



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

**HOPE AWAY
FROM HOME**

EMPLOYERS' GUIDE: INTEGRATING REFUGEES INTO THE GREEK LABOUR MARKET



CONTENT TABLE

INTRODUCTION	3
UNHCR'S ROLE IN REFUGEE INTEGRATION	4
1. GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT.....	5
1.1 Who is a refugee?	6
1.2 What is the educational and professional background of refugees?	8
1.3 What are the main barriers refugees face when seeking employment?	9
1.4 Can refugees work in Greece?	11
2. HOW TO HIRE REFUGEES	12
3. WHY INCLUDE REFUGEES IN THE WORKFORCE?.....	15
4. FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION AND GET SUPPORT	18

INTRODUCTION

After finding safety in the country that offers them protection, refugees turn their focus to something just as vital: opportunity. They seek the chance to contribute, to work and to rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose. For employers, this represents a unique opportunity to tap into a resilient, motivated talent pool eager to find stability and prospects after overcoming significant hardships.

Historical experience and academic research consistently show that integrating refugees into the host country's labour market is not only a humanitarian responsibility—it is a strategic investment. This investment yields both social and economic returns, benefiting individuals, communities, and society as a whole.

Employment is a cornerstone of successful integration. Beyond financial independence, it fosters dignity, stability, and a sense of belonging. Yet, refugees in Greece often encounter significant barriers, including limited language skills, complex bureaucratic procedures, and social discrimination. Despite these challenges, with targeted support and inclusive policies, refugees can thrive as active contributors to society, enriching local communities and boosting the economy.

This support is not an act of charity—it is an investment in human potential. It demonstrates that, when given the opportunity, people can rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully to society. It is a strategic choice that benefits both refugees and the communities that welcome them.

This guide has been developed by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, in Greece to support employers in understanding the value of hiring refugees. It offers practical tools for refugees' integration into the labour market, along with insights, good practices, and real-life examples. By fostering connections between businesses and a motivated, capable workforce, the guide aims to promote inclusive growth and social cohesion.

“ I'm not the same person I was some time ago. I'm happy to have found a job with good working conditions in Greece. I never thought this would happen, after everything I've been through. **”**

Bruce, refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo



UNHCR'S ROLE IN REFUGEE INTEGRATION

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organization committed to saving lives, protecting rights, and building a better future for people forced to flee due to conflict and persecution. In Greece, UNHCR has been operating since 1952, focusing on supporting national authorities in protecting refugees and asylum-seekers and helping them to integrate in Greece.

The timely and effective integration of refugees into the socio-economic fabric of the country is a strategic priority for both Greece and the European Union. To promote this goal, UNHCR in Greece engages in awareness-raising activities and collaborates closely with government bodies, civil society organizations, municipalities, the private sector, and both local and refugee communities. These efforts aim to advance integration policies at both local and national levels, enabling refugees to thrive and contribute to their new home.

Recognizing the vital role of the private sector, UNHCR works with businesses to support refugees throughout every stage of the integration process. By partnering with employers and industry stakeholders, UNHCR fosters initiatives that create mutual benefits and added value. The Agency views business engagement not only as a reflection of corporate social responsibility but also as a strategic investment that enhances productivity, drives growth, and promotes shared prosperity.

Among its various activities, UNHCR has developed tools and initiatives to connect refugees with the labour market, and has implemented programmes in vocational training, education, and livelihoods. These ongoing efforts underscore the importance of creating a supportive environment where refugees can contribute meaningfully to the economy and society. In doing so, UNHCR helps generate solutions and opportunities—for refugees and asylum seekers seeking stability, and for employers looking for skilled, well-prepared staff and guidance throughout the hiring process.





Refugees:

- ✓ They are forced to flee their countries due to a well-founded fear of persecution, armed conflict, or serious human rights violations.
- ✓ They cannot safely return to their country without risking their life, freedom, or security.

Migrants:

- ✓ They move from their country for reasons such as employment, education, or improved living conditions.
- ✓ They can return home without facing threats to their life or fundamental rights, although many migrate to escape difficult or unstable circumstances.

