

**Summary Activity  
Report 2018**

**GREEK COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES**

## The Refugee Situation in Greece in 2018



**50,511**

refugee arrivals in 2018

**36,310**

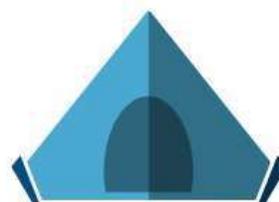
refugee arrivals in 2017

**29,718**

arrivals on the islands in 2017

**32,497**

arrivals on the islands in 2018



**18,014**

arrivals via Evros in 2018

**6,592**

arrivals via Evros in 2017



**Total number of GCR beneficiaries in 2018**

**13,611**



**11,468**

**Persons that received GCR legal aid in 2018**

**Persons that received GCR social assistance in 2018**

**7,249**



Source: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>

### Brief review of the refugee situation in Greece in 2018

The refugee crisis erupted in Greece in 2015; more than three years later, the refugee phenomenon demonstrates some consistent characteristics.

The majority of the newcomers originate from countries that have been in conflict for years or are in a state of generalized violence (Afghanistan 27.7%, Syria 24.4%, Iraq 18%). There is also a **substantial increase of Turkish nationals**<sup>1</sup>, especially following the failed coup in July 2016.

Table 1 records the total number of asylum applications in 2018 and 2017 (the difference between the two numbers indicates the entry of non-registered refugees in the region of Evros; it is also partly due to the registration of persons that have lost their status to remain in the country) where a significant increase (14.20%) is noted compared to 2017.<sup>2</sup>

	2017	2018
<b>Total Number of Asylum Applications</b>	58,642	66,970
<b>Asylum Applications by Turkish nationals</b>	1,826	4,834

Table 1. Asylum Applications

The implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement was extended in 2018 according to which asylum seekers are issued a geographical restriction, forcing them to remain on the Greek islands, even after the annulment of the relevant decision by the Council of State in April 2018, following an action brought by GCR.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the living conditions of the refugees on the Eastern Aegean islands remain extremely problematic and have led to the consolidation of the situation.

A new situation has also been formed by the increasing number of arrivals via Evros. There have been continuous reports and allegations of **illegal push-backs**<sup>4</sup>, which tend to become the new norm, contrary to international law (see relevant reports by the GCR and cooperating organizations). Moreover, the entry of refugees via the same route who are not registered and arrive in Athens and Thessaloniki, even in accommodation facilities, without being submitted to any reception procedure, results in increased protection needs.

The examination system of asylum applications keeps facing problems, especially regarding access; there are many obstacles, in particular for those who have not entered via the Greek islands. Persistent problems remain in the implementation of the Fast-Track Border Procedure following the EU-Turkey Statement. EASO employees-experts are engaged in the admissibility procedure (as well as the examination on the merits for non-vulnerable cases) and the relevant assessment of Turkey

1The increase is evident in the number of asylum applications submitted by Turkish nationals based on the data provided by the Asylum Service. 4,834 persons in 2018 compared to 1,826 in 2017.

2<http://asylo.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Greek-Asylum-Service-Statistical-Data-GR.pdf>

3<https://www.gcr.gr/el/news/press-releases-announcements/item/873-dt-esp-oxfam>

4<https://www.gcr.gr/el/ekdoseis-media/ektheseis/reports/item/790-anafores-gia-systimatikes-epanaproothiseis-ston-evro-apo-eksypiretoy-menous-tou-esp>



qualifying as a safe third country, as well as the vulnerability assessment implemented on the Greek islands.

The negative attitude of the second instance Appeals Committees remains the main problem, as they reject almost 97% of the relevant applications, being obviously at odds with the European average.

The implementation of transfers to other EU countries continued in the last year in accordance with the Dublin Regulation (5,456 in total in 2018), mostly under the family reunification procedure.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Relocation scheme implementation was concluded on 30-3-2018. The return of asylum seekers to Greece in accordance with the Dublin Regulation, the full reinstatement of which was recommended by the European Commission already in March 2017, is still not massively enforced (23 persons in 2018). This happens because, faced with the continued problems in the reception system in the country, many national Courts have suspended the return procedures to Greece, while the monitoring of the execution of the judgment M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers remains ongoing (the judgment had basically suspended the implementation of the Dublin system for Greece).

