

CASE STUDY

# GREECE 2019–2023 / COMPLEX CRISIS

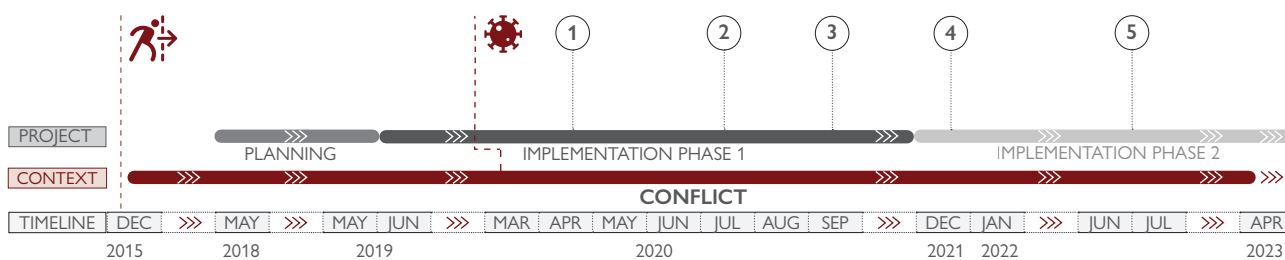
KEYWORDS: Host community integration, Local authorities engagement, Rental assistance, Security of tenure, Social cohesion

<b>CRISIS</b>	<b>Mediterranean Migration Crisis</b>
<b>PEOPLE AFFECTED</b>	<b>391,568 people</b> affected*
<b>RESPONSE LOCATION</b>	Multiple locations in Greece
<b>PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT</b>	<p><b>Total of 35,777 people and 15,942 HHs</b>  <b>48%</b> female and <b>52%</b> male beneficiaries  <b>39%</b> assisted were children   <b>54%</b> were adults   <b>7%</b> were people in their old age (50+ years)</p>
<b>PROJECT OUTPUTS</b>	<p><b>19 Integration Learning Centres</b> established in 13 cities throughout the country  <b>21,876 people/ 9,249 HHs</b> benefitted from <b>monthly rental subsidies</b> for apartments leased in the beneficiary's name  <b>9,384 people</b> enrolled in the <b>Integration Courses</b>  <b>27,971 integration monitoring sessions</b> conducted  <b>10,477 individual job counselling sessions</b> conducted  <b>6,8639 beneficiaries skills' profiles</b> created  <b>233 focus group discussions</b> conducted  <b>97 sensitization events</b> conducted  <b>43 career days and employability events</b> conducted</p>
* International Protection applications (2013 – January 2023) Source: <a href="#">Greek Asylum Service</a>	



**PROJECT SUMMARY**

The project aimed to promote self-reliance within the migrant population and to support the Greek authorities in establishing a sustainable integration mechanism into the society, as part of the overall Migration Management System, through the provision of a holistic set of services including integration courses, consisting of Greek language and soft skills courses, accommodation support services, including rental subsidies, employability support services, integration monitoring services and sensitization activities. The project focused towards a multifaceted and flexible approach to service provision adaptable to current and future needs while adapting the response to Covid-19 restrictive measures.



- 2015:** Mixed migration flows escalated due to mass influx of Syrians, Iraqis, Libyans, Afghans and Eritreans fleeing war, ethnic conflict or economic hardship.
- 1 Mar- May 2020:** Adaptation to remote service provision and extraordinary extension of rental subsidies entitlements due to COVID restrictions.
- 2 Jul 2020:** 19 Integration Learning Centres were established across Greece as service provision locations.
- 3 Sep 2020:** Fire at Lesbos Moria reception and identification centre, led to intensified outreach and enrollment activities.
- 4 Dec 2021:** Transition to national government funding.
- 5 Jun-Jul 2022:** Project target group population expanded to include Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BTP) and increase in the duration and amounts of rental subsidies to incentivize integration in the country.