Heritier, refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, arrived in Greece in 2018. With the support of a UNHCR programme implemented in collaboration with NGO SolidarityNow at the Refugee Support Centre in Thessaloniki—aimed at connecting refugees with the labour market—he was able to create his CV, find employment, and rent his own home. © UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis

1. GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT

Misconceptions and myths often surround the term “refugee.” Who qualifies as a refugee? Do refugees possess the necessary professional and educational background to work? What rights and responsibilities do refugee employees have?

These are common and reasonable questions, frequently raised, even among potential employers. However, the answers are not always straightforward or widely known. The following information and data aim to clarify key aspects of refugees’ access to employment. By dispelling misconceptions and challenging stereotypes, we aim to remove barriers to their successful integration into the labour market and foster a more inclusive, informed approach to hiring.

1.1. Who is a refugee?



For ease of reference, the term “refugees” in this guide encompasses individuals under the following legal statuses.

Asylum-seekers

Asylum-seekers are individuals who have applied for international protection but have not yet received a final decision on their application. Their status is therefore temporary. In Greece, asylum-seekers are issued an Asylum Seeker's Card (see table on p.12), which grants them certain rights and access to services while their claim is being processed.

Beneficiaries of international protection

A) Refugees

Individuals who have a well-founded fear of persecution—meaning their life or freedom is at risk due to their race, nationality, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

Refugee status is granted by the competent authorities of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, following an individualized assessment and a fully reasoned decision. Recognized refugees are issued a Residence Permit of Uniform Format (Άδεια Διαμονής Ενιαίου Τύπου – ΑΔΕΤ), valid for three years and renewable (see table on pp. 12–13).

B) Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection

Individuals who do not meet the criteria for refugee status but cannot safely return to their country of origin due to a real risk of serious harm, such as:

- (a) death penalty or execution,
- (b) torture or inhuman or degrading treatment,
- (c) serious threat to their life resulting from international or internal armed conflict.

The relevant decision is issued by the competent authorities of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, following an individualized assessment. Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are granted a Residence Permit of Uniform Format (Άδεια Διαμονής Ενιαίου Τύπου – ΑΔΕΤ), valid for one year and renewable (see table on pp. 12–13).

Beneficiaries of temporary protection

Temporary protection status is granted following a decision by the Council of the European Union to populations fleeing war, violence, or serious human rights violations, who cannot safely return to their country of origin. To date, this status has been granted exclusively to Ukrainian refugees.

Temporary Protection Residence Permits are issued by the competent authorities of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (see table on p.13). By Ministerial Decision, the validity of these permits has been extended until 4 March 2026.

Maryna arrived in Greece from Ukraine in 2022 with her two children, fleeing the war.

In her home country, she worked as a gynaecologist.

Now in Greece, she is attending Greek language classes and has begun the process of recognizing her medical degree, with the goal of continuing her professional career.



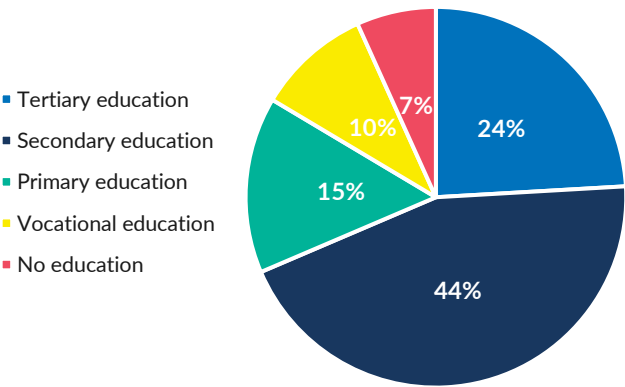
1.2. What is the educational and professional background of refugees?

Refugees come from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. Some are highly qualified professionals—engineers, doctors, researchers—while others bring valuable experience in administration, entrepreneurship, or skilled trades. There are also refugees with limited or no formal education who, nonetheless, are actively seeking employment and, with the right support, can develop skills that are valuable to the Greek labour market.

To better understand and respond to these varied profiles, UNHCR, in cooperation with its partners, regularly collects and analyses demographic data on refugees residing in Greece. This data helps outline their social, economic, educational, and professional characteristics, guiding the development of policies and actions tailored to their specific needs.

