

Annual Report 2024



Irida Women's Center



Irida Women's Center

Table of Contents

Letter from our Founder and CEO

A Glance of 2024

The Protection Program

A powerful story from a community member

The Livelihoods Program

Meet Dimitra

The Child's Safe Space

Financial Review

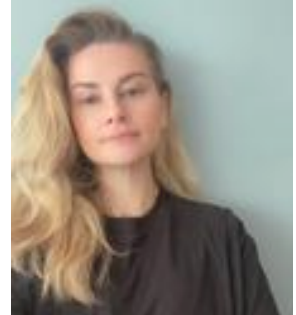
Rising Above 2024

Acknowledgements

A Greeting Letter from Chloe Kousoula, our Founder and CEO

Dear Friends and Supporters of Irida Women's Center,

As we reflect on 2024, we are met once again with the stark realities of our times: ongoing, relentless conflicts, deepening inequalities, economic instability, and the far-reaching impact of climate change. These intersecting crises continue to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, forcing many into uncertainty and poverty. The mechanisms that once mitigated these issues -such as peace treaties and accountability for violations of international law- seem to have weakened, leading to profound negative consequences.



Amid these complex challenges, women and girls are disproportionately affected. Their safety, freedom, and difficulty-earned fundamental rights are increasingly at risk. In such turbulent times, women face heightened exposure to violence, exploitation, and exclusion. The number of women living in conflict-affected areas has reached unprecedented levels, and nearly 1 in 10 women worldwide lives in extreme poverty. At the same time, a woman is killed by their intimate partner or family member every 10 minutes.

In Greece, gender inequality remains a critical issue. Within the European Union, Greece stands in 25th place, with a score of 59 out of 100 in 2024, which is almost 12 points below the EU average. While Greece's score has increased since 2010, it still lags quite behind most other EU member states. As the data demonstrates, more than 1 in 4 women in Greece live at risk of poverty and social exclusion. 4 in 10 women experience physical, psychological, or sexual gender-based violence at least once in their adulthood. Women face multiple intersecting challenges and inequalities deepening their vulnerabilities, with the situation becoming even more complex for refugee and migrant women.

In the face of these urgent realities, Irida Women's Center stood firm, continuing to protect, empower, and support hundreds of the most vulnerable women in Northern Greece, regardless of nationality and legal status.

Through our Protection Program and Livelihood Program, we offered a holistic range of trauma-informed services: from casework and legal aid with court representation, to psychological support, skill-building, and employability services. Our approach remains rooted in the belief that every woman must take ownership of her life, access her rights, and build her future in safety and dignity.

This impact would not have been possible without you. Your dedicated and profound support, trust, and solidarity allowed us to rise to the moment, adapt to complex realities, and meet the growing needs of our community. In a time of uncertainty, you provided our community with stability and offered community hope. Through your generosity, we continued to plant the seeds for a future where gender equality is not an ideal but a lived reality.

This year marked a truly humbling milestone for Irida, as we were honored with the first-ever Vigdis Prize for Women's Empowerment, awarded by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Government of Iceland. This recognition belongs to every woman we serve, and to all of you who make our work possible.

Thanks to the commitment of all of our partners and supporters, we have been able to mobilize essential resources, expand our reach, and strengthen our response, maximizing the quality and depth of our impact.

This annual report is more than a summary of numbers or actions; it is a reflection of resilience, shared responsibility, and collective change. It is our commitment to accountability and our promise to keep moving forward until every woman is not left behind.

We are beyond grateful for standing beside us. Your steady, ongoing belief in our mission and vision fuels our determination and becomes the light to the path ahead of us.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Chloe Kousoula

Welcome to the Irida Women's Center Annual Report for 2024.

2024 marked the second year of implementing our Strategic Plan for 2023-2025. Driven by our vision of leaving no woman behind and drawing on nearly a decade of hands-on experience in the field of women's protection and support, we remained firmly committed to our 3 core Strategic Priorities:

Protection

Our goal is to strengthen women's capacity. We aim to help socially and economically vulnerable women build self-awareness and ownership and access the resources they are entitled to while claiming and upholding their fundamental social rights.