Syrian and Iraqi refugees arrive from Turkey to Skala Sykamias, Lesbos island, Greece

## CONTEXT

Greece is the southeasternmost mainland European Union member state. The country encountered continuously high numbers of mixed migration flows since the end of 2014, with the biggest influx being recorded during 2015–2016. While migration flows have followed a steady decline in numbers since, over 390,000 international protection applications have been submitted from 2014 to August 2022, according to the Greek Asylum Service.

The dominant narrative in Greece is that the country has a nationally, linguistically, and religiously homogenous population. In this regard, most of the population of Greece is of Greek origin (local population groups and descendants of early 20th century Greek refugees from Asia Minor), Greek-speaking and Greek Orthodox. The only officially recognized minority is that of the Muslim population living in the region near Turkey. Nevertheless, after 1990, Greece became a destination country for over one million migrants from the Balkan countries (mainly Albania) and Eastern Europe.

The country's economy is comprised primarily of tertiary sector enterprises, with a thriving tourist industry. High-quality Greek agricultural products, favored by the typically Mediterranean climate, are also exported throughout Europe and Russia. However, because of the global financial crises of 2007–2009, the Greek economy suffered important setbacks in the period 2009–2018, which resulted in a significant decrease in the income per capita and consequent living standards, while the social welfare system had to undergo substantial cuts.

## SITUATION BEFORE THE CRISIS

Although Greece has been a transit country for migrants predominantly from the Middle East and Central Asia, the migration flows of 2014–2016 due to the expansion of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq was unprecedented. Over a million people entered the country through Turkey, primarily landing on the islands of the Aegean Sea and – to a lesser extent – by crossing the Evros River (the natural border between the two countries). The refugees were predominantly Arabs, Kurds, and Afghans from both the urban centers and the rural areas of Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

## SITUATION AFTER THE CRISIS

Upon arrival on the Greek islands, the intent of many refugees was to use the Western Balkans Route (from Greece to North Macedonia, to Serbia and Croatia, through Slovenia to Austria and Germany). The main exit point from Greece was the irregular crossing of Idomeni, where an informal refugee camp was created on farming fields. However, border crossing restrictions began in November 2015 and a complete shutdown of the irregular crossings took place in March 2016. The Greek state responded during the crisis by setting up accommodation schemes of the Greek Reception System, including open and closed

reception and identification centers, short and long-term open accommodation centers, safe zones and shelters for unaccompanied children, protective housing programs, and accommodation projects in chartered hotel facilities and rented urban apartments. These are considered as participants' residence locations prior to enrolling in the project (and residence therein during recognition serves as a prerequisite for enrollment). Pre-crisis infrastructure was strictly limited compared to the accommodation schemes set up in response.

## NATIONAL SHELTER STRATEGY

In accordance with EU Directive 2013/33 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 – laying down standards for the reception of applicants of international protection – the Government of Greece began creating temporary accommodation facilities in mainland Greece as early as February 2016. By September 2017, 49 temporary accommodation facilities with a total capacity of 50,000 individuals were established in mainland Greece. In addition, accommodation for asylum seekers in apartments was also provided through the UNHCR-implemented ESTIA project (Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation) with a capacity of 27,000 individuals. However, no additional support was foreseen for the migrants who were granted international protection status, resulting in congestion in reception accommodation schemes. Since its conception, the project aimed to facilitate the stranded participants of international protection to exit reception accommodation schemes. The project was planned and established as an integration mechanism, to provide a holistic set of services to participants, and since July 2022, temporary status of protection.

## PROJECT DESIGN

The main goals of the project were to increase migrants' prospects towards self-reliance and to support them in becoming active members of Greek society through a holistic set of services that touched upon basic elements of integration, i.e., integration courses (Greek language and soft skills), accommodation and employability support, individual integration monitoring and host community sensitization.



A recognized refugee receives information about job opportunities in Greece after attending in a Career Day co-organized by the organization.



One intended outcome was to support the national authorities to establish a sustainable integration mechanism for these participants in Greece, as part of the overall Migration Management System in the country. The project also intended to work as a rotation mechanism for the Greek Reception System (GRS), offering an exit strategy – along with the integration policy – to decongest GRS accommodation schemes or address participant needs after exiting others accommodated as applicants.

