

Irida Women's Center



Executive Summary



Prepared by: Chloe E. Kousoula + The Irida Team

Why we are here

Women play a key role in the socioeconomic development of society. Throughout history, the central role of women in society has ensured stability, progress, and long-term development. Women hold a valuable role as caretakers, educators, dynamic members of society's workforce, and agents of positive change and progress. Yet, women are often left behind.

Gender inequality, violence, and poverty hinder women's personal and professional progress and are interrelated. Poverty and unemployment can be both a cause and a consequence of gender-based violence, which has a tremendous impact not only on the lives of women who experience it but on society as a whole. Violence impoverishes women, their families, communities, and nations.

The costs of violence against women in the EU can be estimated to be almost 256 billion euros. At the same time, gender inequality means that women are often discriminated against and lack access to resources, which makes them vulnerable to gender-based violence and poverty. More than 1 in 4 women in Greece are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Greece has one of the lowest rates of women's employment in the EU and holds the last place in gender equality among 27 EU member states, with a score that has remained almost the same for the last ten years. The situation is even worse for marginalized groups, such as refugees and migrants.

Positioning Statement

Irida Women's Center is a nonprofit organization that empowers economically and socially vulnerable women to become active members of society and fulfill their goals and aspirations. In our women-led community center, women can find the support they need to address challenges, find solutions and achieve positive change. Through counseling, legal, psychosocial support, and employability services, women are inspired to share and learn, make responsible decisions for their lives and pursue opportunities for personal and professional development.



OUR VISION

" A WORLD IN WHICH NO WOMAN IS LEFT BEHIND"

OUR MISSION

" To ensure that all women are supported and empowered to pursue opportunities for personal and professional development and determine the course of their lives "

OUR VALUES

Resilience

We believe in the capacity of women to build self-reliance, face their challenges and take ownership of their life.

Community

We embrace the power of the community that nurtures solidarity and compassion; a community where women offer and receive support, are heard and respected.

Accountability

We are committed to our mission and accountable to the people we serve. Our values are reflected in our work and in our relationships with the women we support, our partners and donors.

Respect

We respect the individual needs of the women we support and we encourage their freedom to make choices for their lives. We work with all women, regardless of their religion, nationality and culture, without any discrimination.



Our Women-Led Community Center

The heart of our work lays in a unique Community Center made by women, for women. In Irida Center women are active members of a strong vibrant community, where they find support from other women, share their stories, and are respected and accepted. In Irida Center women can be themselves, free of discrimination and judgment. With compassion and understanding, Irida's experienced staff encourages women to be self-aware of their situation and to take initiative to address their challenges and bring positive change in their life. In Irida Center, women are heard. They are empowered to break barriers and take responsibility for their future.

Women in Irida are seen as unique individuals, with their own needs and potential. Through protection interventions, legal support, skill-building activities, and employability services, they are encouraged to comprehend fully and claim their rights and grow into active members of society. Within the next three years, we intend to work more in-depth with women, with a long-term perspective, helping them to build their life on strong, sustainable foundations.

We focus on persons who identify themselves as women over 18 years old and face extreme social and economic vulnerabilities living in poverty and social exclusion, including Greek, refugee, and migrant women, victims of gender-based violence, and low-skilled and unemployed women.

Women are supported to build confidence and find work, able to lead their future.

Irida Women's Center is a unique safe place for women, where women's hopes, aspirations, and desires are nurtured; where women find light in hardship, where they can be themselves and take pride in their individuality; a place where they can re-write their story.

Although the world generally sees men as stronger and more powerful, women are just as strong and powerful as men and sometimes more than them. They understand the problems that even their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons do not feel.

Behind their smile and beauty, women have hidden terrible, painful memories and many dark days and moments, because they are women, they are strong, they are capable, and they are big souls like angels, but only refugee women know in exile how much they need to find themselves again...To restore... how much they need a source of energy... how much they need a safe and friendly space and how much they need to be able to exchange energy signals in a space with other women, to be refreshed, passionate, and eager.

To find me again, to remember that I have been very strong, so now I can be stronger than before ... My spirit, the city lady was restored at the Irida Women's Center, I lived and felt safe in the true sense. Now that I have left the beautiful country but with not so fond memories, I feel that my tears want to flow because I will miss all the loving and respectful staff there and its members. I will not forget you.

Sharhabanoo
Former Community Member from Iran

Irida Women's Center & the Covid-19 Pandemic

In 2020 we experienced life-changing events. The world has been shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic, which introduced new, unprecedented normality.

Women have disproportionately been affected by the pandemic.

In the shadow of Covid-19, pre-existing gender inequalities have been exacerbated, affecting women and girls. In particular, Covid-19 has a massive impact on refugee and asylum-seeking women who face the triple crisis: the effects of the pandemic, the trauma of displacement, and the threats and discrimination experienced because of their gender.

For the women of our community, the pandemic increased their existing vulnerabilities, jeopardizing their fundamental rights and affecting their safety, socio-emotional well-being, and socio-economic empowerment.

Specifically, during the years of the pandemic and the lockdown periods, they experienced unprecedented inequalities and challenges, including:

- high increase of gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation: 3 in 4 women in the EU mention that the pandemic caused an increase in the physical and emotional abuse against women in their countries. In Greece, this number reached 93% (European Parliament, 2022).
- lack of access to decent healthcare services: refugee and migrant women faced higher obstacles to accessing public healthcare services (PubMed, 2021).
- limited to zero access to mental health and psychosocial support services: 40% of women who faced intense symptoms and anxiety could not access mental health services or support during Covid-19. Furthermore, up to a third of refugee and asylum-seeking women have been struggling with toxic stress, anxiety disorders, and depression. It is worth mentioning that female refugees are twice more likely than their male counterparts to face mental health conditions due to traumatic incidents related to their gender (PubMed, 2021).
- negative impact on their living conditions: according to the European Parliament (2022), 38% of women in the EU experienced loss of their income or their wages were negatively affected.
- lack of access to educational and learning opportunities.

