

Drawing learnings from working in Greece for children and youth on the move in 2016-2018

Summary of the external evaluation conducted under the collaborative Fund “Never Alone – Building our future with children and youth arriving in Europe”

“Never Alone – Building our future with children and youth arriving in Europe” is a collaborative fund led by the [European Programme for Integration and Migration \(EPIM\)](#), dedicated to the protection and long-term perspectives of children and youth on the move in Europe. Through this fund, work in four focus countries (Greece, Italy, Germany and Belgium) as well as at European level is supported.

In 2016-2018, together with the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, the John S. Latsis Foundation and the Bodossaki Foundation, EPIM supported civil society organisations in Greece working on the identification and protection of unaccompanied and separated children and youth. In order to assess the progress towards the objectives of the fund as well as to draw learnings and highlight good practices for the field, EPIM commissioned an external evaluation in 2018, conducted by Maria Antonia di Maio¹. The present document aims to summarise key findings from the evaluation by highlighting the outcomes and lessons learned from supported work in Greece.

EPIM’s work in Greece in 2016-2018

In 2016, it was clear that upon arrival in Greece, children and youth were facing a number of obstacles to the full enjoyment of their fundamental rights. These pertained in particular to: the process of [identification](#), its outcomes and consequences; [care and accommodation](#), including detention for migration-related purposes; procedures (or lack of) to determine the [best interests of an individual child](#); and [awareness about the situation of children and youth on the move](#) among service providers.

In order to contribute to improving the situation for children and youth on the move in the country, EPIM decided to support civil society organisations to address the following key objectives:

- ✓ **Identification:** Build safe structures and networks at the first points of arrival and strengthen mechanisms for identification in registration centres and main cities of transit.
- ✓ **Protection:** Provide alternatives to detention with the support of sustainable transit structures. Foster individualized support and protection with the scaling up and improvement of the guardianship system for children and youth transiting through and/or establishing their life in Greece.
- ✓ **Awareness raising:** Raise awareness of the issues concerning unaccompanied and separated children and youth to avoid misinterpretation and increase the attention given to such children and youth.

To address the above-mentioned objectives, three projects were supported:

1. Holistic intervention led by [PRAKSIS](#) for female unaccompanied & separated children and youth who were facing gender-based violence
2. “Following their Footsteps” project led by [Faros](#) to provide an alternative for children and youth living in the streets of Athens
3. “Strengthening the Protection Network” project supporting the expansion of [METAdrasi](#)’s guardianship programme aimed at child protection

¹ “Project evaluation and assessment of the context for children and youth on the move: new opportunities for EPIM to engage in Greece”, Maria Antonia Di Maio, February 2018.



1. Responding to the needs of female unaccompanied and separated children and youth in a dynamic environment with a holistic model of intervention

by PRAKSIS, in partnership with CIVIS PLUS

Aim: enhance the protection of female unaccompanied and separated children and youth in Greece, through providing care, accommodation and other holistic services to children and young people on the move who have suffered from gender-based violence prior to coming to Greece (and/or while in the country).

At a glance...

Served as a model and go-to facility for pregnant girls close to delivery

Compiled evidence to improve national referral mechanisms for victims of trafficking

- ✓ Being recognized as ‘the’ facility providing support to girls presenting very complex life situations, the shelter received requests of care and accommodation made by EKKΑ concerning such cases from the beginning of its operations. By the end of the implementation phase, the shelter hosted 17 female children & youth, and four babies.
- ✓ The project adapted well to the changing context and changing needs of beneficiaries. For instance, the facility was requested to take in babies and pregnant girls who were close to birth delivery, who in most cases came from a heavily traumatizing background. In order to respond to this, Praxis put in a series of measures, such as:
 - hiring an expert on working with infants, as well as an extra care-taker,
 - the shelter’s transit room was adapted into a nursery room for the mothers and their babies,
 - while the common area was divided into two separate areas – one of them was turned into a mother-and-child area for play and breastfeeding.
- ✓ Praxis was able to bring substantial evidence from the actual cases hosted at the EPIM-funded shelter to build stronger evidence to influence the shape and contents of the national referral mechanisms for victims of trafficking being shaped in Greece.



2. Following their Footsteps

by Faros, in partnership with Solidarity Now, Merimna, CIVIS PLUS and Babel

Aim: Build a holistic approach to the identification and protection of unaccompanied and separated children and youth through outreach work and accommodation at a shelter for children who are virtually outside any protection mechanism.

At a glance...

