



2022

**Annual Report
Irida Women's Center**



Table of Content

02 Introduction

03 2022 in overview

04 Mission, Vision, and Programs

05 The Protection Program

09 The Skill-building Program

12 The Child's Safe Space Project

13 Financial Overview

14 Rising Above 2022

15 Acknowledgements



Introduction

A Greeting Letter from Chloe E. Kousoula, our Founder and CEO.



Dear friends and supporters of Irida,

We hope you and your loved ones are doing well.

2022 was a landmark year shaking the ground in our world and forcing us to showcase exceptional strength and resilience. As, in every crisis, women and girls find themselves on the frontline, with their safety, freedom, livelihoods, and hard-earned rights threatened. Stigmatized by the war in Ukraine, a humanitarian tragedy with tens of thousands of human and material casualties instigated Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. Within the first months of the conflict, approximately 12 million Ukrainians were displaced, with more than 6 million having escaped the country. Almost 27,000 Ukrainians have reached Greece, with 90% being women and children.

We supported over one hundred women -and their children- from Ukraine helping alleviate their trauma and become self-reliant.

We put immense efforts, provisions, and services to ensure that every single woman reaching Irida in need of help and support would access focused and rigorous services in response to her unique needs. Working tirelessly and passionately, we developed a response inclusive of support with living costs, medication and medical care, legal aid, psychosocial support, and skill-building activities.

However, our efforts would not have had the positive impact we fought for without the extraordinary generosity of all our donors and the determination and commitment of our partners, volunteers, and supporters.

The firm belief in our mission and the astonishing generosity of our donors allowed us to respond effectively to the constantly growing needs of our community amid unexpected humanitarian crises shaping the international and national context and unprecedented internal challenges faced by our organization restricting our capacity.

The determination and commitment of our partners, volunteers, and supporters helped us deploy tangible and non-tangible resources and achieve meaningful change, maximizing the quality of our response.

Our annual report has one goal; to determine our impact and to ensure that every woman is empowered and supported to pursue opportunities for personal and professional growth and determine the course of her life.

We are beyond grateful for embracing our vision and mission for one more year. Your support comes in any form, and is a source of inspiration for us, fueling our efforts to shape a society reflecting Irida's values of resilience, accountability, respect, and community-driven solutions to every challenge.

