

# DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL GREECE



**September 2021** - Welcome to the third edition of DCI Greece's bi-monthly newsletter! The aim is to update our partners and supporters on our work, achievements and plans ahead, as well as to give you an insight on the daily lives of the young people we work with, by giving them a platform to express themselves without filter.

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accommodation, or with being reunited with their families.

**Absence of child-friendly procedures and lack of coordination.** *Through this story, we wish to highlight the institutional violence children on the move experience in Greece:*

Earlier this month, DCIG took up the case of a 16-year-old refugee girl that was being abused by her 30-year-old husband. Not only had the girl been forced into child marriage, she also had a 5-months old baby with that man, and feared for her and her baby's life when she contacted our Helpdesk. She told our lawyers she had reported her husband's abuse to the Hellenic police, and that policemen had come to her house to arrest him, but that he had been let go of only a few hours later. Fortunately, the young girl had been able to escape and was hiding at a safe place when she reached out, but she was scared and in need of help.

DCIG immediately activated the protection mechanisms and contacted the competent authorities to find a shelter for the girl and her baby. A few days later, DCIG was informed that a shelter had been found. That same day, the girl called the Helpdesk in sheer panic, as she believed she was being abducted by her husband. Two men had come to her house to take her and her baby, and had forced her into a van without giving her any explanation on who they were and where they were taking her... Our lawyers managed to get on the phone with the men who explained to them they were policemen -dressed as civilians- and that they had been ordered by the prosecutor's office to take the girl to a children's hospital while a shelter was being found. They had not been able to explain that to the girl as they couldn't understand her.



However, the story doesn't end here... The policemen took the girl and her baby to the children's hospital, but once they got there, they were told that the girl and her child could not be taken in because they didn't accept any patient over 15 years old. Because the girl couldn't be placed in the hospital, it was decided that she and her baby would be placed in protective custody at the police station until she could enter the shelter – which would take days. Protective custody, which is effectively jail, was not an option for our Helpdesk. We thus intervened, and moved heaven and earth to avoid this situation, which payed off as our lawyers convinced the shelter to let the girl self-isolate before moving there.

Now, the girl has been moved to a shelter but she was unable to take the baby with her as the shelter didn't accept to take the baby in. Our lawyers are actively looking for ways to keep the mother and the child together, as we believe it is in the best interest of both to stay together.

From this story, we can identify many faults in the child protection system in Greece:

- The girl was not made aware of her rights, was not informed that the men were from the police and were taking her somewhere safe. This procedure was everything but child friendly.
- Secondly, there was a clear lack of communication and information sharing between the different services. The prosecutor who had ordered that the policemen come get the girl to place her in the hospital was not aware that a shelter had already been found for the girl.
- All of this happened without informing her legal representatives. It should be the rule of thumb to inform the legal representatives, who know the girl and have her best interests at heart of such decisions.
- The lack of communication from the prosecutor's office and the police with the hospital and the girl's legal representatives created a counterproductive and potentially dangerous situation that could have easily been avoided.
- Keeping the mother and the child together should be a priority in these type of cases, but the rights of children seem to be secondary for the current system.

With this story, we wish to highlight the chronic, structural and institutional type of violence that children on the move face on a daily basis in Greece. We urgently need to reform the current system to include child friendly procedures, make sure their rights are upheld, and that all the actors are working together and on the same page.

*Our legal and protection services in relation to UAM's are currently delivered as part of a broader emergency support programme to UAMs (medical, psychological, humanitarian and outreach components) called Themida Greece and is run in collaboration with the NGO Better Days. Our successful and impactful collaboration in the family reunification interventions in Lesbos island in 2019-2020, made us believe that when we merge our expertise with the expertise of other Stakeholders who share the same ethics, values, determination and love for the children our impact can become even stronger.*

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**2. Looking back on a successful event:** *On the 28th of June, four young unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan organized their first online youth-led event online: "We are more than a refugee"*



During this event, these four young people discussed their experience as young asylum-seekers in Greece, but also presented their many accomplishments and

discussed their hopes and dreams for the future. Neda, who coordinated the discussion talked about her blossoming career as a journalist and discussed the importance of mental health. Arash spoke about resilience and played the guitar - singing in both Greek and Farsi. Rahmat spoke about his experience as a UAM in Greece and about his decision to move to another European country, he also read one of his poems. Lastly, Parwana talked about refugees' and women's rights, and read a paragraph from her published book.

