

STEPPING STONE PROJECT

A holistic approach that provides displaced children and their mothers—survivors of violence and displacement—with the support they mostly need to heal, grow, and reclaim the lives they were denied.



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STEPPING STONE PROJECT

*A Pathway to Healing and
Integration*

Developed in close consultation with the families we serve, the project responds directly to the complex challenges faced by accompanied children and their mothers—the vast majority of whom are survivors of violence, exploitation, and displacement.

ALL THE WAY FROM SHADOW TO VISIBILITY

IN THE SHADOW



**STEPPING STONE
PROJECT**



**PROTECTED,
AUTONOMOUS AND
EMPOWERED**



Everyone deserves a place to *feel safe and thrive*

Within a city where many refugee families live in overcrowded or unstable conditions, the project provides a nurturing environment where children can play, learn, and feel secure, while mothers access legal, psychosocial, and vocational support with peace of mind.

For children, the space restores a sense of safety, joy, and belonging through play, creativity, learning, and daily routines. For mothers, it offers dignity, understanding, and the rare opportunity to focus on rebuilding their lives while knowing their children are safe and emotionally supported.

By combining childcare with holistic support services, Stepping Stone addresses one of the greatest barriers displaced women face: **trying to recover and plan for the future while caring for children in conditions of ongoing instability**. For many families, the project becomes a first step toward confidence, independence, and a more hopeful future.

To experience moments from the Stepping Stone Project, you can view a short selection here:

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSFgv96DMMn/?igsh=MW5odW02dGlydmt1NQ>



STEPPING STONE PROJECT



In Their Own Words:

'I feel like I'm being seen and heard for the first time'

Anneta, 28, Sierra Leone

"Here my child smiles again. That alone gives me the courage to keep going."

— Mother from Uganda

'I didn't know where to start. Now everything is falling into place for me and my child.'

Aminata, 21, Democratic Republic of Congo



The Profile of the Families

we support

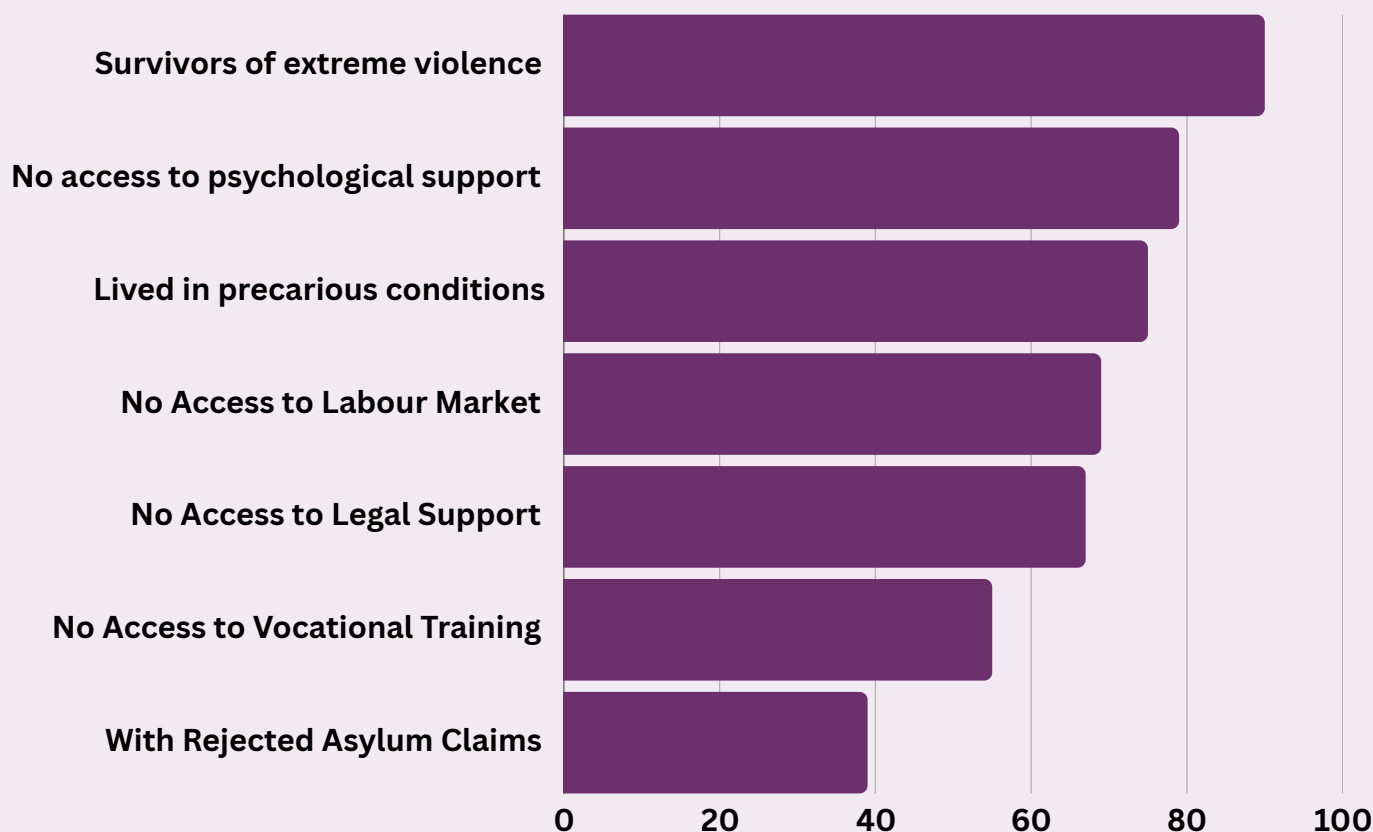
The Stepping Stone Project supports some of the most vulnerable displaced families living in Athens:

single mothers and their young children who have fled violence, exploitation, conflict, and severe instability in their countries of origin. Many women survive **forced marriage, FGM, trafficking, abuse, or conflict-related violence**, while also navigating the uncertainty of asylum procedures and precarious living conditions in Greece.

Most mothers arrive alone with one or two young children, many under the age of eight, after journeys marked by danger, loss, and exhaustion.

Despite their different backgrounds, most families share a common reality: **life in Athens is often unstable, unsafe, and deeply isolating.** Many mothers live in **overcrowded apartments, shelters, shared rooms, or temporary informal arrangements**, frequently **without consistent access to basic services**, education, or long-term stability.

Profile of Women Who Visited Our Centre in 2025



The Profile of the Families

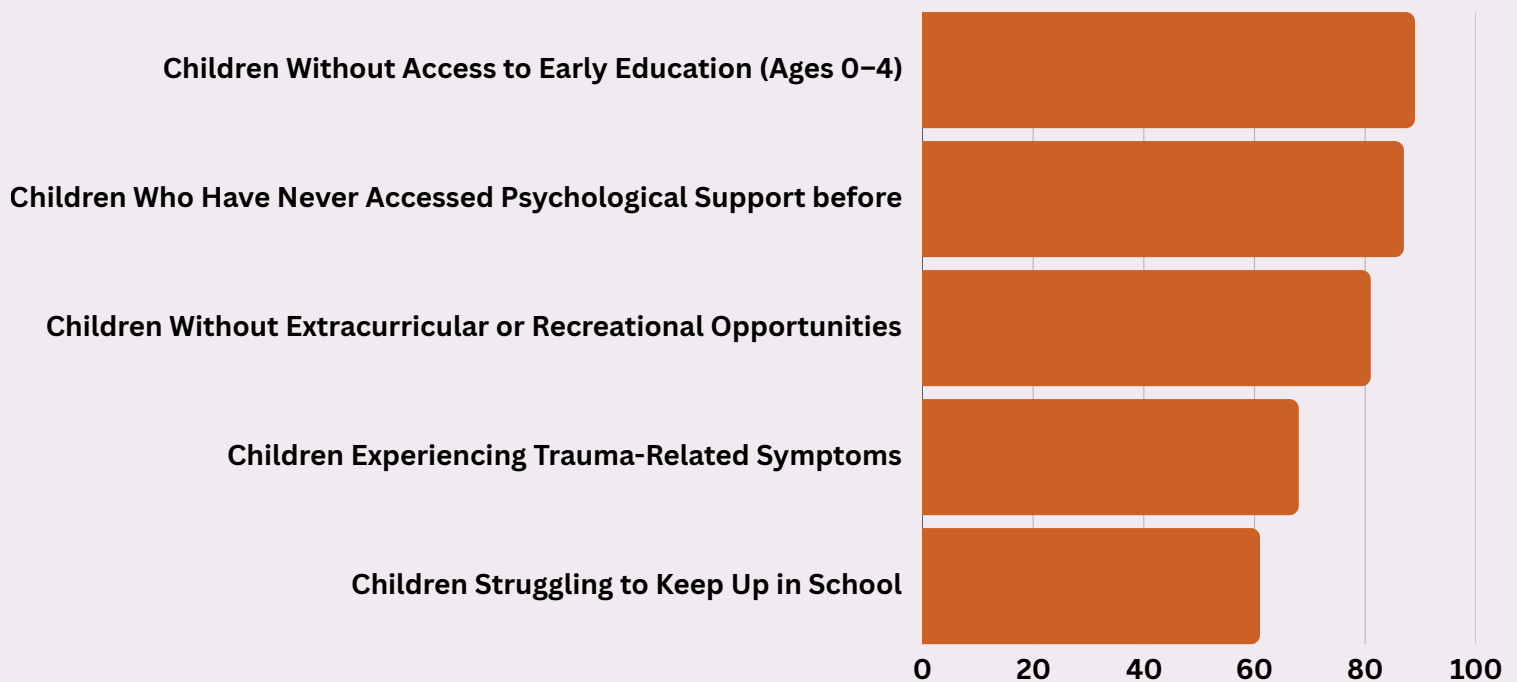
we support

Their children are also deeply affected by displacement and instability. Many experience **emotional distress, fear reactions, sleep difficulties, and delays in language, learning, and social development.**

For children under the age of four, access to nursery or early childhood education in Greece is extremely limited, leaving many without opportunities for safe play, peer interaction, or developmental support during critical early years.