Economic Empowerment

Our goal is to empower women to gain the skills and confidence they need to pursue opportunities for employment and income generation. To accomplish this goal, we focused 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.

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.

A defining milestone of 2024 was Irida Women's Center being honored with the first-ever Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment, awarded by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the Government of Iceland. Selected from among 123 nominations worldwide, this prestigious recognition marked a profoundly humbling and meaningful moment in our journey. We dedicate this award to the women we serve—the true protagonists of our mission—whose strength, resilience, and courage continue to inspire and guide our work every day. The Vigdís Prize reinforces our unwavering commitment to closing gender gaps, challenging systemic inequalities, and empowering women to become agents of change within their families, communities, and beyond.



In 2024, Irida also launched its first large-scale awareness campaign, #SheChangeSpeak: Thessaloniki Raises Its Voice Against Gender-Based Violence. With 14 femicides recorded in Greece during the year—each committed by a current or former partner—the campaign sought to amplify the voices of women in Thessaloniki and raise awareness of one of the most pressing social issues of our time. At the heart of the campaign is the creation of a network of 50 local businesses trained to act as temporary safe spaces for women at risk, offering immediate shelter and support until official services are mobilized. The campaign formed a key action within our EU-funded project “SheChange: Combating Gender-Based Violence”, under the CERV-2023-DAPHNE programme.



A Glance at 2024



681

Women reached as registered community members



231

Children supported in our Child's Safe Space Project.



51

Different Countries represented

"This is the only place where I feel a sense of safety. At Irida, I know what to expect, and that makes me feel protected. I am grateful to witness all these women treating each other with kindness and humanity. Humanity is not something that should be taken for granted. M. is a 58-year-old from Afghanistan."

M. is originally from Afghanistan and was seeking asylum in Greece. She managed to escape with her child while her life was under threat from the Taliban due to her profession as a lawyer. Through the Irida, M. receives psychological support while participating in the open psychosocial group sessions.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are changing my life. I was feeling very low and did not want to speak with anyone I did not know because I was embarrassed. I believe that this, combined with my age and my health condition, was a major factor preventing me from finding a job. Thank you, you make me so happy." K. is a 63-year-old woman from Greece."

K. was a single woman living alone. She was experiencing a serious health condition along with severe socio-economic vulnerabilities. She was a cancer patient and, as a result of undergoing chemotherapy, lost her dentures. Despite her serious health condition, K remained active in the workforce. However, the lack of dentures caused her great insecurity, which she believed was a key obstacle in her efforts to find employment. Irida Women's Center was able to cover the cost of producing a new set of dentures. After the dental procedure, and in 2024, K. was able to secure a part-time job.

"Thank you! I am very grateful to the Lawyer. She saved my life and my child's future. I will never forget what you did for me and all the other women. I want to help other women resolve their issues, and I am willing to help with translation from Somali to English if you need it." N.A is a 40-year-old community member from Somalia."

N.A. is a single mother of a young daughter with severe health issues. N.A. was supported by our legal team for her asylum application and prepared for her asylum interview. When she received asylum and became a beneficiary of international protection, our legal team also undertook the case of her child custody, helping the mother to take full custody of her child. She was deeply moved by Irida's support that she offered her time and skills and started to support voluntarily with interpretation during legal sessions.

The Protection Program

The Protection is the integral first step in our efforts to accomplish our vision of leaving no woman behind. Through individualized and trauma-informed support, we protect, empower, and support women to address immediate challenges and take meaningful steps toward accessing their rights, regaining ownership of their lives, and fostering their personal growth.

Throughout 2024, we remained loyal to providing comprehensive case management and social services. We supported the most socially and economically vulnerable women in mitigating their most urgent needs, while helping them navigate complex bureaucratic processes and connect with public services and civil society actors to access the rights and resources they have been entitled to, yet they were deprived of due to their gender.