This event showed us once more that young refugees have immense talent, resilience and drive, and that they deserve all the support, protection and care in the world - and that they need to be included in decisions that affect them. Giving a voice to young refugees is one way to empower them, and making the world a better place. The event can be viewed [here](#).

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**3. Afghanis hiding in Tajikistan.** *DCIG's Helpdesk has been actively involved in the protection of 80 Afghanis hiding from the Taliban in Tajikistan.*



On August 22nd, 80 Afghanis, including children fled their home country in a

desperate effort to save their lives. They reached Tajikistan and claimed international protection there. Instead of receiving the protection they claimed, they were beaten by the border police, were denied access to asylum and were transferred on 'Island 266', situated between Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

DCIG was in direct contact with a family member of one of the refugees on the island and was one of the few organizations to have any information about what was going on on the ground. From the information we could collect, the refugees were stranded without food or water, and without shelter. We were told police officers were guarding the island, making it impossible to escape.

Together with DCI's offices in Geneva, DCIG mobilized UN Special Rapporteurs, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan to the UN Office in Geneva, as well as other relevant stakeholders. At the moment, we are working behind the scenes to shed light on the situation and uphold the right to seek international protection and safety in dignity.

This frightening story supports our belief that **Europe needs to do its fair share in supporting and welcoming displaced people**. With the recent developments in Afghanistan, we urge the international community to cooperate to create a safe passage for Afghan refugees, and **countries breaking their international obligations need to be held accountable**.

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#### **4. What's coming next months:**

**A) Trainings:** Following the success of our previous training on family reunification, we decided to launch a new season of trainings the following topics:

- 1) Training on **Family reunification** (2 days): on the 20th and 23rd of October 2021
- 2) **Introduction to the legal and procedural framework when working with people on the move** (1 day): 23th of November

2021.

3) In 2022, DCIG will also organize trainings on **Asylum Law, Structural Violence, Child Safeguarding and Child Protection in Emergencies, and on the Wellbeing of children rights' professionals**

[If you are interested in participating or would like to have more information on any of these trainings, please e-mail us at \[delphinecallebaut.dci@gmail.com\]\(mailto:delphinecallebaut.dci@gmail.com\)](#)

#### **B) Real Talk**

**discussions:** Following the success of our online youth-led event back in June, we decided to continue hosting online discussions with youth on the move. Later this month, DCIG Director Nantina Tsekeri and Mahbobe, a young Afghan refugee girl and author will discuss the conditions of Afghan women in Afghanistan and abroad. More talks will follow.





Training on Family Reunification under Dublin III

Day 2

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## 5. DCI Training for Youth Facilitators

From the 12th to the 14th of July, Director of DCI Greece, Nantina Tsekeri, and colleague Iris Pappa participated along with 13 other child protection professionals in a training of trainers, organised in Budapest as part of the BECOME Safe regional project. The purpose of the training was to build the capacity of participants on the different forms of violence affecting children and youth on the move, how to identify and respond to violence against children as well as how to mitigate institutional violence.



Following the event, trained trainers will be cascading the knowledge further among care and migration professionals in Greece, Belgium, Italy and Spain and hold trainings for youth facilitators. In October, DCIG will hold a Youth Facilitator training to train 10 youth facilitators that will be equipped with the tools and knowledge to empower and raise awareness amongst children and youth on the move on their rights to protection and services.

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## **6. DCIG Advocacy:**

A) As the situation in Afghanistan keeps worsening, [DCIG came together with a large network of European human rights organisations](#) to ask EU States to respond the following way:

- Provide safe evacuation, resettlement and other safe routes to protection for Afghans
- Provide humanitarian assistance

-Re-establish security for the people of Afghanistan

-Access to asylum in Europe and ensure rapid access to fair asylum procedure; preparations should be made in Europe now.