<b>Total number of persons</b>	71,000
<b>Persons on the Greek islands</b>	14,600
<b>Persons in the UNHCR accommodation scheme on the mainland</b>	22,700
<b>Persons in the emergency accommodation scheme (IOM)</b>	2,500
<b>Persons in accommodation facilities funded mainly by the EU directorate DG ECHO</b>	20,000
<b>Unaccompanied minors</b>	3,741
<b>Asylum seekers in detention</b>	18,204

Table 2. Reception of asylum seekers

The **reception system** in the country faced serious difficulties, as the situation in the accommodation facilities on the Greek islands (a result of the implementation of the **geographical restriction**) remained explosive, with most of them being overcrowded and living conditions that do not respect the minimum rights provided for in the Guideline.<sup>6</sup> The situation of the accommodation facilities on the mainland, especially temporary ones in the form of camps, also faced problems due to their diversity and their administration and supervision status by various state and non-state actors without a central management system. The suspension of the relocation scheme and the need for

<sup>5</sup> <http://asylo.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Dublin-stats-December18GR.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gcr.gr/el/ekdoseis-media/ektheseis/reports/item/892-nea-ekthesi-tou-esp-gia-tis-synthikes-ypodoxis-sta-synora>



Figure 1. Kara Tepe, Lesvos

transferring vulnerable population from the Greek islands has led to the over-crowding of the mainland accommodation facilities, resulting lately in the use of temporary facilities (mostly hotels).

### New challenges in 2018

The significant increase of recognized beneficiaries of international protection increases their need for integration in the country and represents the new great challenge for the national asylum system. Due to the continued financial crisis and lack of an overall integration strategy, there is no significant change in the situation of refugees following their recognition and the granting of protection status. As a result, the accommodation facilities and the UNHCR accommodation scheme remain constantly **fully occupied** (98% occupancy rate in December 2018).

Consultations on the national strategy on integration began only in January 2019, without any measures for supporting the integration of recognized refugees in the country having taken place.

### GCR facing the situation - 2018 Successes

GCR, in cooperation with UNHCR and other international humanitarian organizations, has established its presence in **Athens, Thessaloniki, the islands and the region of Evros**, by continuously strengthening its structures and providing services to a large number of people.

GCR has established a presence in all national entry points, maintaining an office on **Lesvos** and units providing legal protection on the other islands with operating RICs, as well as in the areas of **Rhodes** and **Evros while it opened a new office in Samos**.

In Athens, GCR continued the operation of **PYXIDA**, the intercultural center supporting refugees and asylum seekers by offering education courses, helping in their integration in the job market<sup>7</sup>, as well as providing psychosocial support to children, families and refugees in a vulnerable position.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.kathimerini.gr/996902/gallery/epikairothta/ellada/prosfyges-me-doyleia-sthn-ellada-vinteo>

Moreover, by carrying out missions, GCR has covered the needs for legal protection in all the pre-removal detention centers in Greece (Amygdaleza, Corinth, Xanthi, Paranesti, Fylakio) as well as in other detention facilities (e.g. police stations).

At the same time, GCR provided services to refugees in the **Epirus region** with an office in Ioannina, while it also regularly provided services in accommodation facilities- camps in the Attica - Voiotia regions and the wider Thessaloniki area. In cooperation with the Municipality of Thessaloniki and **UNHCR**, GCR also provided services to persons participating in the UNHCR accommodation scheme.

GCR also provided services to **recognized refugees**, covering the whole range of their needs; similarly, GCR, in cooperation with other organizations (Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Babel), has been providing services to survivors of torture.

GCR's activities in the provision of protection to unaccompanied minors, via its offices in Athens and Thessaloniki have filled a significant gap in the protection, especially of unaccompanied minors that were not previously registered.

In the second semester of 2018, GCR gradually assumed the operation of **safe zones** for unaccompanied minors, within the Accommodation Facilities of **Elaionas** in Athens and **Alexandria** in Central Macedonia.

GCR has also regularly provided support **at the second instance examination of asylum applications**, taking over the relevant state obligation in the mainland (Attica, Corinth, Thessaloniki) and in the areas of Rhodes and Evros for the first semester of 2018. Moreover, towards the end of 2018 GCR assumed the provision of support to the lawyers of the legal aid lawyer directory that has been established by the Asylum Service.