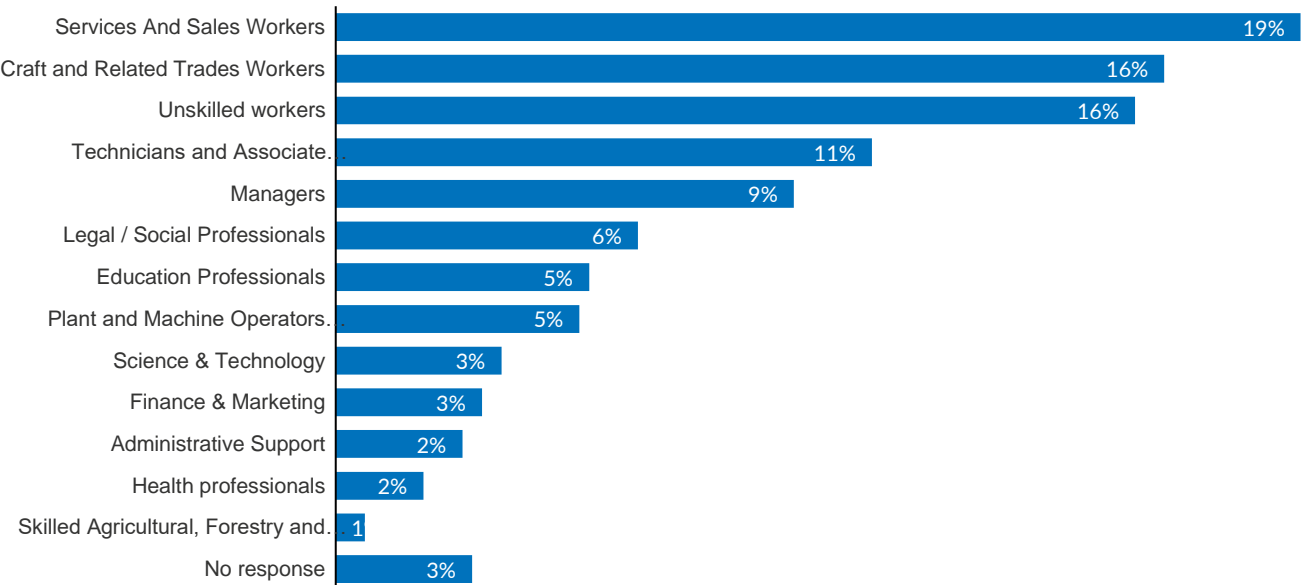
Findings show that the majority of refugees have some level of education, with one in four holding a higher education degree. Their professional experience spans a wide range of sectors, from technical and manual labour to business administration, education, and law, highlighting the potential they bring to the workforce.

Education level



Source: UNHCR, Data period 2024, Sample 681 persons

Occupation in country of origin



Source: UNHCR, Data period 2024, sample of 523 persons



© UNHCR/ Christy Tsantioti

1.3 What are the main barriers refugees face when seeking employment?

Despite their qualifications and skills, many refugees face significant challenges when seeking employment in Greece. The main barriers identified by UNHCR through its integration programme are the following:

- i. **Language:** Most refugees speak little or no Greek, and only a few have sufficient knowledge of English. Due to the limited availability of Greek language courses, many are unable to acquire the language skills required by the labour market. This language gap often leads to communication difficulties between job seekers and employers, making it considerably harder for refugees to access employment opportunities—even when they are otherwise qualified and motivated.



© UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis

Bayan, a refugee from Syria, arrived in Greece in 2016 with her husband and their three children.

In her home country, she worked as a teacher.

In Greece, she attended Greek language classes through a UNHCR programme implemented in collaboration with the NGO METAdrasi in Thessaloniki.

