



The Greek National Referral Mechanism: Design, Strengths, Challenges

July 2026



Co-funded by
the European Union

Authors

Filip Mitrovski

Senior Officer Safety and Legal Protection
IRC Deutschland
Filip.Mitrovski@Rescue.org

Marine Messina

Program Officer, Asylum and Legal Protection
IRC Italia
Marine.Messina@Rescue.org

© 2026

Second revised version

International Rescue Committee IRC Deutschland gGmbH

Wattstraße 11, 13355 Berlin

Commercial Register: Amtsgericht Berlin-Charlottenburg

Registration Number: 181447 B

Tax Number: 27/614/04217

Managing Directors: Lena Görgen, Madlin Sadler

Supervisory Board: Kathrin Jungehülsing (Chair), Dr. Kara Preedy (Vice-Chair)

<https://de.rescue.org>

<https://antitraffickingresponse.org>

The authors would like to thank Dimitra Arvanitaki and Zoe Kafeiva for providing context on the anti-trafficking landscape in Greece. They also thank the Hellenic NRM management team in the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) for their expertise on the NRM's handbook and annual reports.

This report was written within the framework of the TIES project. TIES is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

The Greek National Referral Mechanism: Design, Strengths, Challenges

Greece has strengthened its framework to identify and support victims of trafficking through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), with reported identifications rising since 2022. While detection and reporting have improved, protection outcomes still depend on recognition pathways and long-term support capacity. This report presents key trafficking indicators, explains how the NRM works, assesses strengths and challenges and offers recommendations for the future.

8 questions and answers on trafficking in Greece

1 What is trafficking in human beings?

Under Greek law, human trafficking refers to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons where coercion, deception, abuse of power or the exploitation of a position of vulnerability are used for exploitation and the acquisition of unlawful economic advantage. The forms of trafficking most frequently identified are sexual exploitation and labour exploitation. Other forms include forced begging, the exploitation of criminal activities, servitude and practices similar to slavery, forced marriage, as well as the removal of organs or bodily tissues.²

2 How many victims of trafficking are there in Greece?

Between 2022 and 2024, 1,356 individuals have been registered as victims of trafficking. The number of undetected cases is probably much higher.

Year	Cases reported through the NRM
2019	154
2020	167
2021	157
2022	358
2023	533
2024	465

Cases reported through the NRM

3 What do we know about the victims?

The majority of the 1,356 registered individuals between 2022 and 2024 are adults and identify as female:

Adults
1090

Women: 914
Men: 174
Trans Women: 2
Trans Men: 0

Minors
267

Girls: 151
Boys: 115
Trans Girls: 1
Trans Boys: 0

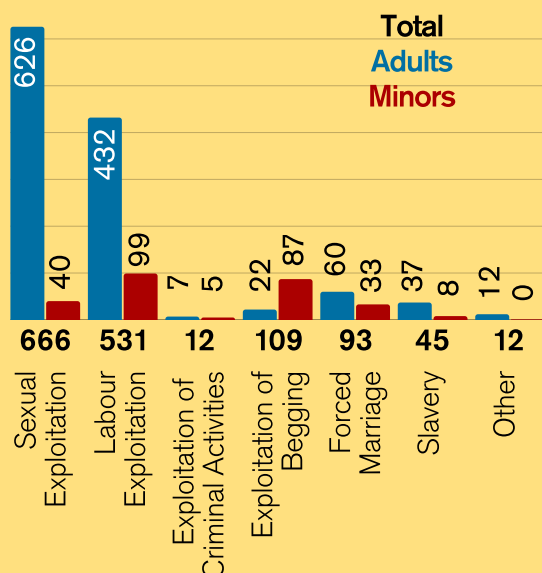
4 Where do the victims come from?

Region	Adults	Minors
Africa	928	136
Asia	167	138
Greece	105	89
EU	33	10
Europe (non-EU)	36	2
South America	70	0
Caribbean	5	0
Stateless	4	1

Period: 2022 - 2024

5 In what forms are victims of trafficking being exploited?

Sexual exploitation and labour exploitation are the most dominant forms of trafficking in Greece, making up 81% of all recorded exploitation entries.