GCR has supported a number of asylum cases before the competent Administrative Courts of Appeal, while it has offered legal support in a significant number of civil-criminal cases, as well as in extradition cases, asylum seekers, recognized beneficiaries of international protection and vulnerable cases all over the country.

GCR, along with others, mostly Greek organizations, have managed to suspend the execution of decisions for return/readmission to Turkey, while they also provided protection to refugees whose application was rejected, by achieving a suspension of their return to Turkey.

In April 2018, following an action brought by GCR, **the decision of the Asylum Service**, imposing a geographical restriction to asylum seekers on the Greek islands **was annulled**. The decision was reinstated immediately after the issue of the Council of State judgment, while the hearing for the annulment application against the new decision imposing once again the same restriction is scheduled for April 2019.

In 2018, the GCR Legal Unit together with well-known academics and the support of the Athens Bar Association **brought before the Plenary Session of the Council of State the first case of the 8 Turkish servicemen**, who fled to Greece after the failed coup in July 2016. Following an application for annulment and suspension lodged by the Minister of Migration Policy, the beneficiary was

granted asylum in Greece. The Court judgment vindicated the refugee, recording a significant win for the national asylum system and the rule of law.<sup>8</sup>

## Entry Points

The Eastern Aegean islands remained the principal entry points of those seeking asylum in Greece in 2018. During the same year, there was a significant increase in the flows near the northern borders, and more specifically in the Evros region. GCR firmly established its presence in all the entry points in Greece in 2018.

## Islands

With a small increase in the arrival numbers in 2018 compared to 2017 (**32,497 persons compared to 29,718**) the situation on the islands remains extremely problematic, due to the overcrowding of the existing reception facilities and the implementation of the geographical restriction policy on the islands, leading to dire living conditions.

From a total number of **66,970 asylum applications**, a total number of **27,426** applications were lodged on the islands. More specifically, per island:

Lesvos	11,949	Kos	2,141
Samos	6,743	Leros	1,784
Chios	4,082	Rhodes	727

Table 3. Asylum applications on the islands

Through various programs and funding (OXFAM, UNHCR, MSF, Dutch Council for Refugees etc.), GCR managed to maintain its presence, almost throughout the year, on all the islands-entry points in the Greek territory, with lawyers present on every island (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, Kos, Rhodes), while it maintained an office in Lesvos and Samos throughout the year. A total of **1,820 cases** were served on the islands.

At the same time, groups of lawyers and social workers coordinated their activities in the Athens office, while missions were carried out locally on the islands to get in contact with the local authorities and agencies and supervise the situation.

Additionally, the GCR lawyers have, in large part, assumed the legal representation, following the rejection of asylum applications at second instance (the large majority concerns Syrians whose applications were finally dismissed as inadmissible on the basis that Turkey is a safe third country, as well as Afghans, Iraqis etc.), **lodging applications for annulment and suspension** against the relevant

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gcr.gr/el/news/press-releases-announcements/item/949-deltio-typou-tou-esp-gia-to-skeptiko-tis-apofasis-tou-ste>

decisions of the Appeals Committees as well as decisions on deportation/readmission, to prevent their readmission to Turkey as per the EU-Turkey Statement.

Moreover, the GCR Legal Unit has taken over **numerous cases of detainees**, carrying out interventions to lift their detentions, as well as administrative appeals against decisions on deportation/readmission.

## Evros

Due to a large increase of entries via Evros, GCR maintained its presence in the area, providing services to asylum seekers in the Fylakio RIC and the Fylakio pre-removal detention facility (PROKEKA). GCR also monitored closely the push-backs, a phenomenon that became worrying during 2018, by carrying out missions from the Thessaloniki Offices.

Thanks to the wide presence of GCR at all main entry points in Greece (including Evros) and in the mainland, as well as the direct collaboration between the islands units and those in the mainland, a full, more efficient and holistic case management becomes possible, with referrals between the programs (e.g. rehabilitation of survivors of torture or of unaccompanied minors) so as to provide full protection to the beneficiary. More specifically, the representation of our beneficiaries continues and is ensured both in the case of their transfer to another island from the original point of entry, as well as following their arrival to the mainland.

## GCR Units

The Greek Council for Refugees is organized in distinct units, working closely together, aiming to offer a holistic and complete frame for their beneficiaries, from their arrival in the Greek territory up until the moment they feel ready to begin their integration journey in the Greek society. The Units are: **the First Reception Unit**, the **Legal Unit**, the **Social Unit** and the **Intercultural Center PYXIDA**.