- ii. **Recognition of degrees and professional skills:** According to UNHCR data, many refugees have completed higher education and possess professional experience across various sectors in their countries of origin. However, they often cannot provide the necessary documentation—such as diplomas and certificates, particularly those who were forced to flee conflict-affected areas. Additionally, differences between the educational and professional systems of their home countries and those of Greece make it difficult for employers to accurately assess the qualifications of refugee candidates.
- iii. **Personal challenges:** Refugees have endured extremely difficult circumstances, having been forced to leave their homes and often their families behind, undertaking long and dangerous journeys in search of safety. These traumatic experiences, combined with the absence of a support network in the host country, present additional challenges. Practical obstacles also arise, such as the lack of childcare, particularly affecting women who are raising children alone while trying to enter the workforce.
- iv. **Bureaucratic issues:** The Greek administration has made efforts to adapt procedures to ensure refugees can access employment-related services, such as social security and tax registration. However, despite the adoption of several relevant legal provisions in recent years, challenges persist due to misinterpretation of these regulations by certain public authorities. As a result, the hiring process for refugees is often more complex and demanding than usual.

1.3. Can refugees work in Greece?

Access to the labour market is vital for refugees, as it is essential not only for their self-reliance but also for their integration into society. At the same time, accurate information regarding their labour rights and the documentation required to work is crucial. Incomplete or incorrect information often discourages employers from hiring refugees.

Below is a brief overview of the legal framework governing the right to work for refugees in Greece. The aim is to provide clear guidance on who is eligible to work, under what conditions, and what steps are required to facilitate both refugees' access to employment and the recruitment process for employers.

According to the applicable legislation (Law 4939/2022, Government Gazette A' 111/10.06.22), recognized refugees (Article 26) and beneficiaries of temporary protection (Article 128) have the right to work and to establish their own business in Greece. Asylum-seekers gain the right to access employment 60 days after the full registration of their asylum application by the competent authorities (Article 57).

Asylum-seekers


They acquire the right to work 60 days after the full registration of their asylum application, which corresponds to the date their initial Asylum Seeker Card is issued.

Beneficiaries of international protection

Recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have access to the labour market under the same conditions as Greek citizens.

Beneficiaries of temporary protection

The Temporary Protection Residence Permit is sufficient for accessing the labour market, without the need for an additional work permit.



Refugee women **have been trained to work as nannies** through a specialized UNHCR upskilling programme implemented in collaboration with NGO METAdrasi.

2. HOW TO HIRE REFUGEES

The procedure for hiring refugees is the same as that for hiring any other employee. Below is a table listing the documents that refugees must possess in order to be employed, depending on their legal status. In cases where additional requirements apply to a specific profession—such as a professional license, health certificate, or other qualifications—the same rules that apply to Greek workers also apply to refugees.

Legal Status

Required Documentation

I. Asylum-seekers

1. **Asylum-seeker Card**, which includes the Temporary Insurance and Health Care Number for Foreigners (PAAYPE).
2. **Tax Identification Number (AFM)**, which in most cases has already been issued by the Asylum Service.
3. **Social Insurance Registration Number (AMA)**.

The image shows a sample of an Asylum-seeker's Card (AITON ASYLO / ASYLUM SEEKER) issued by the Hellenic Republic (ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ) Ministry of Migration and Asylum (Υπουργείο Μεταναστευσης & Ασύλου). The card is divided into several sections with numbered fields (1-15) for personal information, including name, father's name, sex, citizenship, date of birth, card number, folder ID, case number, and PAAYPE/AMA number. It also includes the issuing authority, issue validity, and renewal/restriction information. The card is framed by a red border with the title 'ΑΙΤΩΝ ΑΣΥΛΟ / ASYLUM SEEKER' at the bottom.

Sample of
Asylum-
seeker's
Card

II. Beneficiaries of international protection

1. **Residence Permit (ADET)**, valid for three years in the case of refugees, and for one or two years in the case of beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.
2. **Tax Identification Number (AFM)**, which in most cases has already been issued by the Asylum Service
3. **Certificate of Social Security Number (AMKA)** issuance (if the ADET has not yet been issued, the PAAYPE remains valid)

Note: The PAAYPE must be converted to an AMKA within 30 days of receiving the residence permit.

4. **Social Insurance Registration Number (AMA)**.



