GREECE
IFRC Country Office

BACKGROUND

Country Profile

Greece today faces many complex challenges such as issues related to migration, the consequences of the financial crisis, health vulnerabilities and recurring natural disasters.

Although Greece’s achievements in rebounding from a deep financial crisis have been remarkable, significant challenges remain. Efforts must continue to liberalize the economy, create an effective public administration, as well as a business-friendly environment. Unemployment remains very high and sustainable growth is the only way for Greece to deliver more jobs and prosperity for its people.

The austerity measures taken as a result of the financial crisis have had a serious impact on people’s vulnerability. Every sixth Greek is unemployed (the highest level in the eurozone) and youth unemployment is at 33 per cent. Of the eleven million Greek population, over a third is at risk of poverty or social exclusion,
including four out of ten children. Spending on social benefits and state services have been reduced substantially, affecting those such as older people who rely on public services to meet their basic needs.

Between 2008 and 2013, public health expenditure was cut by 32 per cent, leading to a significant increase in Greek people reporting unmet health needs. Even though registered asylum-seekers and refugees technically have the same rights to access the health system as the Greek citizens, in reality they face significant barriers due to language and cultural differences. Undocumented migrants or those whose asylum claims are rejected only have access to emergency healthcare, meaning that chronic conditions and minor injuries are going untreated. The health system is overstretched, and self-care in the home is an increasingly important form of support, particularly for older people.

In addition to the financial crisis, Greece had to deal with an unprecedented influx of people from 2015 onwards, posing one of the country’s most critical challenges. According to UNHCR data, almost 103,500 migrants remain stranded in Greece, of whom around 35,400 are on the islands of Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos. In 2019 alone more than 67,240 people arrived in Greece. The spike in sea arrivals since May, mostly from Afghanistan and Syria in September, made conditions untenable in the reception centres. In September alone 10,500 people reached the islands and 2,000 crossed Evros land border. In October, some 7,500 third country nationals reached the Aegean islands, of whom more than 50 per cent landed in Lesvos.
Migrant flows towards Lesvos island are easily compared to 2015 numbers. In a single day (06/10) eight dinghies carrying 433 persons reached the island’s shores. Moria reception centre’s population has surpassed 19,000 with a capacity to host only 3,100 people. This has put further strain on the overcrowded reception centre, which is already known for its poor hygiene conditions and outbreaks of violence. Children account for a third of the population on the islands, of whom 20 per cent are unaccompanied or separated.

Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, spoke of an “explosive situation” on the Aegean islands, following her visit mid-November in the Greek islands.

To reduce overcrowding, the government is carrying out a plan for the resettlement of refugees and migrants with a systematic way from the islands to the mainland. This plan started being implemented in early November, with the transfer of 2,500 people to hotels across Greece. It is the largest operation following the new increase in migration—from August to October 3,700 people were transferred in total.

The Greek government announced on 20 November 2019, that four camps in the islands of Lesvos, Leros, Samos and Chios will be replaced with new closed facilities for identification and relocation with a capacity of at least 5,000 people each. But the government’s plan seems to be suspended after being made clear that the European Commission does not provide the funding for such centres in the context of emergency measures, as EU law prohibits the detention of asylum seekers or refugees. As such, the proposal could only be realized if the Greek government assumes its funding.

People continue to arrive to the islands, where reception centres are overcrowded and in poor condition, while transfers continue to the mainland sites where living conditions are slightly better compared to the islands. While the urgency of meeting basic needs for the new arrivals will continue, people increasingly need support to enhance their resilience and self-sufficiency, to access their fundamental human rights, and to facilitate their inclusion and integration to the Greek society.

Greece is prone to regular natural disasters including earthquakes, wildfires and floods. With mountainous terrain and many islands, effective and timely emergency response requires a national but localized system, which the Hellenic Red Cross is in a strong position to develop.

This operational plan reflects the support IFRC will provide to the Hellenic Red Cross in agreed upon areas, with a focus on health, migration, protection, gender and inclusion and strengthening the National Society.
National Society Profile

The Hellenic Red Cross is the largest humanitarian organization in Greece with over 450 staff and more than 5,550 active volunteers. For the last twenty years, Hellenic Red Cross has provided assistance to migrants through programmes aimed at their reception, temporary accommodation and local integration. Due to the migration response and the cooperation offered by the IFRC, ICRC and partner National Societies, Hellenic Red Cross has strengthened its capacities during the last four years particularly in the areas of migration programming, disaster management, cash-based interventions, logistics, protection, community engagement and accountability, nonetheless there remains a need for strong organizational development support.