### First Reception and Interpretation Unit

The First Reception Unit and the **Screening and Interpretation department** consist of interpreters who intervene to meet the needs of those seeking asylum in Greece & Europe, who know the traditions of the culture, civilization and religion of these people and who deeply understand the difficulties of adjusting to the Greek and European reality, as in the majority of cases they themselves have sought asylum in these countries.



Figure 2. First Reception Unit

The interpreters are present in all units and participate in all the stages of communicating with the beneficiaries, from the point of first reception to phone communications and any contact with the officers of all the organization's departments. At the same time, they participate in other GCR programs on the islands of Samos, Leros, Chios, Mytilene, Kos, as well as in Thessaloniki and Ioannina, while they accompany the beneficiaries to health care facilities and facilitate their access to legal aid in detention centers.

In 2018, the GCR Screening group served **5,242 new cases**, concerning **7,633 persons**.

## Legal Unit

In 2018, the GCR Legal Unit implemented a number of programs for the protection of the rights of asylum seekers, international protection beneficiaries and vulnerable cases.

### Provision of protection in accommodation facilities (camps) in Attica-Thessaloniki

GCR, in the context of implementing the UNHCR Program, provided legal information and up to 30/06/2018 legal aid in accommodation facilities in the Attica region (camps of Malakasa, Thiva, Lavrio, Ritsona) and in Voiotia (flats in Livadia) as well as the wider area of Thessaloniki-Kilkis (camps of Nea Kavala, Kilkis and Volvi) in case of asylum procedures at first and second instance, as well as legal support for family reunification and relocation applications.

### Provision of services in the Athens-Thessaloniki offices

Within the context of implementing the UNHCR Program and making use of other funding (via the HELP program (up to 07/2018), jointly with the Spanish Organization "Comision Española de Ayuda al Refugiado" (CEAR) and with co-funding by the Municipality of Madrid, GCR provided legal information and help to asylum seekers, residing in flats of the ESTIA program (React in the Thessaloniki area), as well as to those who came to its offices in accordance with its **open door policy**. The legal aid concerned all the stages of the asylum procedure, as well as family reunification and relocation cases.

The GCR Offices in Athens and Thessaloniki methodically collect beneficiaries' reports regarding the lack of access to the asylum system and submit these reports to the competent authorities and the Greek Ombudsman.

### GCR presence in the Epirus area

With OXFAM funding until March 2018 and then with UNHCR funding, GCR maintained its presence in the area in 2018, meeting the needs for legal protection, initially for the entire population and then for those residing in Ioannina city.

More specifically, up until March 2018, GCR provided services with regular visits to the accommodation facilities of the area, to the refugee population of Ioannina, residing in rented flats. Then, since April 2018, GCR has provided services to the refugee population of the city at its office within the Community Center. At the same time, the Ioannina unit worked closely together with the offices in Athens and Thessaloniki to carry out visits to detention facilities (Igoumenitsa detention center), intervening successfully to the competent authorities.

### Rehabilitation of survivors of torture

The Program for the Rehabilitation of Survivors of Torture, PROMETHEUS, is implemented by the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) and the Babel Day Centre/Syn-eirmos (February 2013) in cooperation with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (October 2014). The purpose is to provide a **multidisciplinary approach** and holistic legal, social, medical, psychological and psychiatric services to asylum seekers and refugees that have been subjected to torture. The Program was successfully

continued in 2018, funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture (UNFVT).

#### Provision of protection to unaccompanied minors

Combining multiple funding (World Jewish Relief, Christian Aid, Help program, Multicolored City Program funded by the Prefecture of Attica), GCR managed to continue to provide services to unaccompanied minors and families, so as to continue to serve more efficiently these specific vulnerable groups of the refugee population that visit the GCR offices in Athens and Thessaloniki.

The majority of the cases concerned intervention for access to asylum, family reunifications and procedures before the Public Prosecutor for Minors to grant power of attorney for specific actions as well as temporary arrangements for the custody of minors.

#### Providing legal aid on appeal

The GCR Free Legal Aid program, funded by UNHCR, concluded its activities in Athens and Thessaloniki during the first semester of 2018 replacing adequately and as far as possible the obligation for providing legal aid on appeal as per the program agreement between UNHCR and the Asylum Service.