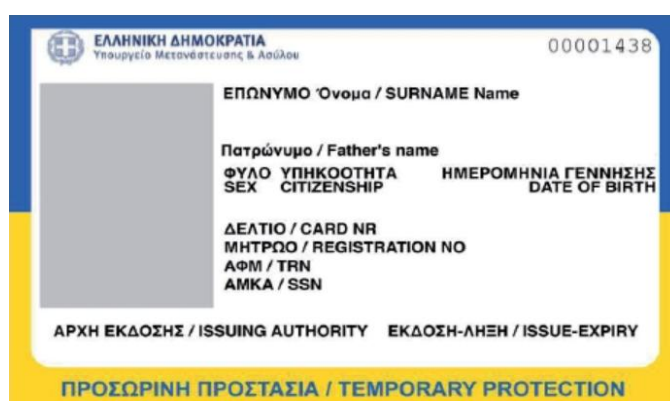
Sample of
Residence
Permit
(refugee)



Sample of
Residence
Permit
(Beneficiary of
subsidiary
protection)

III. Beneficiaries of temporary protection

1. **Residence Permit**, which includes both the Tax Identification Number (AFM) and the Social Security Number (AMKA)
2. **Social Security Registration Number (AMA)**



Sample of
Residence
Permit of
beneficiary of
temporary
protection



PIRAEUS BANK – Refugee Women Academy

/// Piraeus | Equall

Piraeus Bank, acknowledging the challenges refugee women face in accessing employment, has partnered with UNHCR to establish the 'Refugee Women Academy', a programme designed to address the employment barriers faced by refugee women and support their professional integration.

Implemented by NGO Odyssey, the programme aims to strengthen the professional capacities of refugee women by providing them with the necessary tools to enter the labour market.

Through specialized training in the tourism sector—one of the most significant and fast-growing industries in the Greek economy—participants acquire practical skills in areas such as hospitality services and customer care. At the same time, the programme offers career guidance and networking opportunities, supporting refugee women in their efforts to integrate into the workforce.

An innovative feature of the 'Refugee Women Academy' is the provision of childcare services for participating mothers. As many refugee women lack a supportive environment or someone to care for their children, this service enables them to attend training sessions without difficulty.

This initiative is part of Piraeus Bank's Corporate Responsibility Equall – For a Society of Equal People programme and specifically aligns with the Gender Equality pillar.

The 'Refugee Women Academy' contributes to the creation of equal opportunities by supporting the social and professional integration of refugee women, offering them new prospects and helping shape pathways toward a better future.

“From the very beginning, everyone at the hotel treated me with great kindness. They are warm and welcoming, and they show genuine respect for people. They never made me feel like a stranger.”

Yahya, refugee from Yemen, works at Mitsis Blue Domes Resort & Spa Hotel in Kos island.



© UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis

3. WHY INCLUDE REFUGEES IN THE WORKFORCE?

Refugees may have left everything behind, but they bring with them valuable knowledge and skills acquired in their countries of origin. Research shows that integrating refugees into the workforce can generate significant benefits for both companies and their employees, such as:

i. Filling job vacancies

Across Europe, many countries including in Greece, continue to face persistent labour shortages in key sectors of the economy. At the same time, Greece is home to a significant number of refugees who possess the skills the labour market demands: individuals who are both capable and motivated to contribute to the country's development. According to data from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, by the end of 2024, approximately 146,000 refugees and asylum-seekers held valid residence permits or asylum-seeker cards, with the majority belonging to economically active age groups. While many employers have already tapped into this talent pool, others are increasingly exploring the potential of hiring individuals with a refugee background.

ii. Strengthening corporate social responsibility

An increasing number of companies are adopting innovative employment models that address both social and environmental challenges. Central to these efforts is the transition toward a workplace culture that values diversity and inclusion¹. As businesses strive to implement and expand sustainable and responsible practices, integrating refugees into the workforce emerges as a meaningful way to align strategic goals with social impact. This approach not only strengthens human capital but also fosters a culture of belonging and contributes to broader societal progress.

¹ *Diversity and Inclusion in the Greek Workplace*, American- Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, January-February 2023



“Facinet has become an integral part of the team. The residents trust him and care for him deeply. At first, he was a bit reserved, but he quickly opened up, improved his Greek, and now feels confident in himself. He has been through difficult times and achieved a great deal. He is truly admirable.”