Mental health and psychosocial support remained a core component of our Protection Program. We continued to offer 1:1 psychological support, as well as arts-based psychosocial interventions, enabling women to build emotional resilience, restore self-confidence, and process trauma in a supportive environment.

Furthermore, we continued to respond to the critical and persistent gap in access to justice by providing rigorous legal assistance and judicial representation, the only organization in Northern Greece offering such services across Asylum, Migration, Civil, and Criminal Law. In response to rising demand, we expanded our legal team in the second half of 2024 with the recruitment of a second Lawyer, significantly strengthening our capacity to meet women's needs and help them claim and uphold their rights.

Finally, throughout 2024, we implemented several integrated projects under the Protection Program, combining social services, legal, and psychosocial services. These projects provided a 360 support to diverse groups of women, including refugees, migrants, survivors of gender-based violence, and elderly women, experiencing multiple layers of vulnerabilities.

The Protection Program in Numbers

January 2024 - December 2024

Social Services

569

women received social services

451

women received general counseling with the Social Worker

206

women received support with medical care and medication

193

women were provided with non-food items

86

women received orientation, mediation, and general information

5

women were provided with emergency temporary accommodation

Legal Aid and Court Representation

129

women received legal assistance.

180

other direct beneficiaries who are first-degree relatives of our members.

981

legal appointments were held.

88

cases represented at the court.

95%

success rate of resolved cases

Psychological and Psychosocial Support

53

women had at least one individualized counseling session with the Psychologist.

274

Individualized counseling sessions with the Psychologist were held.

160

women participated in the open psychosocial support group sessions through recreational activities.

52

open psychosocial support group sessions through recreational activities were held.



Dear Irida Team,

Sending greetings from Tasmania.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude for the incredible help, care, support, and love you showed me during my stay in Greece and especially during the hard situation I faced. I was consoled and revived to have you around me whenever I needed you. Your unmatched kindness and support during such a challenging time have meant the world to me, and I cannot thank you enough for your selflessness.

I sincerely appreciate the nature of your organization and its people, as it is built on serving people and especially women, despite their race, status, or nationality. This truly amazed me and made me understand that there are people who have devoted their time and resources to serve others. Honestly, this is among the rare favours in most communities.

On behalf of my family, we want you to know that we really value your dedication towards helping us. Thank you so much for your support in saving my life and resting her very well.

I hope to see you again soon.

*Sincerely,
M.M.*



M.M., a 35-year-old woman from Tanzania, a wife and mother of a young child, M.M. had previously worked at her university, where she led a project empowering extremely vulnerable women to earn an income through clothing production.

She came to Greece with a scholarship from her university and an agreement that, upon completing her studies within a specified timeline, she would be offered a higher work position at the university in Tanzania.

However, unfortunately, towards the end of her studies, and while heavily pregnant, she was involved in a devastating accident that threatened her life and caused the loss of her unborn baby.

Alone in a foreign country, without her family, support, or a safety net, M.M. found herself in a moment of unimaginable vulnerability. We immediately stepped up to undertake any medical expenses and facilitate the complex processes related to her care and her situation, while also providing continuous psychological support until she was able to safely return to her country.

M. M. has been maintaining communication with us until today, and in one of her messages, she let us know that she is grateful to Irida not only for the life-saving and emotional support during her darkest moment, but also for supporting her in completing her studies. This accomplishment has since allowed her to secure employment and provide stability for her family.

Her story is a powerful reminder of the importance of timely, compassionate intervention and the transformative impact of community support in times of crisis.

This letter was shared with us the day of her departure to Tanzania.





The Livelihood Program

Our Livelihoods Program aims to break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion by equipping women with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to access employment and achieve sustainable income generation. The program offers a comprehensive package of services, including skill-building activities and vocational training, individualized job counseling, soft skills development, and career pathway planning.

