS Greece will also advance its work to build the capacity of Greek civil society to incorporate best practices in GBV, mental health, and child-centered programming into their work with refugees and asylum seekers.



Sandy Spinner, HIAS board member, and staff from Islamic Relief USA, at the HIAS office in Lesvos for the launch of the Greece Refugee Rights Initiative, a first-of-its-kind interfaith project for refugee rights. **Photo:** Bill Swersey

Operational Support for Programs

As HIAS' programs expand to meet new global needs, HIAS remains committed to delivering the highest quality of services to those it seeks to support and empower. To enable country teams to succeed and thrive, HIAS will invest new operational resources in our programs, processes, and people.

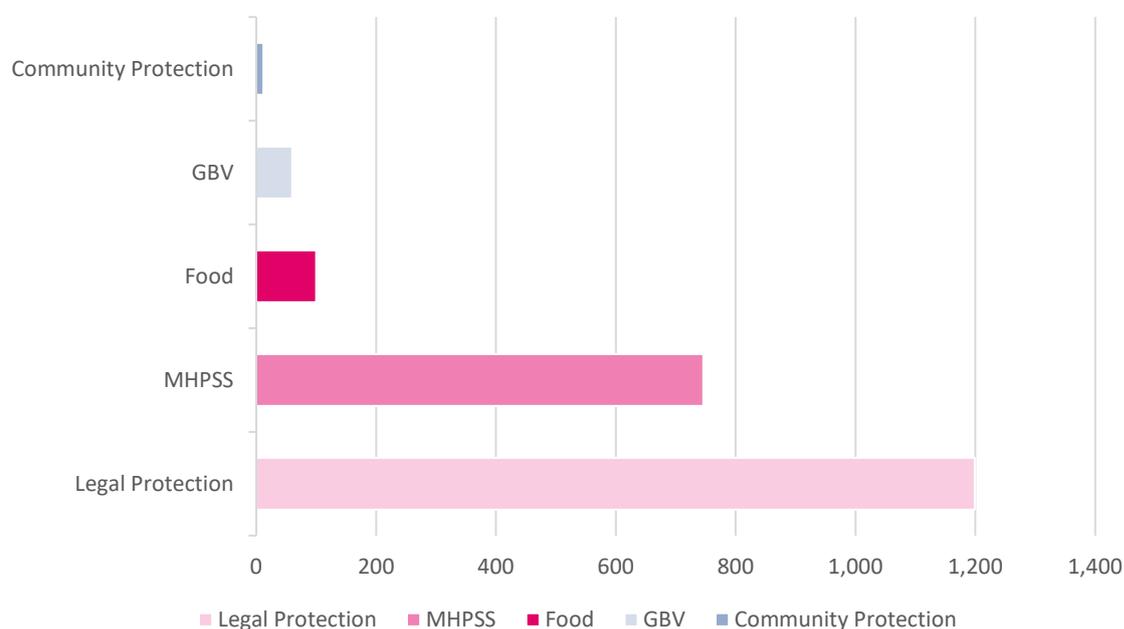
The HIAS Greece team is comprised of 20 staff in two locations. HIAS Greece's Country Director, Program Manager, and Finance Manager make up the leadership team. Each HIAS Greece staff member abides by HIAS' Code of Conduct and other policies and procedures in line with global best practices. All staff members have completed trainings on **Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)**. These trainings are updated and repeated regularly to ensure both prevention and response to any reported incidents of SEA. HIAS applies a gender lens when analyzing, planning, and making decisions across all its operations, in order to ensure the safety, security, and wellbeing of the entire organization's staff.

To support **staff wellbeing**, HIAS has a global contract with the Konterra Group, which provides support for work-related and personal challenges. HIAS Greece provides monthly support sessions to staff to support their mental health and wellbeing. HIAS also invests in the skills and capacity of staff worldwide, supporting a wide range of local, national, regional, and international training for staff. Going forward, HIAS will ensure that staff have diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) training. HIAS Greece will request additional training resources in line with emerging programming and operational needs.

