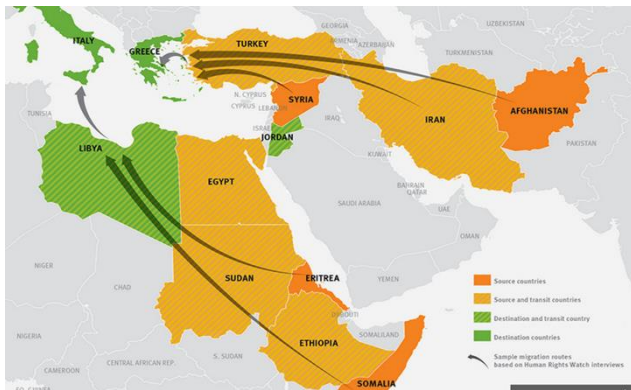


### Europe Migrant and Refugee Crisis: Greece



Depiction of the “migration route” into Greece

The European migrant and refugee crisis began in 2015 when close to 1 million migrants and asylum seekers arrived in Greece hoping to apply for asylum in northern Europe. During this time borders across this “migration route” were temporarily open to all. The governments of neighboring countries enacted policy changes in early 2016 that stopped the flow of migrants and refugees out of Greece. Additionally, in March 2016, the European Union and Turkey negotiated a policy to slow the influx of migrants and refugees from arriving in Europe by providing Turkey with financial support.

Currently UNHCR reports that more than 84,000 asylum seekers and recognized refugees remain in Greece since their arrival in 2015.<sup>1</sup> The rate of arrival continues to increase in 2019 and current estimations predict that Greece will host 100,000 asylum seekers by end of the year. Reception sites in Greece are overcrowded due to the continuous influx of asylum seekers by land and sea and there is a need to further enhance the country’s reception centers. Overcrowding has led to a humanitarian crisis where people living in reception centers face protection risks, are often denied their right to safe and appropriate shelter, and do not have access to basic social services. These challenges make it difficult for residents to develop any sense of normalcy in these locations.

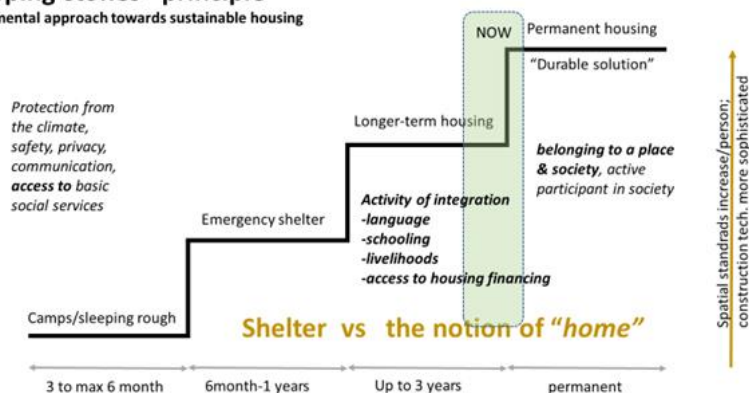


Families at reception center in Greece

### CRS Greece: Rental Assistance Overview

#### “Stepping stones” principle

– incremental approach towards sustainable housing



CRS is working in partnership with Caritas Hellas and Caritas Athens to provide safe and appropriate housing to asylum seekers and recognized refugees. CRS conducted a housing market assessment in 2015 that confirmed there were large amounts of unused apartments which needed some investment to be rehabilitated into active rental properties in Greece, and specifically in the urban areas of Athens and Thessaloniki. Considering this context, CRS focused our response on urban programming where beneficiaries would receive basic housing support and access to already existing social services.

<sup>1</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>

## CRS Resilience Webinar: *Rental Assistance Programs*

CRS programming has shifted over time following the “stepping stones” strategy from providing emergency shelter support to families in shared buildings then to intermediate housing support in shared independent apartments and now to transitioning families from humanitarian aid to independent living through the provision of rental subsidies.

CRS worked closely with UNHCR and IOM to develop integration pilot projects for the Greek government to develop a comprehensive and sustainable approach for asylum reception and exit. The goal would be to provide asylum seekers with temporary accommodation in a site upon arriving in Greece. Asylum seekers would quickly transition to urban apartments leased by an institution where these beneficiaries would receive intensive support including cash for basic needs, case management and integration support. Once the family is recognized as a refugee, they transition to renting an independent apartment with lease in their name and receive rental subsidy support.