In 2024, we strengthened the implementation of our Livelihoods Program through several key developments:

- We continued offering intensive skill-building activities, including English, Greek, and Digital Literacy. In addition, we provided 3 different preparatory classes for the Certificate of Competency in English and the Certificate of Competency in Greek, with 3 women participating in total, reinforcing their skillset and enhancing their employability.
- We implemented 3 vocational training programs in the sectors of hospitality, tourism, and beauty, in partnership with accredited vocational education and training centers. These programs provided practical skills aligned with labor market needs and women's aspirations, with 23 women successfully participating.
- We deepened our employability services. In 2024, we continued our partnership with the International Rescue Committee Hellas by seconding a Livelihood Officer to our facilities, enhancing the effectiveness of our employability services. At the same time, we have been able to further reinforce our capacity by recruiting a part-time Employability Officer to offer more tailored support to our members.

Through these actions, the Livelihoods Program continues to serve as a vital pillar of our strategic priority of economic empowerment, helping women to access dignified work and build a sustainable future.

The Livelihoods Program in Numbers

January 2024 - December 2024

Skill-Building Activities in hours

1248

Women participated

136



Job Counseling Sessions

979

Women attended

158



Vocational Training

3

Women attended

23



Workplace Soft Skills Workshops

7

Women participated

17





Meet Dimitra

My name is Dimitra, I'm 58 years old, and I live in Thessaloniki.

I first discovered Irida Women's Center through a psychosocial support activity organized in collaboration with another civil society organization. During that activity, I met Irida's psychologist. She radiated kindness, and I really liked the way she worked. What stood out to me was that the group didn't focus on discussing problems in depth. Instead, we explored positive tools and practical strategies to manage challenges. I was interested and asked more about Irida, and shortly after, in early 2024, I decided to register.

What attracted me most was the variety of services Irida offers: psychological support, legal aid, and job counseling. I appreciated that Irida does not offer one-dimensional support. Our lives are complex, and so are our needs. Irida understands this and offers support that reflects this reality.

I started individualized counseling sessions with the Psychologist, which felt like a journey, filled with both light and heavy moments. I was going through a difficult period in my life, and having someone to talk to was deeply relieving. I felt safe and free to express myself without fear or shame.

I also joined a painting workshop facilitated by another woman in the Irida community. I loved being creative and using different materials—it gave me joy and a sense of accomplishment.

Later that year, I decided to enroll in English classes. I started in summer 2024, and now I'm at B2 level, preparing to take the official language exam (ECCE) in December. I feel proud of how far I've come. I truly enjoy the learning environment fostered by our teacher. She is inspiring and fosters our motivation to learn. I also like the connection with other women from different parts of the world. Communicating through a mix of English, Greek, and even body language has become a fun and meaningful experience.

With support from Irida's Employability Officer, I've started applying for jobs, too. We've created my CV together and identified positions that match my interests and background.

What I've found at Irida is more than services; it's a space where every door leads to support, encouragement, and growth. For me, Irida feels like an extended family. A place of acceptance, kindness, and possibility.

Looking ahead, I hope to earn my certificate in English, find a job that gives me satisfaction, and continue being part of this community. I want to keep engaging in its activities, connect with other women, and be part of a space where we support, learn from, and uplift one another.



The Child's Friendly Space Project

Alongside our 2 major Programs, in alignment with our current strategic priorities, Irida operates a Child's Safe Space.

In 2024, the Child's Friendly Space remained a critical component for the impactful implementation of our programming. It endorsed our holistic approach while adding double-added value to our mission to empower women to pursue opportunities for their personal and professional growth.

The Child's Friendly Space continued to offer a safe and nurturing childcare mechanism for young children. It enabled their mothers to participate fully in our programming, focus on their personal and professional growth, and pursue a safer, improved, and sustainable livelihood for themselves and their children.

Additionally, it provided a safe, secure space, offering children a stimulating environment that endorsed their learning and socio-emotional development via play and age-appropriate activities.