**B)** [Read here](#) the special summer edition of the Child Rights Observer dedicated to child rights in the context of High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals.

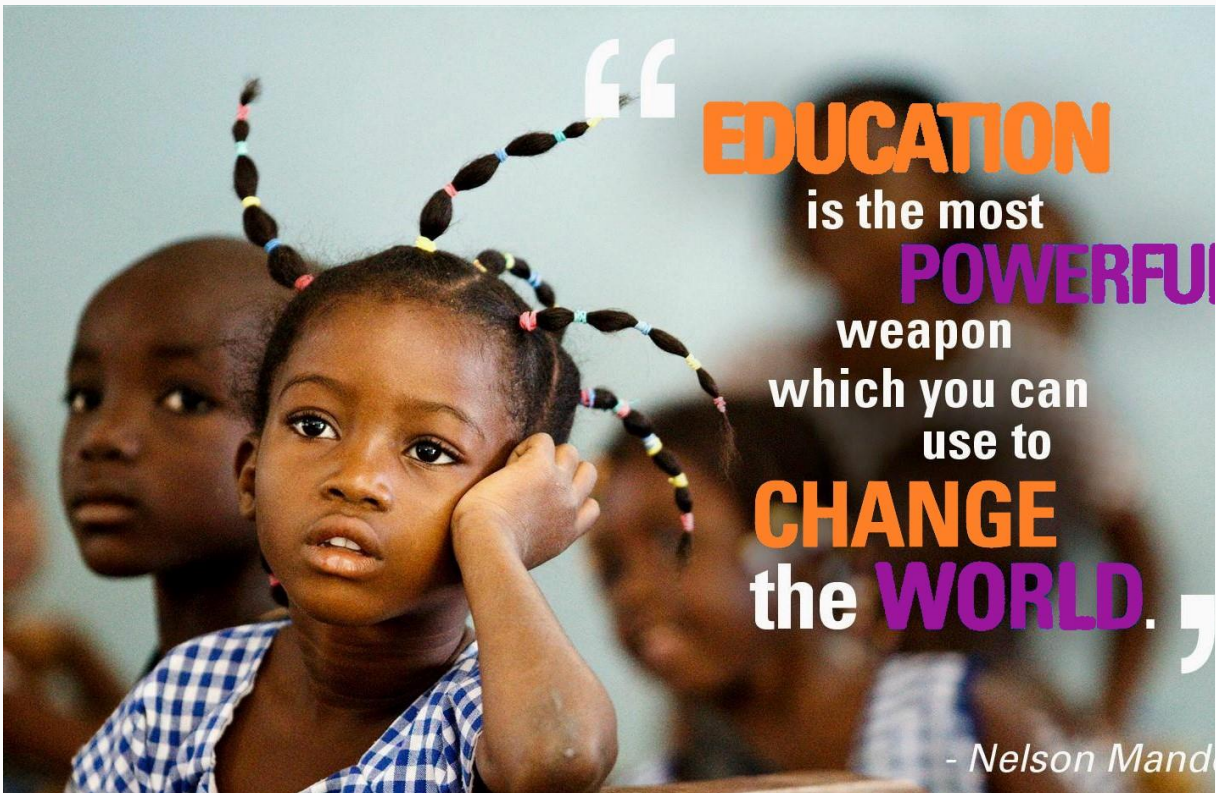
**C)** DCIG participated in the 88th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child that continues until 24 September. The programme of work for the CRC 88th Session is available and [can be accessed here](#). All the sessions are also available live to the public on the webcast [webtv.un.org](http://webtv.un.org), and summaries of the sessions have been compiled by UN Geneva and can be accessed [through the following link](#).

**D)** DCIG participated in the [Day of General Discussion](#) that was held on 16 and 17 of September, and was centered around "Children's Rights and Alternative Care".

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## **7. News from the field:**

- **Who will be going back to school?** During the 2020-21 schoolyear, it was reported that only 1 in 7 children living in camps were able to attend school. The lack of transportation from camps to schools, understaffing and malfunctioning of reception classes, a lack of spots available at schools and kindergartens as well as resistance by school administrations and local communities against enrolling refugee and migrant children have been the most important barriers, with the situation being particularly bad for children living in camps on the Greek Aegean Islands, where access to schools in the local communities has long been "almost non-existent" for these children.