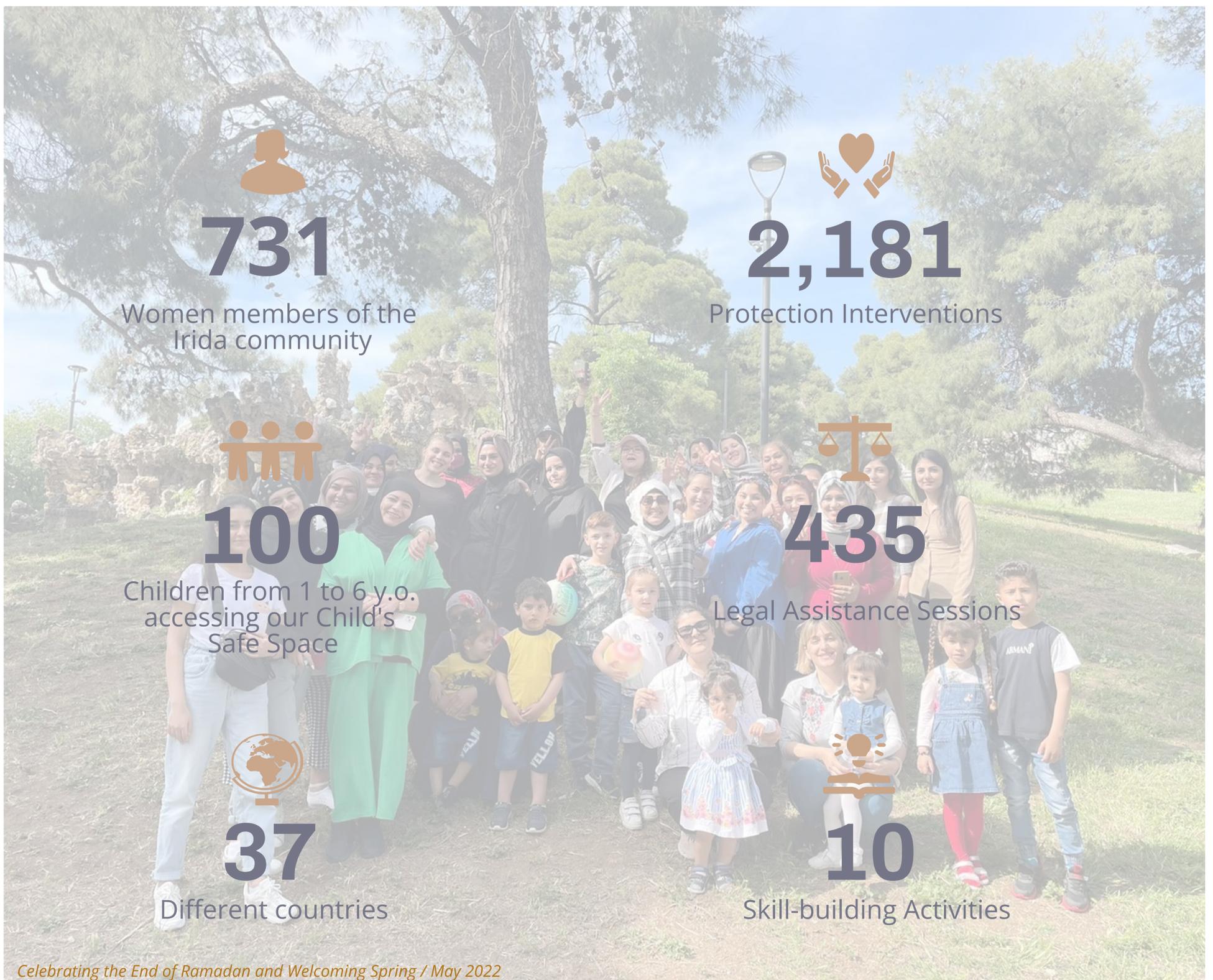
With gratitude,

Chloe E. Kousoula - Founder and CEO.

Irida Women's Center is a Greek, non-profit organization founded in 2016 and established in Thessaloniki, Northern Greece. We work to protect, empower, and support socially and economically vulnerable women to become active members of society and fulfill their goals and aspirations. In the sole safe space for women in Northern Greece, women find the support they need to address their challenges, find solutions, and achieve long-lasting positive change. Through casework, legal and psychosocial support, and skill-building and employability services, women find a space to learn, make responsible decisions for their lives, and pursue opportunities for personal and professional growth.

We focus on individuals who identify themselves as women over 18 years -Greek, refugees, and migrants-facing extreme social and economic vulnerabilities, living in poverty, and social exclusion, being (potentially) victims of gender-based violence, single mothers, mothers of large families, and low-skilled and/or (long-term) unemployed adults.

2022 in an overview



OUR VISION

We envision 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 PROGRAMS

The Protection Program

Casework and Social Services
Legal Assistance and Court Representation
Psychosocial Support in one-to-one and group sessions

The Skill-building and Economic Empowerment Program

Language courses
Literacy classes
Job counseling
Artistic Activities

The Child's Safe Space Project

Early-childhood development activities
Well-being activities

The Protection Program

In 2022, Irida Women's Center assessed the growing need for primary protection services and support with living costs, medication and medical care, psychosocial support, and legal assistance.

In response, the Protection Program emphasized casework and social services, legal assistance, and psychosocial support aiming to alleviate women's anxiety over day-to-day necessities while helping them to mitigate the symptoms of traumatic experiences they survived. We informed women about their fundamental social rights -based on their legal status- and empowered and supported them to claim and uphold their rights.

Acknowledging the growing needs of the community we serve, we introduced the Irida Solidarity Shop; within 2022, every month, hundreds of women at risk of poverty and social exclusion had access to a variety of food and non-food items. The Irida Solidarity Shop remained active throughout 2022.