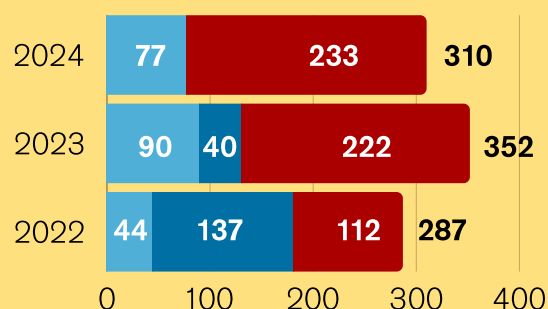


Period: 2022 - 2024

Some victims have experienced multiple forms of exploitation. In these cases, each form has been recorded individually.

6 How many victims apply for asylum in Greece?

Between 2022 and 2024, 1,218 victims of trafficking were non-EU citizens. Of these, 949 applied for asylum in Greece, although not necessarily as a result of their experience of human trafficking. Of the asylum applications submitted, 388 were granted. The remaining 561 applications are either still pending, inadmissible, or have been rejected.



of applicants granted asylum within 1 year

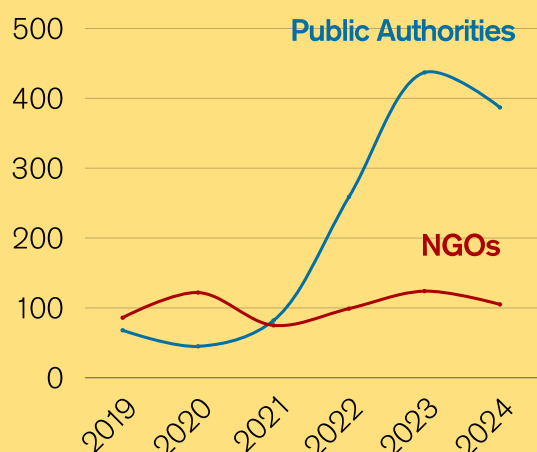
of applicants granted asylum within 1 to 2 years

of applicants still awaiting a decision, disqualified or rejected. No breakdown available.

of all asylum applicants

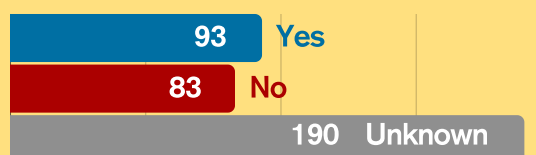
7 Who detects victims of trafficking?

Authorised NGOs, as well as public authorities, can register cases through the NRM. Of the 1,411 cases reported between 2022 and 2024, 328 were registered by NGOs. In 55 cases, individuals were reported by two agencies.



8 How many victims cooperate with public authorities?

Victim consent to collaborate with the Greek authorities in 2024:



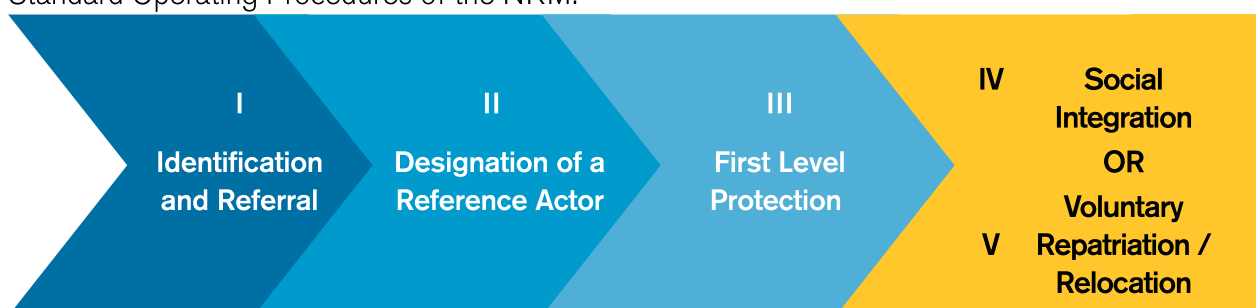
Of the 83 individuals objecting to collaborating with the authorities, 69 claimed that their exploitation had taken place abroad, while the vast majority of the victims reported were asylum seekers. In 21 cases, victims mentioned fear, reluctance or mental health issues as reasons for not having consented to collaborate with the authorities.