Role of the Country Office

The mission of the IFRC Country Office is to accompany the Hellenic Red Cross through its path to recovery in order to ensure that vulnerable people will be able to receive the support they need. Following a temporary suspension of the Hellenic Red Cross which has now been lifted, the IFRC will resume completely the support and cooperation with the Hellenic Red Cross, seeking the engagement of its member National Societies and donors for the implementation of the activities included in this operational plan. The IFRC is providing technical assistance in disaster management, risk reduction and health, institutional capacity strengthening, representation and advocacy as well as facilitation of partnerships and multilateral assistance to support vulnerable communities.

Movement Footprint

Following the suspension of the Hellenic Red Cross in 2018, partner National Societies phased out their support in 2018. However, some strong relationships have been maintained for example with British Red Cross in support of the multifunctional centres.

In 2020, the full cooperation with Hellenic Red Cross will be reactivated as the National Society is again a full member of IFRC and the Movement coordination mechanisms of 2018 will be reintroduced for all Movement partners in country.

ICRC supports the Hellenic Red Cross Tracing Service to provide an effective Restoring Family Links service for migrants. ICRC chairs a Movement Protection Working Group supported by IFRC and the Hellenic Red Cross to define a complementary approach to strengthening protection in Greece.
The economic crisis has had a major impact on the Greek health sector, with public spending falling significantly since 2009, leading to unmet health needs of both local people and migrants. 94 per cent of deaths in Greece are due to non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer and dementia. Preventable health problems such as hypertension and obesity persist due to a lack of education and awareness among children and adults. Greece has one of the highest proportions of people aged over 65 years in Europe and many older people face health problems requiring extensive care and support from others. The decrease in national expenditure on health and the near-total lack of public services in home care have added to the existing financial burden of many households trying to care for older relatives.

Health remains a challenge for migrants due to language barriers, complex bureaucracy and lack of clarity about legal rights and procedures as well as lack of capacity of the Greek public system. Despite the efforts of the authorities to improve the system, the percentage of migrants with a public health system registration number (AMKA) is still very low. People who do not have an AMKA number, including those who have remained in the country irregularly after a failed asylum claim, often do not have access to any services except emergency healthcare. As a result, 62 per cent of undocumented migrants report unmet health needs.

The Hellenic Red Cross has established collaboration with the Ministry of Education, regional educational authorities and school directors, and its nursing staff have a wealth of teaching experience. Together with the IFRC, the National Society will deliver a health education programme to empower adults and children to adopt healthy behaviours, and provide healthcare training for older people and carers.

The Hellenic Red Cross Educational Health Stations in Athens have been providing community primary healthcare services for children and women for many years and have evolved to respond to the needs of the increased migrant population in urban settings. The programme aims to reduce health inequalities for vulnerable people such as migrants, unaccompanied minors, people without AMKA, and Greeks on low incomes, while empowering people to follow healthy behaviours and hygiene practices.

The established Mobile Health Unit provides outreach medical services, responding to the health needs of migrants in urban areas. The unit may visit refugee camps if needed and can cover any gaps that may exist after the handover of services at the camps to the Greek government.
The Accompaniment Referrals Programme (ACCREF) initiated by Spanish Red Cross with Hellenic Red Cross in 2017, is a team of cultural mediators with relevant language skills that accompany migrants to medical appointments, assist them in health procedures, and guide them through the Greek health system structure.

All programmes are delivered in close coordination with relevant authorities and actors to ensure they do not constitute a parallel structure, but rather complement and provide an entry point to existing public health services.

In 2020, the IFRC and Hellenic Red Cross aim to enhance vulnerable people’s access to appropriate healthcare through the following activities:

- **Health education for school students** aged 11–12 covering hygienic habits, healthy lifestyles, human papillomavirus (HPV) and menstrual care for females
- **Health education for adults in the community** covering healthy lifestyles and management of modern threats to adults’ health
- **Care skills training for older people and carers** implemented in three branches already covers the most common health issues faced by older people and the respective care needed, as well as topics such as safe administration of medicines, safe feeding, personal hygiene, measuring blood pressure, ulcer care, mobilization and manual handling techniques, physical activity exercises and ergonomics
- **Educational Health Stations** (three locations across Athens) are providing services including GP, paediatrician and gynecologist consultations, medical first aid, consultation on basic mental health first aid, vaccinations, basic dental health care and preventive dental care, health and hygiene promotion, referrals and information about the health system in Greece
- **Mobile Health Unit** focusing on medical consultation, mobile vaccination, educational activities and paediatric services
- **Accompaniment Referrals Programme (ACCREF)** supporting migrants to navigate the health system through cultural mediation and accompaniment to medical appointments

**NUMBER OF PEOPLE REACHED BY NATIONAL SOCIETY HEALTH PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES**

12,850

**VULNERABLE PEOPLE’S HEALTH AND DIGNITY ARE IMPROVED THROUGH ACCESS TO RELEVANT SERVICES**
AREA OF FOCUS
PROTECTION, GENDER AND INCLUSION

Social exclusion and protection risks are faced by both migrant and Greek populations. Migrants living on overcrowded sites have little access to basic services including health and interpretation, and those in the urban context struggle with lack of support, language barriers and a complex public system. The financial crisis has increased unemployment and poverty, and the resulting uncertainty has a negative impact on the mental health of children and adults. Staff and volunteers in the multifunctional centres or working on the cash transfer programme are increasingly faced with complex protection cases such as victims of sexual and gender-based violence, homeless families, child abuse as well as serious health concerns.