The project included rental subsidies as financial support for apartments leased by participants in their names, utilized to have participants understand and use the same methods, credentials, and platforms any other citizen in the country would use to rent a property.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Nineteen Integration Learning Centers (ILC) were established in thirteen cities as service provision locations to host project activities, in addition to field teams roving the government reception accommodation facilities. The value and duration of rental subsidies were revisited to match the situation in the housing market and to respond to the needs of the participants as identified through project feedback mechanisms. Land allocation or land issues were not a project concern, as the intended housing units were existing registered private properties in the country available for rent.



*It is crucial that beneficiaries of shelter provision projects are timely informed, periodically reminded and adequately empowered to address their needs after the end of service provision.*

Government-imposed movement restriction measures enforced during the initial phases of the COVID-19 pandemic urged the project to design remote implementation mechanisms. These were eventually maintained after the end of the restriction period – resulting in the availability of hybrid services (in-person and remote/online).

The project was implemented by an international agency with the support of ten partners. The initial overall personnel structure included five hundred staff. Over time, the number of staff involved was amended in accordance with the number of participants enrolled in the project in each period.

### TARGETING

The project was designed for implementation at the national level, following relevant coordination with important stakeholders. Furthermore, the target population was initially those receiving international protection (refugees and participants of subsidiary protection) and then, as of July 2022, included those receiving temporary protection (on the basis of the published Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of the Council of the European Union).

Project outreach activities took place at accommodation schemes of the Greek Reception System (Open Accommodation Centers, Reception and Identification Centers, and Hotels). Areas for the establishment of the project's Integration Learning Centers were targeted based on a preexisting presence of participant populations of rented urban apartment accommodations schemes (ESTIA).



*A refugee working in an elderly care facility together with his colleague, after receiving integration support by the organization.*



*Beneficiaries of the organization moving-in to their new apartment.*



**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Integration is a two-way process that requires the investment of both the host and the hosted communities. In this regard, participants of the project were required to attend mandatory integration courses, were provided with optional accommodation and employment services, and were invited to participate in individual integration monitoring and sensitization activities. Consequently, to benefit from the complete set of offered services, participants were required to be actively involved.

Moreover, the project launched impact and satisfaction services where participants provided feedback and suggestions on offered services. Project participants and members of the local population also had the opportunity to interact through 233 focus group discussions and 97 sensitization events organized by the sensitization component of the project. This feedback mechanism resulted in significant changes to provisions throughout the project, such as the increase in the duration and amounts of the monthly rental subsidies.



Refugees are visiting an apple orchard as part of the employability support provided by the organization.

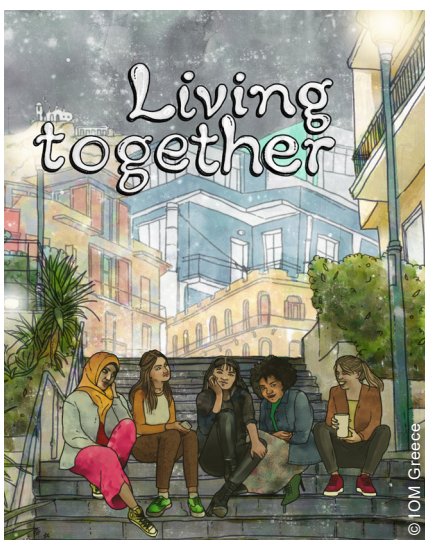
**COORDINATION**

The project falls under the general Migration Management continuum in Greece. In this regard, close coordination with the governmental and local authorities was required, to support the National and Local Integration Strategies and to support building the state's integration mechanism that is not in place yet. The project was developed in close coordination with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and all primary decisions were taken trilaterally (MoMA, DG Home, and the implementing agency) during international funding and bilaterally (MoMA – international agency) after the transition to national funding. Strong coordination with implementing partners in accommodation and education resulted in project quality and credibility, which was established as the main integration mechanism of the country.