Structure and features of the Greek National Referral Mechanism

The OSCE defines a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) as a “co-operative framework through which state actors fulfil their obligations to protect and promote the human rights of trafficked persons, coordinating their efforts in a strategic partnership with civil society.”⁴

In Greece, the NRM is operationally managed by the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), which coordinates registration, referrals, and case monitoring nationwide. The Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings (ONR) provides strategic coordination and oversight. In practice, participating authorities (e.g., police, labour inspectorate, reception and asylum services, health services), as well as NGOs and international organisations (e.g., UNHCR, IOM), follow five Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) from identification to either social integration or voluntary return.⁵

Standard Operating Procedures of the NRM:



I Identification and Referral

In procedure I, Identification Actors (such as the police, coast guard, reception and asylum services, healthcare providers, or NGOs) submit a reporting form to EKKA, once they detect a presumed victim of human trafficking. For adults, the person's consent is needed to enable a full NRM case monitoring through all procedures, linked to an anonymised registration number for each case. Without consent, the case is recorded anonymously for statistical purposes only.⁶

II Designation of a Reference Actor

Procedure II lets EKKA appoint a Reference Actor immediately after identification to take over the case. A Reference Actor serves as the case lead. This is an organisation that can provide protection and assistance to the presumed victim. It is selected based on which organisation can intervene quickly and appropriately for the person's profile (e.g. age, marital status, language). It can be the same as the Identification Actor in Procedure I, or if not suitable, another cooperating actor, chosen by EKKA.⁷

The Reference Actors' responsibilities include in this procedure:

- Create an individualised Action Plan for the presumed victim
- Set up and coordinate the support and monitor services delivered by other actors
- Send a reporting form to EKKA within one month after taking over
- Hand in the protection services' monitoring form every four months to EKKA.⁸

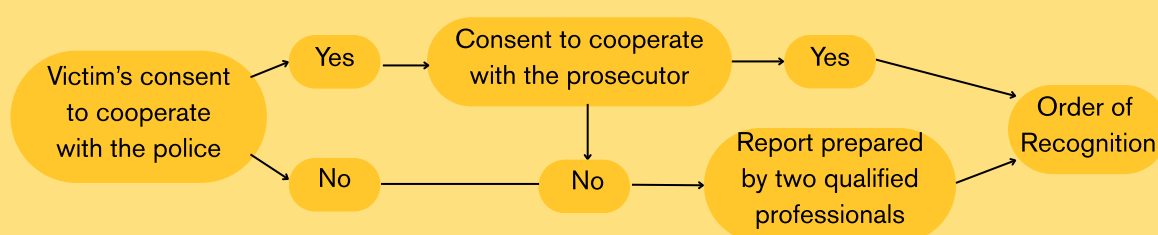
III First Level Protection

In Procedure III, the Reference Actor delivers protection services to the presumed victim, either directly or via coordination with other Protection Actors. These services include accommodation, healthcare, social and psychological support and legal counselling. For foreign victims, this may also include referral to a legal adviser to secure a lawful residence in Greece. The services are organised around the individualised Action Plan, created in Procedure II.⁹

FORMAL RECOGNITION OF VICTIM STATUS (“ORDER OF RECOGNITION”)

The NRM case management is separate from the formal legal recognition of a person as a victim of trafficking. In Greece, victim status is granted through an “order of recognition” issued by the competent public prosecutor of the First Court of Instance.¹⁰

Two routes are available, depending on the victim's consent to cooperate with the authorities:



- 1 For victims cooperating with law-enforcement, the case file is forwarded to the prosecutor.
- 2 For non-cooperating victims (“Social Path”), a written psychological report is submitted to the prosecutor, prepared by two qualified professionals (psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker). Criminal proceedings are therefore not required for formal recognition.¹¹

IV Social Integration

Procedure IV focuses on longer-term integration support for victims into the Greek society, coordinated by the Reference Actor and delivered by all involved actors in the case. The actions can be grouped into four fields:

- Education and Training (e.g. school enrollment for minors or language courses)
- Employment integration (e.g. skills profiling, job-search and application writing support)
- Entertainment (enrollment in recreational activity groups involving e.g. sports, music or arts)
- Independent living (practical support to build a stable daily routine)¹²

V Voluntary Repatriation or Relocation

Procedure V covers voluntary repatriation or relocation to a third country when a foreign victim chooses return over social integration. This procedure is led by the Reference Actor and involves Return Actors and the embassy, if needed. Voluntary Repatriation is set up in four steps:

1. Inform the victim about the possibilities of staying in Greece versus returning, so that their choice is voluntary and informed.
2. Assess risks of re-victimisation.
3. Liaise with a Protection Actor in the receiving country to ensure continuity.
4. Prepare travel (obtain documents via the embassy, arrange safe transport and escort).¹³

Relocation depends on a right of residence in another country or family reunification. Otherwise, the same stages apply with the necessary adjustments.¹⁴

Once the cooperation between the Reference Actor and the victim is completed, the Reference Actor closes the case and notifies EKKA. Through that, the case reaches the end of the NRM.¹⁵

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE NRM FOR MINOR VICTIMS

For minors, a guardian is appointed who informs the child about their rights and options and represents the child in all procedures.¹⁶ The minor must be informed about all steps throughout all procedures, and their points of view must be taken into account.¹⁷ Minors are entitled to safe accommodation, preferably with other minors, and to public school education.¹⁸ The consent of child victims is not required for NRM monitoring through EKKA.¹⁹

Strengths of the Greek NRM

Greece's National Referral Mechanism demonstrates several strengths, which are being presented here as a good-practice example for policymakers and practitioners working on or with National Referral Mechanisms in different EU member states:

1. Victim-centred safeguards

Victim-centred and rights-based principles are translated into standardised safeguards and follow-up procedures. The NRM explicitly emphasises voluntary participation of victims of trafficking, informed consent, confidentiality and tailored support, based on individual needs. The mechanism foresees that victims can access services irrespective of their cooperation with law enforcement. Actors have to submit detailed case information enabling the design of individual action plans which cover accommodation, legal assistance, healthcare, psychosocial support and integration measures.

2. Central coordination through EKKA

The centralised structure of the NRM with EKKA as the managing body ensures consistent national data collection and accountability for follow-up. It allows Greece to craft comprehensive annual statistics and identify trends year-to-year. This “one-stop” coordination is a model for clear responsibility and transparency: it allows authorities and NGOs to share information through one hub and can support external review to assess progress using the NRM's consolidated data.

3. Structured multi-actor participation

The Greek NRM operates as an inclusive platform that formally involves a wide range of State and non-State actors. According to the last annual NRM report in 2024, 59 International Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations participated in this mechanism during 2024.²⁰

4. Ongoing capacity building

Between November 2018 and March 2021, EKKA anti-trafficking trainers delivered inter-agency training across Greece, reaching more than 800 first-line professionals.²¹ After 2021, EKKA's NRM support team continued these trainings with partners such as the Greek NGO KMOP, including the Asylum Service, NGOs, and law enforcement. Sessions targeted frontline staff in transport, education, reception and identification services, labour inspection, and policing. These rolling trainings and standardised tools strengthen identification and referral capacity and offer a transferable model for other contexts.²²

5. Public reporting

Regular annual NRM reports that publish disaggregated data and describe system changes promote transparency, facilitate external evaluation, and help build public trust. Other actors can build on this transparent annual reporting to analyse trends and design policy measures and anti-trafficking programmes.

Challenges to address in future

Despite these strengths, the Greek NRM's results in practice are shaped by constraints beyond the mechanism's core design. Early identification can fail in reception settings, formal recognition and access to rights may hinge on how legal pathways are applied, and long-term accommodation and integration remain uneven. The following section highlights the most consequential challenges and what is needed to address them.