The Hellenic Red Cross psychosocial services provide support to vulnerable Greeks and migrants through a range of services that aim to build resilience and empower people to regain autonomy in everyday living. Services focus on psychosocial support and empowerment of children and families, as well as support to elderly people, people with disabilities, the homeless, and people with chronic diseases. This well-established programme has a holistic approach to service provision including case management, accompaniment to public services, recreational and cultural activities, language and skills building courses, psychosocial support and provision of essential items.

460,000 SWISS FRANCS FUNDING REQUIREMENT
To deliver this service, staff and volunteers need the tools and training to ensure policies and procedures are implemented consistently across all programmes. IFRC will work closely with the Hellenic Red Cross to provide technical support and ongoing training to strengthen protection mainstreaming including child protection. Specific activities include:

- Mainstreaming protection across multifunctional centres and cash transfer programmes
- Life skills sessions (Greek language courses for migrant women, computer courses for unemployed women, sewing workshops, tuition lessons for children)
- Case management (counselling, psychosocial support, information provision, referrals, mediation with community services) and psychological and psychoeducational sessions
- Supporting basic needs through provision of food assistance, clothing, hygiene parcels, vouchers
- Information provision, counselling and guidance for people with special health needs
- Accompaniment of people with special needs to hospitals and public services
- Recreational and cultural group activities for social inclusion
- Psychological first aid, psychosocial support and protection training for Hellenic Red Cross staff and volunteers
- Ensure relevant protection policies, procedures and referrals pathways are established and implemented throughout all programmes

**OUTCOME**

Communities become more safe, peaceful and inclusive

**NUMBER OF PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH SOCIAL INCLUSION ACTIVITIES AT THE PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT CENTRE**

2,850
Many of the people who came to Europe in search of a better and safer future have found their new life in Greece is filled with challenges. The humanitarian support provided the years following 2015, have drastically been reduced and many organizations providing essential services to migrants have closed or scaled down due to lack of funding. People who are not registered as asylum seekers have no access to support from official services, while the process for getting registered for asylum is complex and difficult to access due to language barriers, lengthy procedures and inadequate legal support. People who have applied for asylum in Greece are not allowed to work until they are recognized refugees, and the Greek social security system is not adapted to supporting refugees either financially or administratively. Therefore, many migrants are forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms to meet their basic needs due to lack of income.

Through this plan, IFRC and Hellenic Red Cross will deliver holistic services to migrants living in urban centres through the two multifunctional centres in Athens and Thessaloniki in which migrants receive counselling and guidance and can participate in activities to aid social inclusion and integration. Importantly this includes help to obtain the necessary registration and documentation in order to be eligible for employment and access social services, education and medical care in Greek society. The multifunctional centres provide a centrally located and accessible entry point to Red Cross services and help give service users a sense of community, which may otherwise be difficult to find in urban accommodation. The multifunctional centres engage with other Red Cross services in their area for easy access in the same premises, for example weekly visits by a mobile health unit, Restoring Family Links, distribution of non-food items or cash and access to accompaniment services. The multifunctional centres work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies to ensure sustainability and to share learning.

The National Red Cross Helpline provides information, assistance, and referrals to migrants countrywide on a number of topics such as protection issues, the asylum process, legal issues, interpretation, and the cash assistance programme. Between January and November 2019, the Red Cross effectively responded to almost 40,000 requests via the helpline, which is accessible through three communication channels (landline, Viber and WhatsApp) and is operational in 13 languages.

Several assessments carried out in Greece have shown that cash assistance is preferred and appreciated by migrants as it allows them the right to decide on how best to meet their own needs. IFRC and Hellenic Red Cross have been involved in providing cash assistance to migrants with funding from UNHCR and other partners since 2016. The approach in 2020 aims to complete the development of the Hellenic Red Cross systems to enable them to take over cash programming in the future. This will involve establishing the outstanding elements for an efficient and integrated cash transfer operational framework
and infrastructure. The Hellenic Red Cross will take over implementation of the ongoing cash programme while IFRC retains a technical and contract management role thus building the capacity and expertise of the National Society.

Hellenic Red Cross will continue to provide Restoring Family Links services in cooperation with ICRC to help people trace their missing relatives, to prevent separation of families and to assist migrants in establishing contact with their families. The service includes free three-minute phone calls, battery charging units for recharging mobile phones and provision of WiFi.