Irida Women's Center as the sole safe space in Northern Greece, providing socially and economically vulnerable women with a holistic approach inclusive of focused and rigorous solutions was called to:

- expand its services and provide further humanitarian welfare and support - stretching our capacity - to ensure that the women of our community would continue to have access to high-quality and effective protection and legal assistance services responding to their unique needs.
- suspend the operations of our physical space and transfer most of our skill-building activities online. This has been a major challenge as our work was based on physical and personal interaction with the women. Almost 70% of our community had very limited to zero digital skills and were unfamiliar with online meeting platforms. At the same time, almost 35% of our beneficiaries had limited access to the Internet and were sharing one device with the rest of their family.
- due to early interrupted education, many women of our community were already facing difficulties to adjust in the context of a (physical) classroom. The situation deteriorated when they were invited to join online classes.

To respond to the new reality and support to the maximum the women of our community, Irida:

- the center remained open as a reference point where women could book and attend an appointment with the Head of Protection and the Legal Expert, following all the precautionary measures and picking up food and non-food necessities.
- supported women victims of GBV with temporary safe accommodation, provision of safe phones and credits
- ensured that all of our beneficiaries would have access to the Internet
- established a private FaceBook group to share and post information and updates in women's native languages and learning materials that women could access on their own time

Our Programming: Services & Provisions

• Protection Services

We provide protection services to alleviate the anxiety of insecurity over day-to-day necessities for the women who struggle to make ends meet, helping them feel safe and enabling them to engage actively with the programming and implement longer-term plans.

Additionally, we focus on improving women's mental health and psychosocial well-being, assisting them in mitigating toxic stress and anxiety, processing their traumatic experiences in a trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, and culturally-aware project, and regaining their self-confidence.

The Protection Services include:

- Maintaining a record with information regarding family status, educational level, medical history, and vulnerabilities
- Provision of medications and vaccines
- Support with accessing decent healthcare
- Provision of service-related information regarding social, educational, and health services
- Mediation, referrals, and connections with available actors in the city
- Support with the translation of official documents
- Psychosocial Support Interventions in one-to-one counseling sessions through appointment and weekly group psychosocial support sessions via artistic and recreational activities

All the above-mentioned services are facilitated by the Head of Protection -a skillful and experienced social worker - with the support of the Communications with Community Officer.

• Legal Assistance & Support

We support women with information about their rights and assist them in claiming them by providing legal support to our beneficiaries to access and uphold their fundamental human and social rights, comprehending the national legal framework and their legal rights in order to make informed decisions about their lives, following legal protocols and process by representing them at court.

We provide:

- Legal Representation to Court
- Legal Assistance
- Legal Advising

Our legal services refer to cases under the Asylum & Migration, Civil, and Family Law. The above-mentioned services are provided by the Legal Expert.



Our Programming: Services & Provisions

• Skill - Building Activities

We encourage and support women to gain new skills, and empower them to build confidence and self-leadership to enter the Greek labor market and find a job.

We intend to provide:

- Language Classes - English and Greek Courses
- Digital Competencies Courses
- Soft-Skill Workshop
- Vocational Training

All the above-mentioned activities will be designed and facilitated by specialized Adult Lifelong Learning Trainers and coordinated by the Communications with Community Officer.

• A Child-Safe Space

We provide childcare support focusing on children of pre-school age (1 to 6 y.o.) for mothers while they attend appointments or sessions with the Head of Protection, the Legal Expert, or participate in skill-building activities.

The children access a safe space where they receive tools and resources to tackle the long-term effects of their trauma and acquire primary skills to deal with challenges and risks they will face in life.

Additionally, mothers access a childcare supporting mechanism where they feel comfortable entrusting their little ones in order to attend our services undistracted and benefit to the maximum from our provisions.

Our Child's Safe Space regular activities include:

- learning and educational opportunities
- movement activities
- artistic activities
- music lessons
- free playing

The Child's Safe Space is facilitated by two Child Safe Space Facilitators who have extensive experience in working with children of this age group.



2023 in Numbers

During the upcoming year, we intend to:



Register at Irida Women's Center

300 women



Support with protection services
and PSS interventions

300 women



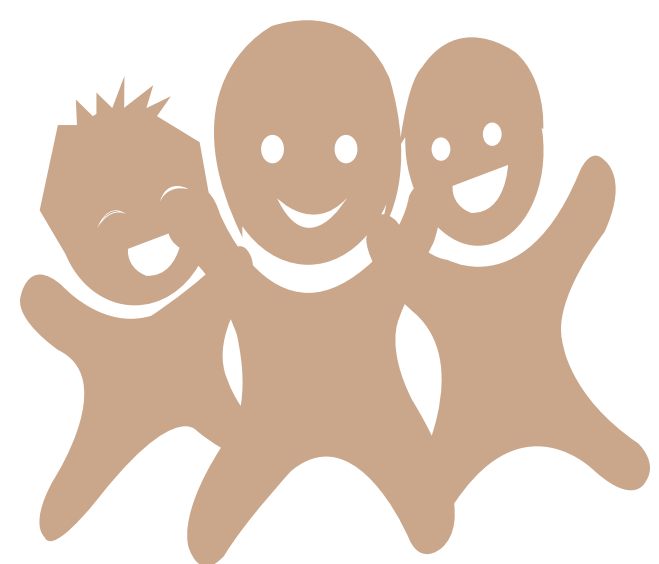
Provide with legal support

100 women



Equip with new skills and knowledge

100 women



Provide specialized childcare
support to

100 children