Dimitris Pappas,
Director of “Ariadni”
Supported Living Facility

Facinet, refugee from Guinea, works at the Supported Living Facility “Ariadni,” where he provides care for adults with severe mobility disabilities. © METAdrasi

iii. Promoting diversity

Hiring refugees and integrating them into the workplace contributes to the development of a multicultural and diverse working environment—an asset that enhances business growth and competitiveness. Refugees bring a wide range of experiences and skills, many of which are in short supply in the Greek labour market. In addition, their native language proficiency can serve as a strategic advantage for companies looking to expand into new markets.

Employees who understand both the language and the cultural context of a target region can help businesses connect with a broader and more diverse customer base, ultimately increasing their reach and impact (The World Bank, 2024²).

According to [research](#)³ by TENT in Europe, 48% of surveyed consumers stated they are more likely to purchase products from—or work for—companies that hire refugees. Additionally, global [studies](#)⁴ by McKinsey & Company show that companies with higher levels of ethnic and cultural diversity are significantly more likely to achieve stronger financial performance compared to their less diverse competitors. Specifically, McKinsey’s most recent [report](#)⁵, published in December 2023, found that such companies are 39% more likely to outperform financially.

² *Refugee employment: Private Sector for Refugees (PS4R) study*, The World Bank, 2024

³ *How hiring refugees helps brands: Europe 2023*, TENT

⁴ *Delivering through diversity*, McKinsey & Company, 2018

⁵ *Diversity Matters Even More: The Case for Holistic Impact*, Dame Vivian Hunt et al., McKinsey & Company, December 2023



MANAGEMENT FORCE GROUP – Health & Safety at the Workplace Seminars

In response to the growing demand for labour across all sectors of the economy and the increasing number of refugees eager to enter the workforce, Management Force Group identified a critical gap in workplace health and safety training. This gap is largely due to the challenge of delivering trainings in the native languages of refugee populations.

To address this issue, the company—a specialized consultancy in occupational health and safety—launched free pilot training sessions for refugees and asylum-seekers, delivered in their mother tongues. These sessions aim to equip participants with essential knowledge and skills in workplace safety, enhancing their readiness for employment.

Through this initiative, Management Force Group actively supports the social and professional integration of refugees, while contributing to the development of a safer, more inclusive, and better-prepared workforce for the Greek economy.

4. FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION AND GET SUPPORT

How UNHCR collaborates with the private sector

The rise in conflicts, climate change, and political instability has led to a significant increase in the number of people forced to flee their countries. In response, the private sector is playing an increasingly active role in humanitarian efforts—leveraging its expertise, innovation, and resources to support sustainable solutions that benefit refugees and strengthen host communities.

UNHCR can support businesses that wish to contribute to refugee integration by offering:

- **Specialized knowledge and data** on refugee employment, the legal framework, and internationally recognized good practices.
- **Examples of successful refugee inclusion in companies**, helping build confidence among employers considering similar initiatives.
- **Ongoing support and guidance** for businesses seeking to offer employment opportunities to refugees, with the goal of fostering meaningful social inclusion.

If you wish to learn more or explore a potential collaboration, please contact:

Ms. Anastasia Benekou, Durable Solutions Associate | Email: benekou@unhcr.org

Adama Job-Matching Platform

All of UNHCR's integration partners closely monitor the Greek labour market to identify employment needs and opportunities, and to connect employers with suitable refugee candidates.

To facilitate this process, the **Adama Job Centre** was created—an online job-matching platform that enables direct connections between refugees and employers across Greece. Refugees can create and upload their CVs, while employers can post job vacancies or training opportunities.

You may visit the Adama job-matching platform by clicking the following link:

<https://adamajobcenter.crs.org/>

ADAMA Job-Matching Platform

**Are you an employer
interested in hiring refugees?**

Scan the QR code to
access the online job-
matching platform.



EMPLOYERS' GUIDE:

INTEGRATING REFUGEES INTO THE GREEK LABOUR MARKET



**HOPE
AWAY
FROM
HOME**

UNHCR Representation in Greece

great@unhcr.org

91 Michalakopoulou str,
115 28, Athens, Greece

www.unhcr.org/gr