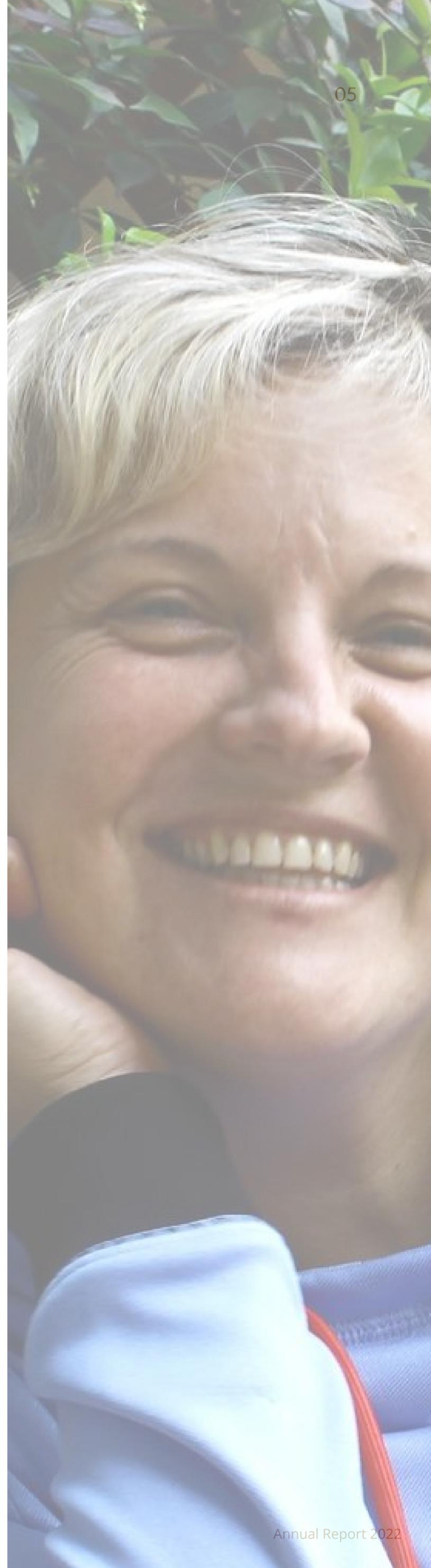
Furthermore, in response to a large gap, we expanded our legal services and emphasized court representation for cases under Asylum Migration, and Civil Law. Through court representation, we enhanced women's access to their legal rights and strengthened their efforts to claim and uphold them.

Finally, we introduced the "Arts, Tea, and Community" activity: Community is one of our four core values. Embracing the power of the community that nurtures solidarity and compassion, we introduced "Arts, Tea, and Community". Women members of the Irida community facilitate the activity sessions; during the sessions, the women establish bonds and connections using art to share common experiences and support each other.

Achievements and Impact

Only refugee women in exile know how much they need to find themselves again, to restore their energy, and how much they need a safe and friendly space. My spirit was restored at Irida Women's Center, I felt safe in a true sense.

Sharhabanoo, 43 years-old with origins in Iran





Psychosocial Support Session in Group through Artistic Activities / October 2022

Casework and Social Services

625

unique women

1,308

provisions of food and non-food necessities through the Irida Solidarity Free Shop

277

provisions of medication and access to medical care

480

meditation, referrals, and connection with public services and other actors

Legal Assistance and Court Representation

150

unique beneficiaries

250

1:1 legal sessions

117

unique cases

31

different cases represented at court

90%

success rate

Psychosocial Support

121

unique women

63

1:1 counseling sessions

59

group psychosocial support sessions through artistic and recreational activities



ZAHRA SHARES HER STORY

My name is Zahra, I am 31 years old, and my origins are from Afghanistan.

I was born and raised in Iran. After graduating from school, I left Iran and went to Afghanistan to study. In Iran, I was not allowed to go to the university. I studied to become a dentist, traveled and lived in India twice for internship and practice, and then decided to settle in Afghanistan, work there, and marry the man I loved. I found a job in a dental clinic only for women -with female dentists- in Kabul. My family did not want to marry the man I loved because of his different religion. It was very difficult. One day, while I was at work, my employer came and told me that we had to stop operating the clinic because the Taliban did not allow the clinic to work. That was the time, my husband and I decided to get married and flee the country. And after a long journey, we found ourselves in Greece; a few months later, I realized I was pregnant, when the Corona Pandemic broke out.

I came to Irida Women's Center in 2020. A friend suggested I should come to the Center; she said: "You can go to Irida, tell your story, tell your problems, and they will help you." During my first time at the Center, I met with a woman who had very good behavior; she was Effie, the social worker. I was pregnant, my husband and I had very little money, the pandemic has just started, and everything was closed. I was very sad and stressed because I wanted to prepare for my baby, but I couldn't with everything being closed. I was desperate, crying and worrying about my baby, and scared about my uncertain future in Greece. The social worker calmed me by telling me some positive things about life, women, and children. "At Irida, we cannot solve all of your problems, but we can help you with some," she said. And they did it and did even more!