**Specific activities include:**

**Multifunctional Centres**
- Provision of relevant, timely and reliable information for migrant communities
- Social work case management and follow-up
- Para-legal advice through the Migrant Advisory Bureau Services
- Individual and group counselling sessions including psychoeducation and health education
- Employment preparation training including CV/cover letter, job interviews, life skills, referral to skill training activities and language learning
- Greek and English language classes
- Support with school integration for children, parents and teachers
- Provision of a social space with access to internet, information and staff assistance
- Focused and structured activities for children in different age groups
- Assessment of vulnerable local people’s needs

**Red Cross Helpline**

**Cash transfer programme**
- Provision of cash assistance to migrants enabling people to meet their basic needs
- Support to Hellenic Red Cross to take on more cash transfer implementation responsibilities

**Restoring Family Links services**

**Outcome**

Number of people reached with migration services: **30,000**

**Migration Services**

Migrants are supported to meet their basic needs and integrate into society.
STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

STRENGTHEN NATIONAL SOCIETY CAPACITIES

Implementing the IFRC migration emergency appeal and multi-million Swiss franc operation enabled Hellenic Red Cross to increase its relevance and visibility, expand its partnerships and improve its capacity in areas such as disaster management, logistics and cash programming. Subsequently, in late 2018 and 2019, Hellenic Red Cross revised its statutes, undertook a massive membership campaign and elected new leadership as part of a recovery plan linked to the suspension of the National Society from IFRC membership. In September 2019, HRC undertook an organisational self-assessment (OCAC) to be able to specifically define areas for improvement and the findings were largely in line with the current recovery plan including the relevance and scope of services, the connectedness of its branches and divisions, the strength of its accountability, and the overall financial sustainability of the organization. This plan aims to support Hellenic RC in the implementation of these activities and to launch a new Strategic Plan with a shared vision, mission and operational priorities that is being developed through a participatory and inclusive strategic planning process.

Hellenic Red Cross has been building a disaster management unit and disaster response mechanisms, including mobile units (one for health, one for psychosocial support), which have been mobilized during recent emergencies such as floods and fires. IFRC will work with Hellenic Red Cross to further develop its disaster management capacities to ensure it is ready to respond to emergencies holistically with relief (including cash), health, psychosocial support and Restoring Family Links, with streamlined support services such as logistics, HR and finance across all branches. The programme will include the establishment of a disaster response plan in selected branches, contingency planning, development of Branch Disaster Response Teams (BDRTs) and volunteer development and training.

IFRC will work with the National Society building its capacity in order to continue to implement cash transfer programme, by training staff and volunteers, contracting a local financial service provider, setting up a database, recruiting information management staff and finalising standard operating procedures.

OUTCOME

THE HELLENIC RED CROSS IS STRONGER AND MORE SUSTAINABLE
STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

INFLUENCE OTHERS AS LEADING STRATEGIC PARTNERS

IFRC with Hellenic Red Cross and partners will continue its dialogue with authorities and actors to influence policies and decisions affecting the asylum seekers, refugees and other vulnerable groups in Greece.

Humanitarian activities will be promoted through a variety of communication channels, including news stories, audio visual products and press releases. Materials produced by IFRC and Hellenic Red Cross communication teams will be shared with all National Societies for use in fundraising and awareness raising efforts in their domestic markets. IFRC will support the Hellenic Red Cross to develop a national communication strategy.

One of the key challenges of Hellenic Red Cross is the financial sustainability of the organization, nonetheless the National Society has developed new partnerships in recent years. This plan aims to support the Hellenic Red Cross to analyse existing opportunities in Greece to expand its resource base through assessing the potential of the Greek authorities, private citizens and the corporate sector. IFRC will provide technical support to carry out this assessment and work with the National Society to develop a fundraising strategy.

OUTCOME

110,000 SWISS FRANCS FUNDING REQUIREMENT

IFRC AND THE NATIONAL SOCIETY USE THEIR POSITION TO INFLUENCE DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THE MOST VULNERABLE AT LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

OUTCOME

ENSURE A STRONG IFRC

IFRC ENHANCES ITS EFFECTIVENESS, CREDIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The IFRC office team mainly consists of experienced and qualified Greek national staff, enhancing the capacity to relate to Greek actors and ensuring programmes are based on a strong understanding of the local context. IFRC will maintain a country office in Greece during 2020 to ensure a good level of representation, programme expertise and support services, with the specific aims to:

- Support the Hellenic Red Cross’ organizational development process
- Represent IFRC and the National Society before Greek authorities and humanitarian actors
- Facilitate Red Cross Red Crescent Movement coordination and advocacy
- Monitor and coordinate the implementation of the operational plan

710,000 SWISS FRANCS FUNDING REQUIREMENT
Contact information of the IFRC Country office, for partners who wish to find out more

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