At the end of 2018, GCR, funded by UNHCR, assumed the **provision of support to the Lawyers of the Legal Aid Directory of the Asylum Service**, providing information and undertaking to create a communication network to help their work.

#### Provision of services to international protection beneficiaries

GCR, funded by UNHCR, continued in 2018 the provision of services to international protection beneficiaries and their families; the services were initially provided until March 2018 with the operation of the One Stop-Shop, and then with the provision of services in the context of the **open door policy** in the offices in Athens and Thessaloniki.

More specifically, GCR provided services regarding: the renewal of their documents (refugee status and/or for humanitarian reasons); granting of travel documents; interventions for their reunification with members of their family; interventions on issues regarding the civil status of beneficiaries of international protection or civil disputes; interventions before public services to facilitate their integration in the country; support regarding administrative issues; institutional interventions for termination of bad practices or for raising awareness regarding the status of the beneficiaries of international protection in Greece.

#### Legal representation before the Courts

By maintaining its presence in various spots in the mainland and supporting asylum seekers and refugees at every stage of the asylum procedure, GCR has submitted 25 applications for annulment and 4 applications for suspension against rejection decisions of the Appeals Committees. GCR has ensured at least 2 positive outcomes on older cases and was probably the first to lodge an application for annulment and suspension against a decision to stop providing accommodation in a mainland camp with a positive outcome for the applicant.

### Supporting detainees in Athens and Thessaloniki

Funded by UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the support unit for detainees continued in 2018 to provide services in a context of ever-increasing asylum applications by detainees, carrying out regular visits to detention centers in Athens and Thessaloniki, as well as missions in almost all the Pre-removal Detention Centers of the country (Corinth, Paranesti, Xanthi, Fylakio of Orestiada).

The detention unit worked together with the island unit to deal with the returns of the asylum seekers who violated the geographical restriction forcing them to remain on the island of their entry, intervening in a significant number of cases to lift the geographical restriction, especially in vulnerable cases. In at least 34 cases, GCR challenged detention by lodging objections with the Courts, 12 of which were accepted.

### Providing legal aid in criminal/civil cases

GCR has also provided legal aid in criminal/civil cases of asylum seekers and in general beneficiaries of international protection, taking into account their particularly vulnerable position, as well as the fact that their need for legal aid was the immediate result of their particular status as asylum seekers.

More specifically, GCR provided assistance to cases supporting **victims of racial or sexual/gender-based violence** (SGBV-DAPHNE program), **victims of human trafficking**, illegal entry/exit from the country, illegal smuggling of persons, in case of emergency etc. Moreover, GCR undertook cases concerning custody and communication arrangements for minors, correction of civil certificates, as well as judicial interdiction. GCR has, among other things, successfully supported a victim of human trafficking in the form of labor exploitation, victims of racial violence as well as refugees facing charges for smuggling migrants or facilitating migrants within the country.

GCR has also successfully handled 9 extradition cases of Turkish nationals and an Iranian national, where the requested persons were in need of international protection in Greece or where their return to the requesting country would pose a risk of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment.

### Strategic Litigation Cases

GCR has lodged **an application for annulment against the decision of the Director of the Asylum Service** imposing a geographical restriction to the asylum seekers on the Greek islands, with a hearing scheduled for 16-4-2019 before the Council of State.

GCR, along with academics, intellectuals and the contribution of the Athens Bas Association, also continues supporting the cases of the **8 Turkish servicemen**, who fled to Greece after the failed coup in July 2016, with the aim to grant them asylum and provide them protection against the threat of persecution.

GCR contributed to the **collective complaint** lodged by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) on 21.12.2018 before the European Committee for Social Rights of the Council of Europe regarding **violations of the rights of unaccompanied and accompanied migrant children** in Greece.

Regarding the Administrative Arrangement between Greece and Germany on the **return of asylum seekers**, GCR took on the case of a Syrian applicant that was returned from Germany in September 2018 and demonstrated the violations of international, European and EU law.

#### Advocacy activities

Within the context of its objective of defending the rights of refugees and vulnerable groups, GCR has carried out a number of advocacy activities in 2018.