And that changed me. I changed a lot - I used to be proud and selfish and think only about myself. Their behavior, their kindness, help, and support made me understand we should help each other in a calm manner. At Irida, I was taken care of; I felt that my emotions matter; every time I was sick, or my child was sick, the social worker helped me book medical appointments and access medication.

At the beginning of 2022, we faced issues with our asylum case. We had a (private) lawyer that was taking money from us without doing anything. When we received the 2nd-degree rejection, I was very disappointed. I was desperate. I booked an appointment with the Lawyer at Irida; she was good; she calmed me down and explained what she was going to do, and undertook my case. She helped my family a lot.

When I was transferred back to the camps during the fall (of 2022), Irida helped me with bus services to join their English classes to improve my skills. My daughter -who is 2 years old now - loves to come to Irida, loves her teacher, and has a best friend - a girl from Ukraine. I am happy because she can speak very good English now.

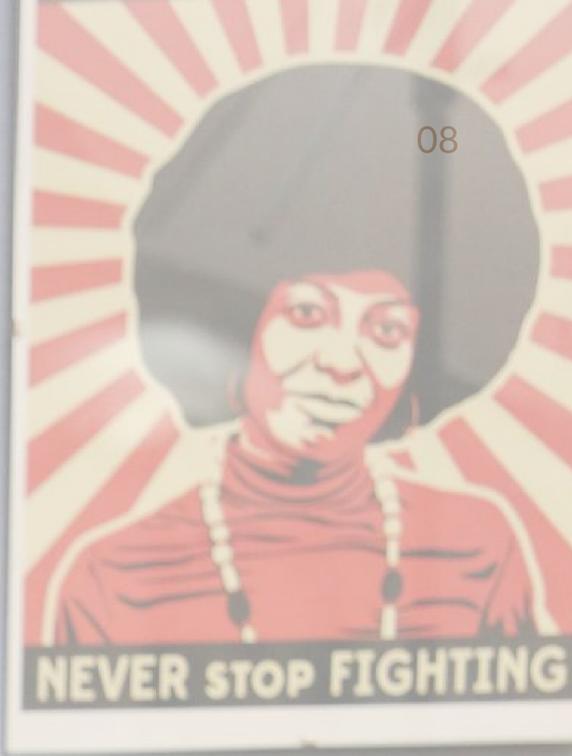
My happiest memories at Irida are two:

When I was pregnant, I was craving rice pudding - it is a traditional dessert we do a lot in my culture. But I did not have the ingredients to make it or the money to buy them. One day, the social worker asked me to come to Irida to give me something; it was a small package with white rice, milk, and sugar for me to cook rice pudding!

And the other memory was the past October, in 2022, when they organized a surprise birthday party for my daughter when she turned 2. It meant the world to me because it was the very first birthday cake for my daughter. This is something I will never forget.

I suggest if a woman is tired and has problems join Irida to feel better for a few hours because there are women from different cultures and religions and you can learn so many new things from each other, find good friends, and communicate with them.





The Skill-building Program

Within 2022, the Skill-building Program was in a preliminary phase, focusing mainly on skill-building activities inclusive of English and Greek language courses, literacy classes for women illiterate in their native language, digital skills lessons, and artistic activities. Rising above 2022 and acknowledging that gender inequality, economic insecurity, and social vulnerabilities fuel a never-ending cycle of further poverty, social exclusion, and threats for women, we decided to reshape and expand the Skill-Building Program and upgrade it into the Livelihoods Program.

The Livelihoods Program aims to eliminate the cycle of poverty and social exclusion and empower women to obtain the skills and confidence they need to pursue opportunities for employment and income generation. The new Program includes skill-building activities and vocational training, the development of soft skills critical to building a successful working path, and job counseling.

The innovative element of the Program is our intersectoral cooperation with vocational education and training actors, e.g., the Life-Long Learning Center of YMCA, recognized by the Greek state. We aim to bring added value to the Program's skill-building activities and enhance women's employability; women are equipped with theoretical and practical skills while receiving certifications recognized nationally. After mapping the available services in the city of Thessaloniki, Irida Women's Center aims to be the sole actor providing certified vocational training free of charge for socially and economically vulnerable women.