1. Detection in reception centres and camps

IRC, I Have Rights and the UN OHCHR have flagged failures of identification and protection inside overcrowded Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs).^{23 24} In the Samos CCAC, indicators of trafficking have often been missed, vulnerability assessments have been inadequate or absent, and structural barriers prevented proper screening, such as a lack of medical staff, restricted NGO access, and conditions that have been described as prison-like.²³ The OHCHR argued in 2024 that asylum and vulnerability assessment processes did not consistently identify and take trafficking experiences into account, having left victims and survivors insufficiently protected and at risk of re-trafficking in Greece.²⁴

→ Scale up routine vulnerability screening in all reception and health settings.

2. Specialised long-term assistance and shelter capacity

Short-term assistance and emergency accommodation exist, but the European Council's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, GRETA, noted in their recent report limitations in long-term housing, integration and rehabilitation pathways, including access to vocational training and employment, which makes sustainable (re-)integration for victims difficult. These limitations were particularly visible for male victims, who were placed in temporary asylum-seekers' shelters or shelters for homeless men when specialised facilities were unavailable.²⁵

→ Increase specialised long-term accommodation and tailored reintegration services, including for male victims and victims of labour exploitation.

GAPS IN THE CHILD-PROTECTION SYSTEM

While Greece has expanded accommodation for unaccompanied children and further structured the protection system, GRETA highlighted that vulnerabilities remained. There are signs that children exploited for forced begging or criminality are often returned to their parents or guardians without proper investigation, exposing them to the risk of (re)trafficking within their families.²⁶ Support also drops once minors turn 18, because provision after adulthood is limited, and an effective linkage between child and adult support systems is lacking.²⁷ GRETA therefore calls for stronger prevention measures, including ensuring children are not returned to risky environments and providing THB-specific training to teachers and child-protection professionals. Furthermore, authorities should increase proactive outreach activities to identify minor victims and ensure long-term assistance for their integration.²⁸

3. Victim-centred “Social Path” unused in practice

The law allows public prosecutors to recognise victims through the “social path” (see infobox, p. 6), intended to protect people who are too frightened, traumatised, or otherwise unable to give a formal statement. However, recent NRM annual reports show that the social-path alternative was initiated only in a small number of cases (0 in 2022; 4 in 2023; 1 in 2024), while no cases were reported as having been granted victim status via the social path by the end of each reporting period. In practice, formal recognition therefore appears to depend largely on active reporting or participation in criminal proceedings, leaving fearful, traumatised, or mistrustful individuals at risk of never being formally recognised as victims of trafficking, despite the social path being designed to address precisely these situations.²⁹

→ Issue guidance and training for prosecutors on applying the social path, and standardise referrals so non-cooperating victims can be recognised without giving a formal statement.

4. Sustainable multi-annual financing and staff capacity

The 2025 U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report notes persistent resource constraints affecting victim protection in Greece: the government did not report total funding for victim protection, and shelters linked to the NRM procedures denied some victims support due to lack of capacity, resources, or space. The report also highlights staffing instability in reception settings, including high turnover and short-term contracts, which can weaken the continuity of identification and referrals.³⁰ Greek NGOs further report funding gaps and a risk of closure.³¹ Sustainable protection however, requires multi-year budgets and stable staffing, including predictable funding for NGOs, given their central role in identification, assistance, and long-term reintegration of victims of trafficking.

→ Secure multi-annual funding for NGOs and NRM-related operations and ensure contingency staffing to address surges in arrivals.

WHAT IRC DOES IN GREECE

IRC Hellas has run since 2015 Refugee.Info, a multilingual, digital information platform for refugees and migrants in both Greece and Italy. In Greece, the platform offers practical information on issues such as the Greek asylum process, legal rights, healthcare, education, work, and regularly updated listings of public and NGO services. The aim is to close critical information gaps and to help people navigate through different agencies and procedures, and to exercise their rights. Users can also ask questions directly via Refugee.info's online Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp channels, which makes the platform both a self-service knowledge hub and an interactive support provider.