We enhance the children's physical and psychosocial well-being through the Child's Friendly Space where we work hand-in-hand with the mother to cultivate a sense of safety, security, and acceptance and develop opportunities for the children to play, learn, and explore the world, be active, and receive stimulation and support from the pedagogist, their mothers, and their peers to grow, bloom, and thrive.

The early childhood development activities include healthy snacks, fundamental movement skills, music activities, creative art, reading, playing, educational activities, and cultural activities.

January 2024 - December 2024



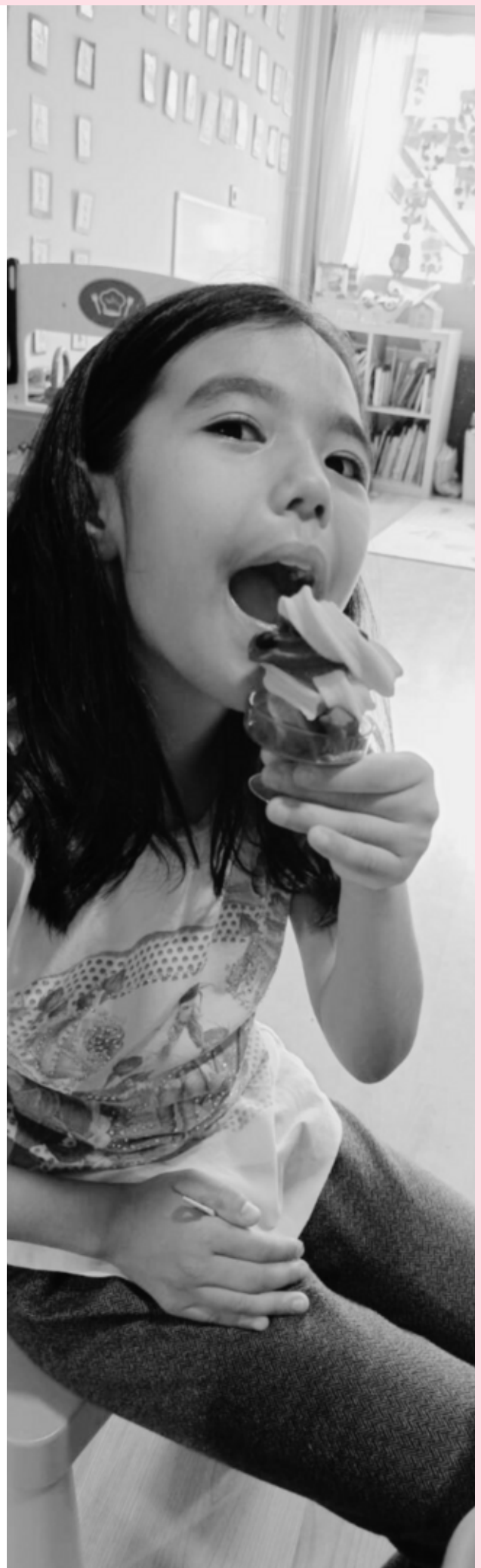
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**children accessed
the Child's Safe
Space**



139

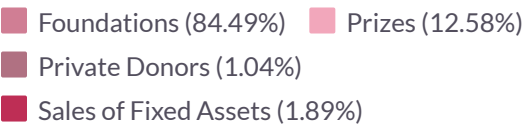
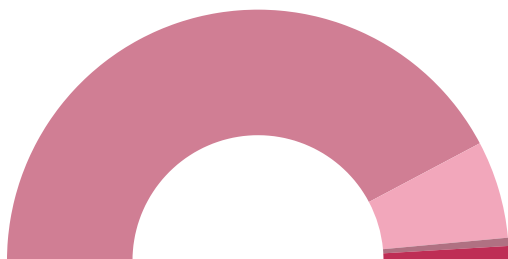
**mothers benefited
from the Child's Safe
Space**