Achievements and Impact



368

hours of English and Greek Language Courses



48

hours of Farsi Literacy Classes



48

hours of digital competencies course



133

unique women



13

job counseling sessions

Greek Language Courses facilitated by Valentina, the Ukrainian Community Representative / September 2022



SVITLANA SHARES HER STORY

The war started on February 24, 2022.

Two weeks later, my family and I decided to escape Kyiv. What had happened to Bucha, combined with the fact that our house (in Kyiv) was next to a military base, scared us, and we decided it was unsafe to remain in the city.

My name is Svitlana. I am 32 years old, and I come from Ukraine.

Before the war, I used to live in Kyiv with my family; my mother, my sister, and my sister's husband. I had a beautiful life that I really loved. I was working as a Social Media Marketing Specialist for the Public Relations and Press Department of an opposing political party; that party does not exist anymore.

After escaping Kyiv, we did not immediately leave the country. With my mother, my sister, and her husband, we went to another city, in a safer area that was not at the heart of the armed conflicts. However, we could not find anywhere to stay; there were no houses to rent or available hotel rooms to stay.

My sister and her husband found shelter in their friends' house and decided to stay in Ukraine.

My mother and I decided to flee abroad.

We decided to come to Greece. From 2015 to 2016, I lived in Thessaloniki as an exchange student through the Erasmus Program. I had kept my old landlord's phone number - I was renting one of his apartments as a student. So I called him and asked whether he had any empty apartments for us to stay in temporarily. Thankfully, he did and offered to keep it available as much as we needed to leave Ukraine and come to Greece. We left with my car and drove from a city close to the borders of Romania to Thessaloniki. The fact that we came to Thessaloniki I was familiar with, because I had spent almost a year here, and found a place to stay from the first day we reached Greece made this major change and transition in my life less difficult.

I have a friend from Ukraine, living in Thessaloniki for many years - I met her during my university years. She is the one who suggested my mother and I should come to Irida. At first, we visited Irida because we just wanted to do something different to take our minds away.

From the first moment we entered Irida, we felt safe and received so much help and support. We discovered all the activities taking place at the Center and met so many people who were willing to help and address our needs without ever asking for anything back. Very soon, I started Greek lessons and my mother started to learn German. I was -and I still am- very pleased with my teacher and the quality of the classes.

Every time we come to Irida, my mother and I feel very well; we feel welcome. When you are in a foreign place -a stranger among strangers- you have nowhere to go, no one to talk with. But at Irida, we feel we can be ourselves, take part in many activities, meet new people, and make friends. I discovered new talents and I would have never thought I could unveil new parts of myself through painting. Now, after almost a year as a member of Irida, every Friday, I wait for my phone to ring and receive via SMS the Irida calendar with the weekly activities.

I am currently working remotely for a charity organization helping people remaining in Ukraine. Since the past week, we have been receiving very bad news from Ukraine and everything is unstable. A major part of my work is communicating with people -in Ukraine- who are in danger and need help. Almost daily, I hear tragic stories that make me shudder in sorrow.

I am also searching for job opportunities in Greece. Since the past week, we have been receiving very bad news from Ukraine and everything is unstable. I do not know when we will be able to return, and that is why I believe I have to find work here, in Greece.





The Child's Safe Space Project

In February 2022, we re-introduced our Child's Safe Space for children of pre-school age, namely from 1 to 6 years of age.

The Child's Safe Space had always been a core element of our holistic approach that with heavy hearts forced to suspend due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022, with our personnel and most of our community vaccinated, and fully aligned with the standing preventative measures, we decided to re-launch our Child's Safe Space for children of pre-school age.

Initially, the Child's Safe Space was operated by volunteers 3 times every. However, quickly enough, it became obvious the double-added value it was bringing to our work, and thus, we expanded the project. Through a series of learning, music, sensory, artistic, and relaxation activities, children socialize, create bonds, and make friends, while obtaining critical cognitive and social skills for their smooth entrance into the formal educational system

At the same time, their mothers access a supporting mechanism to alleviate the burden of childcare that they carry alone from their shoulders.

“
I am very protective of my daughter. I never leave her alone. That's why I was not accepted in some jobs because I asked to bring her with me. The only place I feel safe leaving her to have some "alone time" is Irida. She was raised here. I can trust Irida.