### Modality #1: Direct Housing Support “ESTIA: Urban Accommodation”

**For Asylum Seekers: ESTIA (2016- present):** ESTIA is implemented in partnership with UNHCR and funded by the EU. The ESTIA program focuses on providing vulnerable asylum seekers with urban shelter and case management support. In this model, CRS is the leaseholder and responsible for all management of the apartment. CRS provides basic furniture set-up for families before they arrive in the apartment.

- **Emergency Shelters: Building renovations:** During the initial emergency phase, CRS shelter team focused on identifying and renovating entire buildings in Athens and Thessaloniki to provide larger number of asylum seekers with safe shelter. These accommodations are intended for short term stay. Case management support focused on urgent medical and psychological support.
- **Semi-Independent Living: Linkages to integration:** CRS shifted our approach from renting and renovating entire buildings to identifying individual apartments to help families better integrate within the neighborhood. These apartments are intended for medium term stays and assist families to begin their integration process to live in Greece. Beneficiaries residing in the apartments receive intensive case management support. The Caritas team of social workers and interpreters support families to access medical providers, education, and public services.
- **Beneficiaries:** 5,996 beneficiaries served in ESTIA housing

### Rental Assistance Modality #2: Rental Subsidies: “Curing the Limbo” and “HELIOS”

**For Recognized Refugees: Curing the Limbo (2018-2022):** Curing the Limbo is a pilot project with the Municipality of Athens and other partners; funded through EU Innovation fund for European cities. CRS role within Curing the Limbo is focused on accommodation support, acting as intermediary between the private rental sector and refugee families to help refugees navigate and access the rental market in Athens. Families enrolled in Curing the Limbo are eligible to receive a cash rental subsidy for up to 12 months.

- **Beneficiaries:** 345 beneficiaries, currently 11 families with signed leases (31 beneficiaries)

**For Recognized Refugees: HELIOS (2019-2020):** HELIOS (Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection) pilot project is implemented in partnership with IOM and funded by the EU. This project offers a conditional cash rental subsidy for all recognized refugees since 2018 who sign a lease in their name and maintain regular attendance at daily Greek language courses for 6 months.

Beneficiaries receive the following services as part of Curing the Limbo and HELIOS:

- **Access to pool of refugee-friendly apartments:** CRS staff locate landlords and real estate agents who are willing to rent their apartments to refugee families. As an incentive as part of the Curing the Limbo project, landlords receive rent payment of 6 months upfront to negotiate more competitive rent price for families. CRS team uploads the information about the available apartments to website for refugee families to browse ([heliospiti.com](http://heliospiti.com))

## CRS Resilience Webinar: *Rental Assistance Programs*

- ***Rental accommodation technical support:*** Field staff provide trainings to refugee families of how to look for an apartment, how to sign the lease and how to set up utilities. CRS and Caritas staff will host events to help match beneficiaries who are interested in sharing an apartment.
- ***Conditional cash subsidy:*** Families are eligible to receive a monthly cash rental subsidy that is deposited to their bank accounts, based on their continuous engagement in project activities.
- ***Neighborhood integration:*** Matching refugee families with local families based on interests, needs and geographical proximity (Curing the Limbo)

## Rental Assistance Successes

- ***Stepping Stone Approach:*** Housing programming follows families through their integration process with gradually decreasing support.
- ***Dignified housing meeting individual housing needs:*** ESTIA Urban Shelter provides a successful model for reception of asylum seekers without the creation of refugee camps. ESTIA apartments also provide specialized housing options for single women, mothers and other vulnerable groups with a gender and age sensitive approach; comprehensive social support to families through complementary services (psychosocial and medical activities)

## Rental Assistance Learning

- ***Challenges for Direct Housing Approach: ESTIA Apartments***
  - Finding apartments disbursed throughout the city to limit risk of overburden sections of city with affordable apartments but already overstretched public services
  - Difficult to find affordable apartments for single households as many prefer not to share apartments
- ***Challenges for Rental Subsidy Approach: Curing the Limbo and HELIOS***
  - Difficulty to convince real estate agents and landlords to lease directly to refugee families
  - Landlords concerns on how refugee families will pay for rent after rental subsidy ends

## Lessons Learned / Recommendations

- ***Responsiveness to Needs and Context and Families:*** CRS Greece programming has progressed significantly over time to be responsive to beneficiary needs and change in context and provide different options for the different persons. Be sure to complete full assessments of markets and needs **and** complete the analysis analysis of data to ensure you are meeting the needs of different persons at the different points in time.