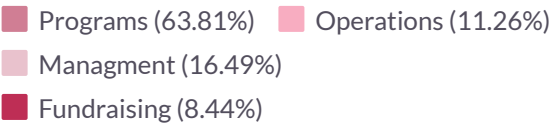
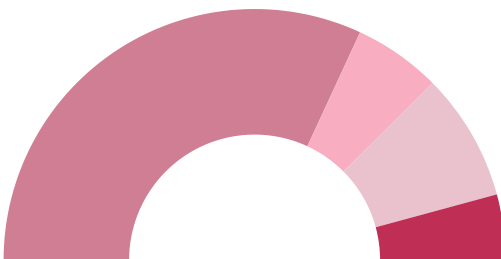
Financial Review



INCOME SOURCES



EXPENSES ALLOCATION



Rising Above 2024

1,500 women to be reached and supported by the end of 2025

Unique Women Reached from 2023 to 2024



In 2024, we completed the second year of our Strategic Plan, guided by our vision to leave no woman behind and anchored in our 3 core strategic priorities:

- Protection
- Economic Empowerment
- Organizational Development.

At the outset of this strategic period, we had set a goal to reach and support 1,000 women by the end of the triennial.

At the end of 2023, we had already exceeded expectations, reaching 610 women through our tailored, holistic services. Inspired by this significant progress, we raised our target to reach 1,500 unique women by the end of 2025.

Throughout 2024, a year marked by both challenge and momentum, Irida Women’s Center supported an additional 688 women, each receiving individualized support tailored to their unique needs and circumstances.

As we enter 2025, we have already achieved 87% of our revised goal. With solid commitment to our strategic priorities, we are confident in our ability to reach this target and continue empowering women to take ownership of their lives and unlock their full potential.

Looking ahead, our three core priorities will remain the cornerstone of our work. Protection, Economic Empowerment, and Organizational Development continue to drive our mission and shape our path toward a more inclusive, equitable future for all women.



Acknowledgements

Reflecting on 2024, we are deeply grateful to our donors and supporters.

In a year marked by horrific atrocities against humanity, severe and ongoing crises and challenges both in the national and global scene, and countless untold hardships, your steadfast support, dedicated compassion, kindness, and solidarity have been an extraordinary privilege and a powerful force of hope.

Through your incredible generosity, we have been able to continue our mission, protecting, empowering, and supporting hundreds of extremely socially and economically vulnerable women to take ownership of their lives and pursue opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Your unwavering commitment made our work possible. Together, we have taken meaningful steps toward building a world where no woman is left behind.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our major donors and supporters for 2024 in alphabetical order, including but not limited to:

- AMNA
- BODOSSAKI FOUNDATION
- CCFD-TERRE SOLIDAIRE
- CHOOSE LOVE
- DESMOS FOUNDATION
- GLOBAL GIVING
- HUMANITY NOW
- L'OREAL FUND FOR WOMEN
- LATTER DAYS SAINT CHARITY
- MEDITERENNEAN WOMEN'S FUND
- SOLIDARITEE
- TIMA CHARITABLE FOUNDATION
- WORLD ORT

We wholeheartedly thank everyone who supported and donated to Irida Women's Center in 2024. Your invaluable contributions have been instrumental to advance our missions and contribute to our vision.

We are also deeply grateful to our partner organizations for their collaboration and shared commitment to building more gender-inclusive communities. Your expertise and solidarity have strengthened our collective impact. A heartfelt thank-you goes to our incredible interns and volunteers. Your dedication, skills, and passion have left a lasting imprint on Irida and the women we serve.

Lastly, we recognize the outstanding efforts of our team. Their resilience, adaptability, and unwavering commitment allowed Irida to navigate a particularly challenging year while continuing to deliver life-changing services and support to the most vulnerable women in Northern Greece.

As we move forward, we remain committed to delivering targeted, timely, and personalized support to the most vulnerable women and their children, ensuring their needs are met with care, dignity, and purpose.