These activities were aiming to strengthen the collaboration with Greek and international organizations and networks supporting refugees and asylum seekers, via regular working group meetings in Greece and abroad. Following the EU-Turkey Statement of 18th March 2016, GCR has contributed information on the difficulties faced by refugees and asylum seekers on the islands and the mainland, as well as the reception conditions resulting from the implementation of the geographical restriction policy on the islands.

In the same context, GCR has participated in meetings with representatives of European institutions visiting Greece (such as the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the Deputy Director-General of the European Commission Directorate of Home Affairs etc.), with foreign embassy representatives in Greece (including the Embassies of Germany and the Netherlands) and with foreign Members of Parliament (including a delegation of Members of the Dutch Parliament).



Figure 3. GCR workshop on “Issues of International Protection before the Independent Appeals Committees”

#### Participation in public entities and organization networks in Greece

GCR is honored to participate in the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR). During 2018, GNCHR made several interventions on issues of protecting migrants and refugees most notably via its Recommendations for the full compliance of the Greek State with the Chowdury

judgment, its statement about the situation on the Eastern Aegean islands and especially in Moria and its statement-intervention regarding informal push-backs in the region of Evros.

In 2018, the GCR Legal Unit along with the Danish Refugee Council continued presiding over the Legal Committee of the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR) of the Municipality of Athens.

GCR is actively participating in the **Advocacy Working Group**, along with representatives of Greek and international NGOs that are active in the country, carrying out interventions with the Ministry of Migration Policy and other entities.

GCR also participates in all Working Groups within the context of UNHCR activities and the Campaign for the Access to Asylum. Moreover, GCR actively participates in any public initiatives for addressing specific issues, such as the Working Group for the National Reporting Mechanism on Trafficking of the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) and the Network for the Rights of Children on the Move under the Greek Ombudsman.

#### Provision of training

GCR has participated in numerous training activities for public administration officials, as well as other public entities or organizations. The main training activity took place in June and July 2018, funded by the European Union, under the program “European Judicial Training on the rights of persons in need of international protection”, where members of the GRC Legal Unit provided **training to students of the National School of Judges** in Thessaloniki and Athens. The program included a visit for educational purposes to the detention facilities of the Directorate for Foreign Nationals/ Transfers in Thessaloniki.

Furthermore, GCR provided training within the context of the Educational Seminal for Lawyers-members of the Heraklion Bar Association (Crete), held by the Heraklion Bar Association in cooperation with the UNHCR in June 2018.

In December 2018, GCR lawyers gave a presentation **updating the lawyers of the Legal Aid Directory of the Asylum Service**, in the context of the educational seminar organized by the UNHCR. Also in December 2018, GCR lawyers taught at the Legal Clinic of the European Law Students’ Association (ELSA) on “Refugee and Migration Law”.

#### Organization and participation in conferences-workshops-events

GCR regularly organizes and participates in conferences as they offer a unique opportunity to raise awareness and have a discussion with the participation of field professionals, civil society, State representatives and academics.

GCR organized in Athens in January 2018 a two-day event on **“Fundamental Human Rights and their implementation”**, in the context of the European Judicial Training on the rights of persons in need of international protection and persons who are victims of racial violence, while in March 2018, together with International Amnesty, Solidarity Now and the Greek Forum of Refugees, held a press conference on the occasion of the 2 years since the signing of the EU-Turkey Statement.

Moreover, in June 2018, GCR organized at the Athens Bar Association an event on: **Issues of International Protection before the Independent Appeals Committees**. GCR also participated in the **15<sup>th</sup> European Asylum Conference** organized by Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) in Athens in October 2018, as well as in workshops by the Greek Ombudsman, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki under the program Supporting University Community pathways for Refugees-migrants (SUCRE), the Jean Monnet European Center of Excellence, the Hellenic Society of International Law and International Relations, the University of Macedonia etc.

#### Publication of reports

GCR, in the context of advocating the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable groups, regularly writes and publishes reports to highlight any relevant issues.

**AIDA REPORT:** The Asylum Information Database (AIDA) Country Report is an important tool for the collection of data and the detection of any issues relating to the examination procedures of the applications for international protection. The report is prepared by GCR under the auspices of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) on an annual basis.<sup>9</sup> In March 2018, GCR published the updated AIDA Report for the previous year (2017). Moreover, in February, GCR published a report with testimonies of push-backs in Evros, while in November 2018, together with the organizations ARSIS – Association for the Social Support of Youth and Human rights 360, published a report on the same issue.