For a joint research project on anti-trafficking prevention, Refugee.info Greece joined forces with The Immigration Policy Lab (IPL). The researchers found that providing legal information – either through a generic website or personalised WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger chats – improved participants' knowledge of exploitation under Greek law and increased their confidence in responding to violence. Furthermore, the IPL research paper highlighted Refugee.Info's role in countering misinformation, fraud, discrimination, and the risks of exploitation and trafficking.³²

Footnotes

- 1 All data in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are drawn exclusively from the three most recent annual reports (2022-2024) of the Greek National Referral Mechanism (NRM), issued jointly by the Office of the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking and the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA):
 - NRM Annual Report 2024, https://ekka.org.gr/images/KOINONIKON-PAREMBASEON/NRM_REPORT_2024.pdf.
 - NRM Annual Report 2023, https://ekka.org.gr/images/KOINONIKON-PAREMBASEON/%CE%95%CE%9C%CE%91/NRM_REPORT__2023_ENGLISH.pdf.
 - NRM Annual Report 2022, https://ekka.org.gr/images/KOINONIKON-PAREMBASEON/EMA/NRM_REPORT_2022_11-4-2024.pdf.
- 2 National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), Handbook of the Greek National Referral Mechanism for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking (Athens: 2021), citing Greek Penal Code, Art. 323A, https://ekka.org.gr/images/KOINONIKON-PAREMBASEON/%CE%95%CE%9C%CE%91/46034_EMA_leaflet_ENGL.pdf, p. 23.
- 3 These figures have not been published to date, but EKKA provided them in January 2026 upon request.
- 4 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), National Referral Mechanisms: Joining Efforts to Protect the Rights of Trafficked Persons, 30 July 2021, https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/2/0/493981_0.pdf.
- 5 National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), Handbook of the Greek National Referral Mechanism for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking (Athens: 2021), pp. 12-13. A list of all involved NRM actors can be found in Part C of the Handbook on pp. 22-26.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 39-40.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 42-43.
- 8 Ibid., p. 43.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 47-49.
- 10 Ibid., p. 28.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 51-52.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 53.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid., p. 48.
- 17 Ibid., p. 33.
- 18 Ibid., p. 47-48.
- 19 Ibid., p. 57.
- 20 A list of all 59 organisations can be found in the NRM Annual Report 2024 on pp. 73-74 (see fn. 1).
- 21 European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, "Greece", https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/eu-countries/greece_en.
- 22 KMOP, "Empowering frontline professionals to address human trafficking in Greece", <https://www.kmop.gr/news-empowering-frontline-professionals-to-address-human-trafficking-in-greece/>.
- 23 International Rescue Committee (IRC) and I Have Rights (IHR), Submission to the European Ombudsman (January 2023), https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/EU%20Ombudsman_Submission_IRC_IHR_Jan%202023.pdf.
- 24 United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), AL GRC 3/2024, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29270>.
- 25 Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Greece: Second Evaluation Round, GRETA(2023)03, <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-greece-2nd-evaluation-round/1680aaa70a?>, p. 38.
- 26 Ibid., p. 25.
- 27 Ibid., p. 39.
- 28 Ibid., p. 41.
- 29 See:
 - NRM Annual Report 2024, https://ekka.org.gr/images/KOINONIKON-PAREMBASEON/NRM_REPORT_2024.pdf, p. 61.
 - NRM Annual Report 2023, https://ekka.org.gr/images/KOINONIKON-PAREMBASEON/%CE%95%CE%9C%CE%91/NRM_REPORT__2023_ENGLISH.pdf, p. 62.
 - NRM Annual Report 2022, https://ekka.org.gr/images/KOINONIKON-PAREMBASEON/EMA/NRM_REPORT_2022_11-4-2024.pdf, p. 47.
- 30 U.S. Department of State, "2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Greece", <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2130598.html>.
- 31 Project ELPIDA, "Funding Gaps and 'Money Laundering'", <https://www.project-elpida.org/post/funding-gaps-and-money-laundering>.
- 32 Marine Casalis, Dominik Hangartner, Alexandra C. Hartman, and Rodrigo Sanchez Sienra, Empowerment on the Move? An Experiment on Supporting Forcibly Displaced People in Greece, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), https://poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/greece_legal_info_may2024_v3.pdf.

All PDFs have been accessed on 24 April 2026.



INTERNATIONAL
RESCUE
COMMITTEE