Implemented strategic street-work outreach which helped to accommodate children & youth directly from the streets; 11 of 22 spots in the shelter were such cases

Produced report “CHILDREN ON THE RUN: Experiences of unaccompanied minors leaving shelters in Greece” & policy brief targeted at practitioners to implement the identified measures to reduce the number of children and youth leaving care

- ✓ Through extensive street work, the project strengthened the identification process and was effective in establishing a relationship with the children detected and in offering them a concrete alternative to street life.
- ✓ On capacity building, which was a key aspect of the project, practitioners noted the creation of a ‘holding environment’ where frontline professionals could discuss the challenging demands posed by their daily work, and find technical and emotional support, as well as understanding.
- ✓ Faros ensured with its partners that 100 children and youth had the opportunity to attend Greek language courses; this along with other social activities facilitate their integration into the host society and give them structure and stability on a daily basis.
- ✓ By conducting a research with practitioners and children², Faros identified and investigated the reasons for and the prevention of children and youth leaving care; an issue of high concern in Greece and other EU Member States. In practice, a holistic approach to care, and the initiation of the mentoring programme, along with peer work to reduce tensions among children at the shelter, were identified as key measures which noticeably contributed to reducing the drop-out rate.

² “CHILDREN ON THE RUN: Experiences of unaccompanied minors leaving shelters in Greece”, Faros, http://www.faros.org.gr/other-files/UASC_ABSCONDING_REPORT_ENG.PDF



3. Strengthening the Protection Network:

A project on guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children

by METAdrasi

Aim: METAdrasi aimed to expand the 'Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Children', in order to increase guardians' capacity to assist unaccompanied and separated children in key locations within the country (including Athens, Lesbos and other entry points).

At a glance...

Conducted thorough vetting, selection and training of 12 new guardians

Guardianship network regarded as vital for filling system-level gap in child protection

- ✓ Through a structured and accurate selection procedure, [twelve new members of the Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors](#) were selected and supported in their operations. In total, the guardianship network supported 139 youth and children throughout the project.
- ✓ All the guardians in the network received training based on best practices identified in Greece and in other EU countries. In order to fulfil their duties, guardians were supported in their activities by a network of interpreters, psychologists and lawyers. The organization [also sought support of foreign organizations with long-standing expertise in providing guardianship to children](#), and together identified qualified trainers for delivering training on psychosocial issues and drug abuse.
- ✓ Some outstanding cases where guardians' support was vital:
 - In collaboration with two Portuguese organizations, METAdrasi managed [to relocate five unaccompanied and separated children from Afghanistan to Lisbon](#).
 - Guardians supported a number of children who were being removed from an evacuated camp (Elliniko), [by promptly referring their cases to the competent authority in order to ensure their placement in adequate facilities](#) – some of these children would have otherwise been transferred to detention centres following the camp evacuation.

Cross-Cutting Challenges & Key Lessons Learned

While several elements across all projects stand out as particularly positive results, similar challenges and learnings can be drawn, which should be considered for future work in Greece.

1. System-level changes through national and European advocacy should be further addressed

All three EPIM partners in these projects as well as other stakeholders were engaged in trying to address the broader, underlying causes of the extremely difficult conditions which children and youth on the move experience.

>> There is a need to further strengthen advocacy on systemic issues to achieve sustainable and long-term policy change, including on: expanding and speeding up legal pathways, ensuring the access to a qualified guardian, and as a matter of priority, addressing the detention of children and the expansion of alternative care.

2. Capacity development opportunities are key to support civil society's adaptation strategies

While the difficulty to provide some space and time for 'reflection' within practitioners' very active and pressured professional lives was recognized, **targeted training and ongoing supervision** was beneficial in order to best handle the changing and demanding situations they were faced with.

>> It is recommended to embed training and ongoing supervision in order to help professionals and partners cope with the very complex and demanding situations across future supported projects.

3. Child participation, inclusion of all migrant children and a holistic approach should be further pursued

While children were included in some phases of the design and implementation of projects, as well as reaching the most marginalized groups and addressing the needs of children in families, **further inclusion should be pursued**.

>> Children's involvement in the services and providing children with feedback about the outcomes of the activities that they contributed to should be prioritized.

4. Barriers to education and vocational training should be further addressed

While the educational components included in the projects were extremely valued, it was equally recognized that children and youth on the move face particularly **strong barriers in accessing education and in effectively enrolling in an education or vocational training path**.

>> Identify additional barriers to education experienced by specific groups of children and young persons, and design programme and/or advocacy strategies accordingly.

5. A flexible funding approach should continue to be pursued

The organisations' capacity to find solutions and to promptly re-orient some activities, whilst at the same time not compromising the quality of the action and related outcomes, was possible due to **EPIM's flexibility in allowing changes to methods and strategies** during the projects. This was viewed by grantees as a 'good practice to be shared'.

>> This flexibility should be preserved and valued in future, as it appears to represent a key strength of the funding programme.



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