Finally, in May 2018, GCR published a report on the conditions of reception of asylum seekers at the borders, as evident from evidence collected in the various sites where GCR is present throughout the country, as well as field research which was funded by the Social Change Initiative. The Report was titled “Borderlines of Despair: First-line reception of asylum seekers at the Greek borders”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gcr.gr/el/ekdoseis-media/ektheseis/reports/item/892-nea-ekthesi-tou-esp-gia-tis-synthikes-ypodoxis-sta-synora>

## Social Unit

The Social Unit consists of a multidisciplinary group of **social workers, psychologists, teachers, nursery school teachers and vocational counselors**, professionals that are specially trained in the management of child protection beneficiaries, survivors of gender-based violence and survivors of torture. The GCR Social Unit is unique in terms of its close collaboration with the Legal Unit, aiming to offer a holistic frame to the asylum seekers and refugees depending on their needs.

**Accommodation** for asylum seekers/refugees remained the major issue for 2018. Their applications were supported by informing and referring them to UNHCR or the competent state authority (EKKA and the Ministry). In particularly vulnerable cases of homelessness, the GCR Social Unit carried out **direct interventions**, ensuring temporary accommodation/housing using GCR resources.

The Social Unit carried out **interventions with state and public services** to facilitate the issue of a Tax Registration Number (AFM), Social Security Number (AMKA) and, in general, respect of their rights. During the year, **interventions were carried out in detention centers** (legal aid and social welfare services were provided to 1,200 persons) to support the lift of the administrative detention, seeking to find an accommodation scheme.

The Social Unit provided support to the population of the Reception and Identification Center in Moria, intervening at the local level to facilitate the forced stay of the refugee population there, as well as the international protection or family reunification procedures.

## Employment Office

In 2018, the GCR vocational counselors group helped **314 refugees and asylum seekers, 40** of which entered the job market. The majority of the persons helped by the office are men (80%). Their countries of origin are mainly Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan and African countries. It is worth noting that many of these persons belong to vulnerable groups (LGBT, released prisoners, victims of rape-abuse-torture).

More specifically, the Employment Office provided: information services; vocational counseling (vocational guidance, preparation for interviews, enhancing self-esteem etc.); support in practical matters (issue of Tax Registration Number (AFM), Social Security Number (AMKA), health booklet, unemployment card etc.); psychosocial support; mediation with Services; information and referrals to Greek courses, professional trainings, job finding strategies and referral services for employment and placement in new jobs.

GCR has been networking and collaborating with other entities, exchanging good practices, information and experiences. It also exchanges information on job openings to maximize the possibilities of integrating the refugee job seekers.

Our beneficiaries usually find jobs in cleaning services, construction work, tourism; they are also employed as workers in various services, as interpreters and as domestic workers.

## Child Protection in Safe Zones

The **safe zones** within the accommodation facilities are home to unaccompanied minors under our protection (30 in each facility) and operate in accordance with the principles of International Child Protection, implementing the know-how transferred from IRC (International Rescue Committee). Our teams consist of caregivers, psychologists, teachers, social workers, interpreters and child protection officers (camp manager). The minors receive care on every level and for all their psychosocial, medical, educational, cultural and recreational needs.



Figure 4. Spanish school Sunion visits the safe zone in Elaionas

A good practice worth mentioning is **the enrollment of unaccompanied minors in the Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) apprenticeship schools**, in collaboration with Career Counselors of the Ministry of Education, where minors can choose a course and do traineeships in their future field of work. Moreover, many migrant teenagers received certifications from the School of Agriculture of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Additionally, collaborations with significant institutions were formed for the provision of psychosocial support, while serious efforts are undertaken to create normal living conditions for this stage of their lives.

## Intercultural center PYXIDA

In 2018, 517 students attended **the Greek language courses** at PYXIDA, while 47 students attended the **English language courses**. Their countries of origin were the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Among them, mostly Iranians and Afghans (23 men and 11 women) indicated a serious interest in **counseling to attend university**. In 2018, there were **37 volunteers** at PYXIDA, 29 of which were women and 8 were men.

**Cultural activities** were organized at the PYXIDA premises and elsewhere throughout the year. For example, there were cultural and music events, seasonal events (Christmas, Easter, Carnival, summer), celebrations, children excursions, sports activities, children's choir and meetings for creative writing groups.