**MAIN CHALLENGES**

The onset of COVID-19, and the first restrictive measures on mobility between March and May of 2020, were challenging to a project designed for face-to-face implementation. The project response was to adapt and overcome by redesigning implementation modalities for remote service provision. Additionally, with regards to financial support, an extraordinary extension of rental subsidies beyond participants' entitlements was agreed with the donor and implemented for the period needed, due to the COVID-19 mobility restriction impacts on the labor market.

The closing of the Moria Reception and Identification Center on Lesbos Island due to fire led to intensified outreach and enrollment activities from September–October 2020. The project's target group population was then expanded in June–July 2022 to include those receiving temporary protection in Greece based on the published Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of the Council of the European Union. This put in motion a parallel design and implementation mechanism geared towards this specific population of participants.



Illustrations promoting community living as part of an awareness raising campaign towards integration.

CROSSCUTTING ISSUES

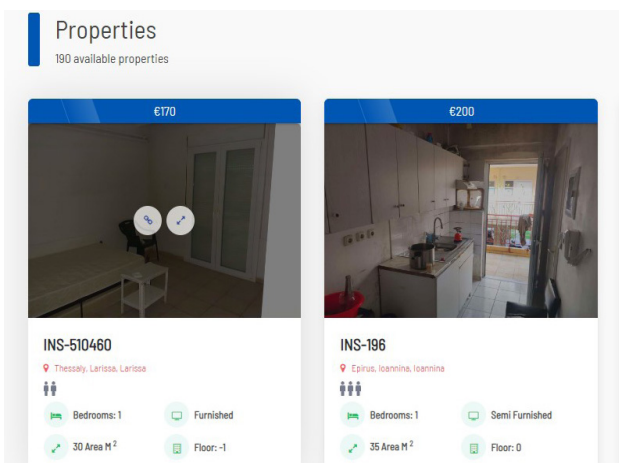
Aiming to ensure equal gender accessibility, mandatory integration courses were offered in three shifts during the day so that each family had the possibility to organize their schedule and childcare according to needs. The project also offered recreational activities through specialized staff available at Integration Learning Centers to take care of the children aged 2–7 while their parents attend mandatory classes. In addition to the above, a mother-toddler space operated in one ILC in Thessaloniki provided the possibility to mothers of children younger than two years of age to also attend integration courses. Specific employability and sensitization events, tailored to the needs of female project participants, took place to promote social integration and labor market inclusion.



Refugees attend language courses lessons in dedicated Integration Learning Centers, run by the organization and its partners.

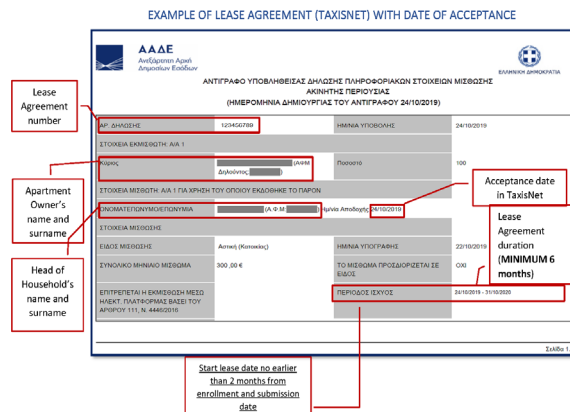
TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS

The project’s website was not a technical innovation per se, as websites with listings for apartments to rent are common. The innovation was qualitative, as a platform with participant-friendly listings for project pre-verified housing options and employment opportunities. The



Various tools were developed to facilitate the provision of rental assistance including a website providing information on apartment listings.

e-learning modality being offered for integration courses was available for sourcing from within the international agency but was adapted to cover the project and participants’ needs. Remote implementation solutions implemented during the movement restriction period, such as digital job fairs, remote apartment verification process via geolocation, and virtual house visits were maintained after the lift of the measures due to high-quality results achieved.



Information on how to use the tools developed for accessing housing were prepared and disseminated for effective programming.

OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS

Findings indicate increased resilience and integration potential of participants when accommodation support is embedded in a support scheme that addresses various aspects of daily life in the protection-granting country – opening and sustaining an integration pathway. The sustainability of a participant household in subsidized accommodation is significantly enhanced when integration pathways are initiated and supported. This is achieved as a rental subsidy provision and is matched with educational (Greek language and soft skills courses) opportunities/obligations, local labor market inclusion support, and integration monitoring provisions. The project provided a model for scaling up a response, as evidenced programmatically with the inclusion of a second new participant target population in mid-2022, and reactively with the intensive outreach to and enrollment of high numbers of participants in a concentrated timeframe.



For increased ownership, the project’s new neighborhoods and housing units were planned in a participatory planning process, including all relevant stakeholders at all levels.



## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

### STRENGTHS

- ✓ The project is the first **country-wide holistic integration project** implemented in Greece, it engaged tens of thousands of participants and adapted to fluctuating circumstances, especially during pandemic restrictions.
- ✓ **Multilateral cooperation was achieved** through a concrete multilayered coordination structure as the project was implemented with the support of ten implementing partners and in close cooperation with government authorities.
- ✓ Rental subsidies **assisted individuals facing the threat of marginalization** especially those about to exit the government accommodation schemes, also decongesting the Greek Reception Systems.
- ✓ Tools such as the online platform, accommodation workshops and the facilitation of communication with apartment owners contributed to an **efficient provision of services**.
- ✓ Provision of skills building courses with a tailored curriculum through e-learning **facilitated integration**.
- ✓ Employability events for beneficiaries resulted in effectively bringing together local employers and project beneficiaries, facilitating the access of the latter in the labour market.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- Standalone accommodation provision is not sufficient in terms of promoting integration of third country nationals (TCNs) in a host community. Data received through the project's feedback mechanisms portray that the beneficiaries who receive the entire set of project services are more positive regarding their integration potentials in the country.
- In the context of rental subsidy approach, it is possible that the service provider will come across individuals whose traumatic experiences and previous cultural setting render them reluctant to leave their collective accommodation, even when these appear to be inadequate for their integration needs.
- Targeted geographical distribution to regions with job opportunities requires additional incentives.
- It is crucial that beneficiaries of shelter provision projects are timely informed, periodically reminded and adequately empowered to address their needs after the end of service provision.

### WEAKNESSES

- × Some beneficiaries **could not sustain their rental agreement after the project** due to limited employment opportunities during the COVID 19 pandemic and the fixed value and duration of rental subsidies.
- × The **link between course attendance and the provision of rental subsidies was sometimes not clearly understood by the beneficiaries**, who would only realize the consequences of non attendance after their deregistration from the project, with very limited possibility of re-enrolment.
- × The project's unified approach targeting many beneficiaries **decreased the possibility of supporting people with vulnerabilities** related to health, which render them in need of such tailored and intensive support not foreseen in the project.
- × The project dedicated **comprehensive efforts to promote decentralization from the main urban centers**, with additional monthly rental subsidies combined with employment opportunities. However, the lack of supporting networks of co-nationals was an insurmountable obstacle to this end.

### RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

- Given funding restrictions, the project did not include additional types of employability services, such as traineeships or vocational training. This expansion is foreseen in the next funding period, negotiated with relevant authorities beginning in February 2023.
- It is also acknowledged that the housing market in Greece – in urban centers and tourist destinations particularly – lacks affordable opportunities. Nevertheless, a significant number of properties remains outside the market due to needed repairs and upgrades whose cost exceeds their owners' budgets. The project will need to explore synergies with affordable housing initiatives and to advocate for the accessibility of TCNs to relevant social housing policies adopted by the State.



### FURTHER READING ON SHELTER PROJECTS

**On local govt. engagement:** [A.12 / ECUADOR, 2016 – 2018](#); [A.16 / UKRAINE, 2016 – 2021](#); [A.18 / IRAQ, 2018-2021](#)

**On rental assistance:** [A.8 / BAHAMAS, 2019 – 2020](#); [A.20 / JORDAN, 2018 – 2020](#)

**On social cohesion and integration:** [A.2 / CHAD, 2019 – 2020](#); [A.3 / CHAD, 2018 – 2020](#); [A.32 / TURKEY, 2017 – 2018](#)