Khadija, 40 years-old with origins in Syria



100

children participated in our Child's Safe Space Project

Irida Women's Center



85

mothers benefited from our Child's Safe Space Project



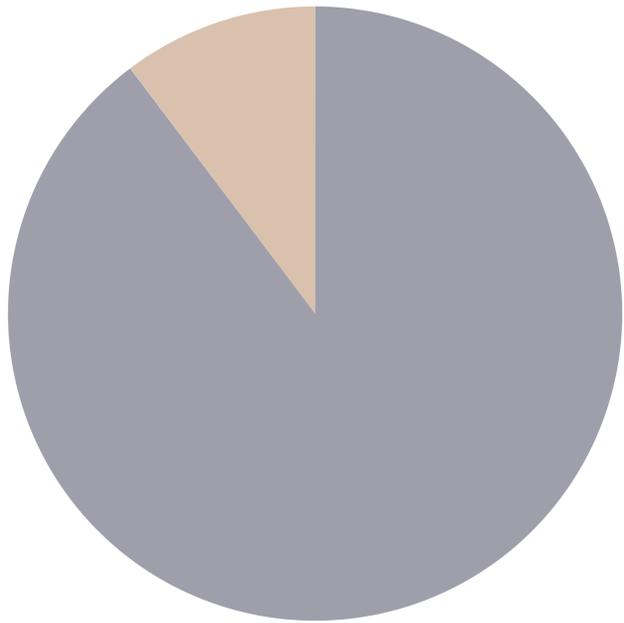
Free playing in our Child's Safe Space / November 2022

Annual Report 2022

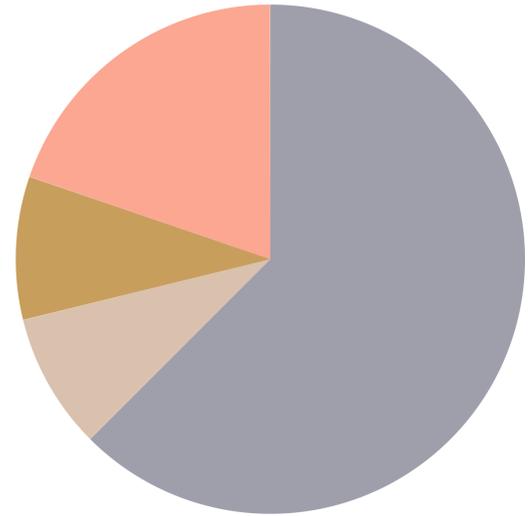
Financial Overview

Income Sources 378,893.45 €

Expenses 319,495.85 €



■ Granting from Foundations (89.73%)
■ Donations (10.27%)



■ Programmatic Costs (62.54%)
■ Operational Costs (8.63%)
■ Fundraising and Communications Cost (9.09%)
■ Management Costs (19.74%)

Income Sources	Amount in Euros (€)
Granting from Foundations	339,979.45 €
Donations	38,914 €
Total	378,893.45 €

Expenses	Amount in Euros (€)
Programmatic Costs	€ 199,802
Operational Costs	€ 27,583.85
Fundraising and Communications Costs	€ 29,038
Management Costs	€ 63,072
Total	319,495.85€ *

(The amount of 59.397,60 € concerns programmatic costs for 2023)

Recognitions

In 2022, Irida Women's Center was honored to be selected as:

- 1 of the 4 winning organizations of the 2022 Ockenden International Prize for refugees and/or displaced people projects. Out of more than 150 submissions from 48 countries, we were chosen for our work through our Protection Program, supporting vulnerable women residing within the geographical scope of Northern Greece. Ockenden International is a firm supporter of the rights of all refugees and displaced people -in any location- to a life of dignity while promoting their self-reliance and independence.
- as a recipient of the Julia Taft Refugee Fund through the U.S. Embassy in Athens and the U.S. Consulate General in Thessaloniki. Through the Julia Taft Refugee Fund, we have been able to implement our first pilot skill-building program inclusive of certified vocational training in partnership with the Lifelong Learning Center of YMCA of Thessaloniki.

Rising Above 2022

Within 2022, we developed the organization's Strategic Plan for the triennial 2023 -2025, setting 3 major strategic priorities, which will be shaping our work for the next years 3 years.

1. Protection

Our goal is to strengthen women's capacity, so they can actively participate in their community, access resources and take informed decisions about their lives. We aim to help socially and economically vulnerable women to build self-awareness and ownership and access the resources they are entitled to while claiming and upholding their fundamental social rights.