At DCI, we believe that the measures taken by the Greek government to tackle the C19 pandemic normalized the exclusion and ghettoization of refugee and asylum-seeking children, and it is clear that Greece has continuously failed to live up to its obligation to ensure all children can access education. Of course, we welcome the Greek government's commitment to a [3-year plan](#) with UNICEF to get all migrant children into some form of education, beginning the 13th of September. It gives us hope that this schoolyear will be better, but it will be important for NGOs to keep an eye on the reality on the ground, as the term "some form of education" is a very loose concept. It is also very unclear if there will be formal education programs inside the new prison-like Reception and Identification Centers... We will need to stay alert to new developments.

- This month marked **one year since the fire destroyed Moria refugee camp**. On September 9th 2020, fires ripped through the camp on Lesbos, which spurred the European Union and the Greek government to react and promised there would be "no more Moria" and that there needed to be a "fresh start". However, the reality today urgently calls to improve conditions for those still trapped in camps. People in Greek refugee camps do not live in safe and dignified accommodation. One

year after the Moria fire, camps are becoming even more prison-like. Both residents' exit and NGOs' entry are restricted, which also means that NGOs will have more obstacles providing support and monitoring human rights violations in camps. 45 NGOs and civil society groups have released a [report](#) last week urging the European Union and Greek government to abandon plans to dramatically restrict the movement of people in refugee camps in Greece.

- Last week marked the inauguration of the new “closed” migrant camp on Samos. The camp has caused outrage amongst human rights defenders as it is surrounded by military-grade fencing, watched over by police, and located in a remote valley. The new camp is highly symbolic of Greece’s harsh stance towards migration and of the EU’s increasingly fortress-mind. For us and for many other NGOs, this new camp is a disgrace. It is a prison for asylum-seekers, and we find it horrifying that Greece proudly inaugurates this jail while we witness what is happening in Afghanistan. We blame the criminal EU policy on migration that holds and detains people who are escaping violence and punishing them for wanting to be safe and call for self-reflection and the upholding of basic human decency.



- An appeals committee has [rejected the return](#) of a vulnerable Afghan family, ruling that Turkey could not be considered a safe third country for them. DCIG applauds the

second instance decision of the Greek asylum procedure that prevented the return of an extremely vulnerable Afghan family under the [controversial Joint Ministerial Decision](#) that designated Turkey as a safe third country for the asylum-seekers coming from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The family included an 83-year-old man with symptoms of dementia and a 61-year-old woman in a wheelchair, unable to speak or support herself. Both had survived beatings by the Taliban. Following that decision, ECRE Legal Officer Stavros Papageorgopoulos [declared that](#) *“While this cannot be interpreted as a direct challenge to the JMD, the decision is nonetheless significant as it upholds the obligation to individually assess every case, indicating that the JMD cannot be applied automatically.”*

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## **8. What we've been reading:**

We want to share with you our list of the most interesting reports and articles that came out recently:

- This joint report on "[Pushbacks, homelessness and human rights abuses](#)" in Greece during the COVID-19 pandemic, published in June 2021.
  - This report from Save the Children, "[Building Forward Better](#)", about the global learning crisis following the COVID-19 pandemic
  - Fenix Aid's [report on the inadequate emergency response by the Greek government to the Moria Fires](#)
  - Project Armonia's "[Voices at the borders](#)" report that shared the stories of displaced people living on Samos island.
  - DRC'S [recommendations on the Regulation on Asylum and Migration Management](#)
  - This report titled "[Back to School? Refugee children in Greece denied right to education](#)" created by Greek Council for Refugees in cooperation with Save the Children International
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DCI Greece is committed to securing a just and viable future for all children present in the Greek territory. DCI Greece aims to ensure through its actions that children's voice

is heard and their rights are fully respected in practice. You can help and support us by donating 

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Thank you all for your support,  
The DCI Greece Team