Moreover, **a group for creative activities** was organized for pre-school children aged 0-6 years; it was initially run by a volunteer and then by a professional nursery school teacher. In total, 55 children were enrolled (29 girls and 26 boys) mostly from Iraq, Congo, Eritrea, Nigeria, Syria and Afghanistan and, in the end, 16 of them attended. The program included emotional education aiming to help the children to recognize and accept their feelings and to develop skills to manage their feelings and settle disputes.

**Support Group for Mothers: 13 group sessions** were held for the psychosocial support of 15 mothers from Nigeria by the psychologist of PYXIDA and one social worker. The women received information regarding potential opportunities to continue their education in Greece, using job finding strategies and preparing for interviews with employers.

**Group for Teenagers: 3 group sessions** were held with the participation of 5 teenagers. The group's objective was initially to bring all of its members together and then to discuss issues that concerned the children (regarding education, social issues and career guidance).

**Creative Writing Group:** There were **4 meetings** with 10 students from the Greek language courses that participated in creative writing exercises during the Athens World Book Capital event.

**Creative Activities for Preschoolers:** The pre-school group (0-6 years) organized in 2018 was initially run by a volunteer and then by a professional nursery school teacher; **55 children** were enrolled in total (29 girls and 26 boys).

**Creative Activities for Children:** There were **5 meetings** with the participation of 10 children of preschool and school age.

**Emotional education:** There were **10 sessions** with a group of 14 children of school age, aiming to help children to recognize their feelings, develop skills to manage them and skills to settle disputes.

**Social Support:** During 2018, the Social Worker of the Intercultural Center PYXIDA helped 59 asylum seekers. Most of them were from Afghanistan, Iraq and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and among them, there were **37 men** and **22 women**. Their main concerns required counseling regarding social issues, school enrollment and enrollment in nurseries.

**Psychological Support: 80 persons in total received psychological support services** at an individual and group level. The services included counseling for parents, children and teenagers, psychological support for children, teenagers and single mothers and information on participating in psychosocial support groups. Most beneficiaries were from Nigeria, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (**48 women, 32 men**).



Figure 5. Map of GCR offices and missions

## Financial Report

The total amount raised for the various Programs undertaken by GCR in 2018 was € 5,541,593.65. According to the 2018 Balance the expenses amounted to € 5,208,346.02.

**Expenses- Year 2018: €5,208,346.02**

Funders	AMOUNT
UNHCR	€2,342,292.31
INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE	€570,474.43
OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS	€490,530.36
OXFAM	€380,690.00
MUNICIPALITY OF MADRID - Project in Partnership with CEAR	€263,127.21
DUTCH COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES	€244,726.80
STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION	€210,989.29
PREFECTURE OF ATTICA	€183,024.00
WORLD JEWISH RELIEF	€167,095.07
SIGRID RAUSING TRUST	€101,346.76
HELP	€93,504.78
CHRISTIAN AID	€79,836.61
EU COMMISSION PROJECTS	€78,776.87
UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTARY FUND FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE	€60,186.73
MSF FRANCE	€57,463.85
INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF RED CROSS	€35,644.00
MSF SWISS	€30,600.00
SOCIAL CHANGE INITIATIVE	€16,575.73
PRIVATE DONATIONS	€14,118.96
OTHER PROGRAMS	€12,580.95
EPIM	€9,660.00
UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME	€7,977.87
COUNCIL OF EUROPE	€4,000.00
MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY	€3,647.24

Table 4. 2018 Funding

## Acknowledgments

GCR would like to thank all those with whom it collaborated for the implementation of the programs providing invaluable services for the support of refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable groups.

Our work would not have been possible without their courteous sponsorship and the support of our funders.

GCR would also like to thank all its members, private entities and donors for their donations in kind or money supporting our activities.

We would like to address a warm thank you to our invaluable volunteers who with their support, enthusiasm and initiative contribute in our work. Without them, we would not be able to achieve the goals and the activities of our Organization as successfully.

Finally, special thanks should be offered to the GCR staff members, who, for yet another year, have worked with awareness, dedication, quality and professional responsibility in order to serve, support and meet the needs of our beneficiaries.

**More information on the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)** is available at [www.gcr.gr](http://www.gcr.gr)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/gcr.gr/>

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