2. Economic Empowerment

Our goal is to empower women to gain the skills & confidence they need to pursue opportunities for employment and income generation. To accomplish our goal, we will be concentrating our efforts on supporting women to build their personalized career paths and navigate the Greek labor market, gain income-generating skills, and build confidence and self-leadership to enter the job market.

3. Organizational Development

Our goal is to ensure and strengthen organizational sustainability and growth. Specifically, we intend to secure the financial viability of the organization, strengthen its institutional structure, and enhance its operational efficiency.

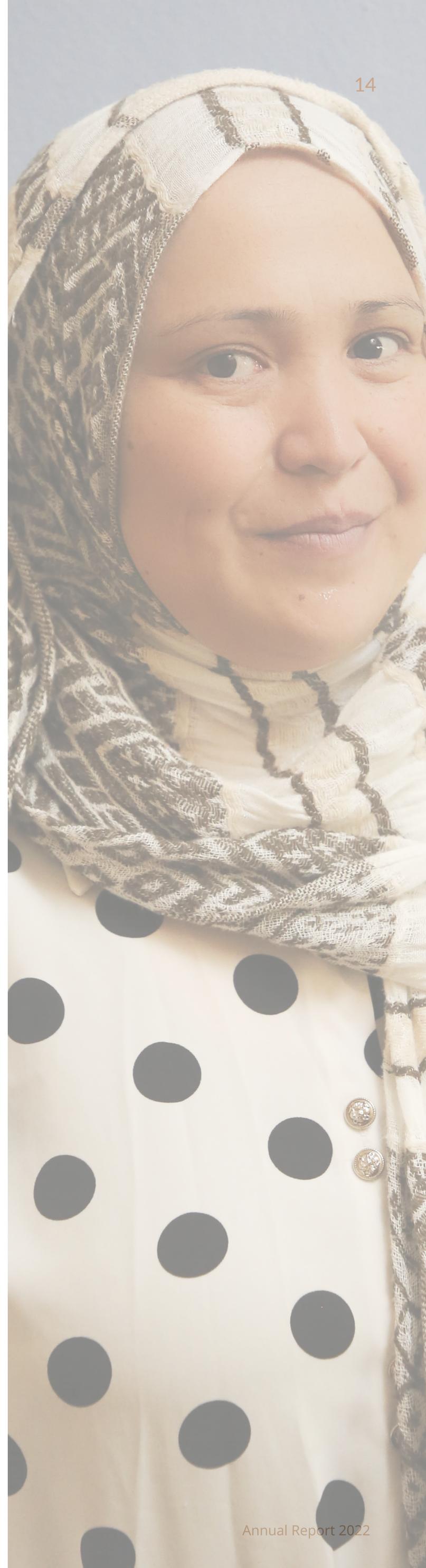
By accomplishing our Strategic Priorities



1,000

Socially and economically women will be reached

*receiving the support they need to pursue opportunities for personal and professional growth **by the end of 2025.***



Acknowledgements

We are beyond grateful to our donors and supporters!

In a year filled with humanitarian crises and tragedies being entrusted with your compassion, kindness, and solidarity has been an extraordinary privilege. Your profound support and generosity were core elements of our efforts, enhancing our response to protect, empower, and support in-depth hundreds of socially and economically vulnerable women to reshape their lives and become active members of their communities

We would like to express our true gratitude to our major donors for 2022, including but not limited to:

- CHOOSE LOVE
- AMNA
- WORLD ORT INTENRATIONAL
- GLOBAL GIVING
- U.S EMBASSY OF ATHENS
- HUMANITY NOW
- MEDITERRANEAN WOMEN'S FUND

We would like to thank every individual who supported and donated to our programs. You have been an integral part of our work.

We are thankful to our fellow partner organizations who joined forces with us and fought to establish a more inclusive and gender-equal society. In addition, we would like to give a loud shoutout to all the fantastic interns and volunteers for enriching Irida with their skills and talents, dedication, and passion, aiming to empower our community.

Last but not least, Irida would like to recognize all of our staff members for their efforts behind our accomplishments. Their agility allowed us to successfully navigate a challenging year and continue to achieve a positive impact. Special thanks to everyone contributing to creating this report, including the unique women of the Irida community. Your courage, strength, and resilience have been sources of inspiration.

Our team commits to continuing to work tirelessly and passionately to provide women and children with tailored, targeted, and timely solutions responding to their unique needs.



2022

Annual Report
Irida Women's Center



www.iridacenter.org