HIAS is committed to developing an effective, sustainable **safety and security** risk management system that is in line with its values and mission. Tensions between locals and refugees in Lesvos and Samos mean community-based security for NGOs operating in Mavrovouni and other camp locations is challenging. Attacks against refugees and NGOs by anti-immigrant activists are not unheard of, making for a complex security and acceptance environment. HIAS Greece continues to develop its approach to safety and security in response to these challenges and to the COVID-19 pandemic. If programming and staffing are expanded, so will the need for investment in operational support infrastructure, including security management.

HIAS Greece has been provided training and closely complies with the EU **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**. Globally, HIAS is rolling out a **Digital Transformation Strategy** to ensure that participants' personal information is digitally secured and protected and in line with the requirements of the GDPR. The strategy will also create one universal source of information and collaboration; ensure all organizational knowledge is standardized, digitized, organized, and discoverable; ensure data around inputs, outcomes, and impact is readily accessible; help employees collaborate on gathering and building resources on this information platform; and easily share and leverage data from partners and affiliates. HIAS will be providing annual refresher training to all country offices on IT tools and procedures.

Graph 2: People Reached by Program Area in 2021



With support from headquarters, HIAS Greece will also continue to review and strengthen procedures and tools related to data and reporting as well as finance and compliance, in line with donor requirements and international standards. HIAS Greece will work with headquarters to implement an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. The ERP system will improve alignment of operations, finance, programs, and human resources, allowing for more efficient and cost-effective country operations.

Donors and Development

HIAS is committed to growing and diversifying its donor base in each country of operation. With support from headquarters, HIAS Greece is developing a resource mobilization strategy to sustain, increase, and diversify funding sources, building on its longstanding reputation for comprehensive and flexible programming in a challenging operating environment. HIAS Greece continues to build strong relationships with current donors including the Open Society Foundations, the law firm Jones Day, the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, and the Jewish Coalition for Disaster Relief. HIAS is very hopeful that the ongoing inter-faith partnership with Islamic Relief USA—the Greece Refugee Rights Initiative—will continue and expand beyond legal assistance to include economic inclusion and GBV programs. In 2022, HIAS Greece will also pursue additional funding from Islamic Relief Worldwide following an external evaluation. HIAS Greece will leverage existing partnerships and expertise in Lesvos and Athens to raise funds for the expected influx of Afghans arriving in Spring 2022 and will seek out additional multi-year funding to stabilize and expand programmatic impact in the coming years.



A HIAS Greece interpreter confers with managing attorney Elli Kriona-Saranti during an informative legal session at the HIAS office. **Photo:** Bill Swersey

Communications, Policy, and Advocacy

HIAS Greece engages in advocacy at multiple levels to advance refugee protection at the policy and practice level. HIAS' advocacy targets include local and national authorities and the European Union. HIAS Greece's networks and partnerships allow HIAS to lead efforts in policy change to advance refugee rights; promote access to asylum; identify cases that would benefit from strategic litigation; refer clients to needed services; and build capacity within the sector. HIAS Greece works with coalition partners to stand against xenophobia and to develop and implement advocacy strategies to prevent it. Refugees and asylum seekers face restrictions on freedom of expression and association, and there are significant concerns around how the new NGO Registry singles out supporters of vulnerable migrants.

Looking ahead, HIAS Greece will prioritize advocacy with national authorities and other stakeholders on core issues, including: criminalization of migration; illegal pushbacks; closure of reception centers on hotspot islands; access to asylum and fair asylum procedures; reception conditions; the EU Pact on Asylum and Migration; and the NGO Registry and its chilling effects. HIAS Greece plans to formally join additional key European advocacy networks relevant to asylum and migration policy, such as the Platform for

International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants and the European NGO Forum on Asylum and Migration.

HIAS' regional team is developing plans to strengthen internal and external communications, building on strategies developed for Greece in 2020. HIAS Greece currently uses Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms to reach the public as well as participants with key messages. Regionally, HIAS will work to ensure that people traveling across Africa and Eurasia are aware of HIAS services and locations and other available resources across different countries through digital and other information tools.

Cover Photo: Dimitra Mantzari
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