




Legal assistance to asylum-seekers in Greece

"I feel so happy about the support I received. I couldn't have made it by myself without legal support",
refugee woman from Senegal

A refugee woman from Senegal during a counselling session, receiving legal assistance through UNHCR's programme. © UNHCR/ Socrates Baltagiannis

 **170,000**
refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless. **54%** are women & children

Source: Ministry of Migration and Asylum, UNHCR; February 2026

 **48,771**
arrivals in 2025, primarily from Afghanistan, Sudan and Egypt

Source: Ministry of Migration and Asylum, UNHCR; December 2025

 **61,629**
new applications lodged
31,950 cases pending
27,181 granted protection

Source: Ministry of Migration and Asylum, UNHCR; December 2025

CONTEXT




Early legal support is essential to ensure fair asylum procedures and effective access to rights for refugees and asylum-seekers. As of 12 June 2026, the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum introduced new procedural demands, requiring early and effective legal assistance and representation for the most vulnerable ones.

UNHCR and its partners' work is essential to sustain minimum safeguards and address emerging gaps through the provision of targeted legal assistance and strategic litigation. UNHCR brings extensive experience in delivering free, high-quality legal assistance, covering key stages of the asylum process and access to fundamental rights, such as right to family reunification. Partners have secured landmark decisions at national and international level, shaping jurisprudence and strengthening protection for refugees and asylum-seekers. This impact is driven by a coordinated approach combining legal action with monitoring, referrals, evidence-based advocacy, and judicial engagement. UNHCR has also played a critical role in bridging systemic gaps, including in the provision of compulsory legal assistance at the appeal stage.

However, severe funding reductions since mid-2025 have significantly undermined this capacity. By end-2025, legal assistance coverage was withdrawn from northern Greece, and services on the islands ended in April 2026. Specialised support for family reunification, statelessness, and detainees ceased between mid and late-2025, leaving only limited resources available for targeted cases. Cuts to social assistance and interpretation services further undermined access to rights.

A total of \$8.3 million is needed in 2026 to sustain priority responses and scale up critical interventions across all UNHCR programmatic areas.

UNHCR'S LEGAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME 2026

 <p>400 refugees receive legal assistance through our programme in 2026</p>	 <p>\$640K prioritized financial requirements in 2026 for the legal assistance programme</p>	 <p>Working with 2 legal assistance partners</p>
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UNHCR's legal assistance programme helps to ensure that people in need of international protection can exercise their rights and are not disadvantaged by language barriers or by Greece's complex legal and administrative system. Through its legal assistance programme, UNHCR, in collaboration with its partners GCR and METAdrasi works to:

 <p>Safeguard refugees' and asylum-seekers rights through legal assistance and interpretation support</p>	<p>Deliver essential legal assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece, through its specialized partners, to strengthen their access to rights and ensure fair procedures. Services are provided in person in Athens as well as in the Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs) on Samos, Kos and Chios and remotely, with interpretation available where needed. The programme provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ counselling on the asylum procedures, including information on rights and obligations and support to lodge an application; ■ legal representation for the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers, including detainees, children, survivors of violence against women and children, and family reunification cases.
 <p>Advance rights through strategic litigation</p>	<p>Support legal representation before national, regional and international courts, through its expert partners and in select cases, to establish jurisprudence with interventions addressing systemic barriers to rights and safeguards. By engaging in strategic and precedent-setting cases, UNHCR promotes positive policy change and helps safeguard the protection environment for asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece.</p>
 <p>Ensure the quality of the asylum system through monitoring, advocacy and capacity building</p>	<p>Undertake continuous monitoring, advocacy and capacity building activities promoting targeted improvements to existing and newly introduced asylum tools and procedures, including recommendations on the EU Pact implementation. This helps to address challenges in asylum processing, particularly during peaks in applications and with increased automation, which—while improving efficiency—can risk weakening individual assessments, procedural safeguards and decision quality. UNHCR strengthens the quality and sustainability of the state legal assistance system through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ training for state-appointed lawyers, judges and decision-makers; ■ quality assurance mechanisms to support consistent and fair processing; and ■ case reviews to identify gaps and promote better practice.

UNMET NEEDS & POTENTIAL TO SCALE UP

<p>In 2024, UNHCR's legal assistance programme supported more than 4,700 refugees & asylum-seekers</p>	<p>In 2025, due to funding cuts of more than 50%, 2,050 refugees and asylum-seekers received essential legal assistance</p>	<p>In 2026, UNHCR needs \$1.4M more to reinstate support for family reunification, expand legal assistance coverage and provide free legal support to detainees, reaching an additional 2,000 individuals</p>
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