Older children often face interrupted education histories and significant learning gaps, while struggling to adapt to Greek-language schooling systems. **Across all age groups, most children have little or no access to extracurricular activities, creative expression, or safe environments where they can play, explore, and build confidence.**

Children's Profile



A Glimpse Into Mothers' Journeys

At the heart of Stepping Stone are the women and children who walk through our doors each day. To offer a deeper sense of their experiences, we have included **a small storybook with reflections from our Stepping Stone graduates**. Their voices illuminate the realities of displacement, the courage they draw upon, and the transformative impact of having a safe space in which to heal, learn, and rebuild.

[You may read the storybook here.](https://www.defenceforchildrengreece.org/_files/ugd/936582_f8e93af9e3a44e05b9b13eb5aff81399.pdf)

https://www.defenceforchildrengreece.org/_files/ugd/936582_f8e93af9e3a44e05b9b13eb5aff81399.pdf



EVERY CHILD
*deserves a chance to learn and
grow*



Specialized Educational Activities

Our Stepping Stone Space provides structured early learning sessions. Activities focus on **pre-literacy, early numeracy, Greek language exposure, and social development** through age-appropriate and play-based learning.

For children under four – many of whom cannot access nursery placements – the programme often serves as **their only consistent learning environment**, helping them build the cognitive, social, and emotional foundations needed for future school integration.



EVERY CHILD

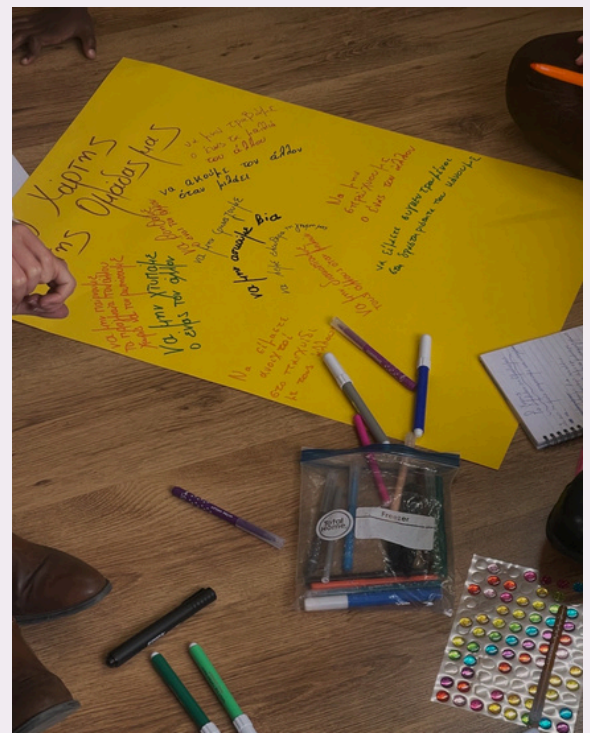
to heal, find peace and joy

Supporting the Mental Health of Displaced Children

Therapeutic and psychosocial support is integrated into daily activities through creative arts, guided play, music, movement, and trauma-sensitive interaction.

Psychologists and educators closely monitor children’s emotional wellbeing and adapt activities to individual needs, supporting emotional regulation, confidence, and peer interaction over time.

Music, movement, and group play also create important opportunities for connection, inclusion, and cultural exchange, including occasional shared sessions with Greek children. For many families living in overcrowded or unstable conditions, Stepping Stone offers the only safe environment where children can play freely, build social skills, express creativity, and experience a sense of belonging.



Children's Progress in 2025

Children showed significant progress throughout the year through regular access to structured learning, therapeutic play, and stable routines. Educators observed improved **emotional regulation, stronger social interaction, increased confidence, and greater ability to focus and participate in activities.**

Improved emotional expression and play-based regulation also contributed to better sleep patterns and overall emotional wellbeing at home.

Key Outcomes

90% of children facing barriers to formal education successfully enrolled or re-enrolled in kindergarten or primary school.

- **80% became more sociable and expressive, engaging more confidently in creative activities, free play, and interactions with peers.**
- **75% demonstrated measurable progress in language development and communication, enabling smoother transitions into formal learning environments.**
- **70% showed significant improvement in emotional regulation, ability to respect limits, sustained attention, and group participation.**

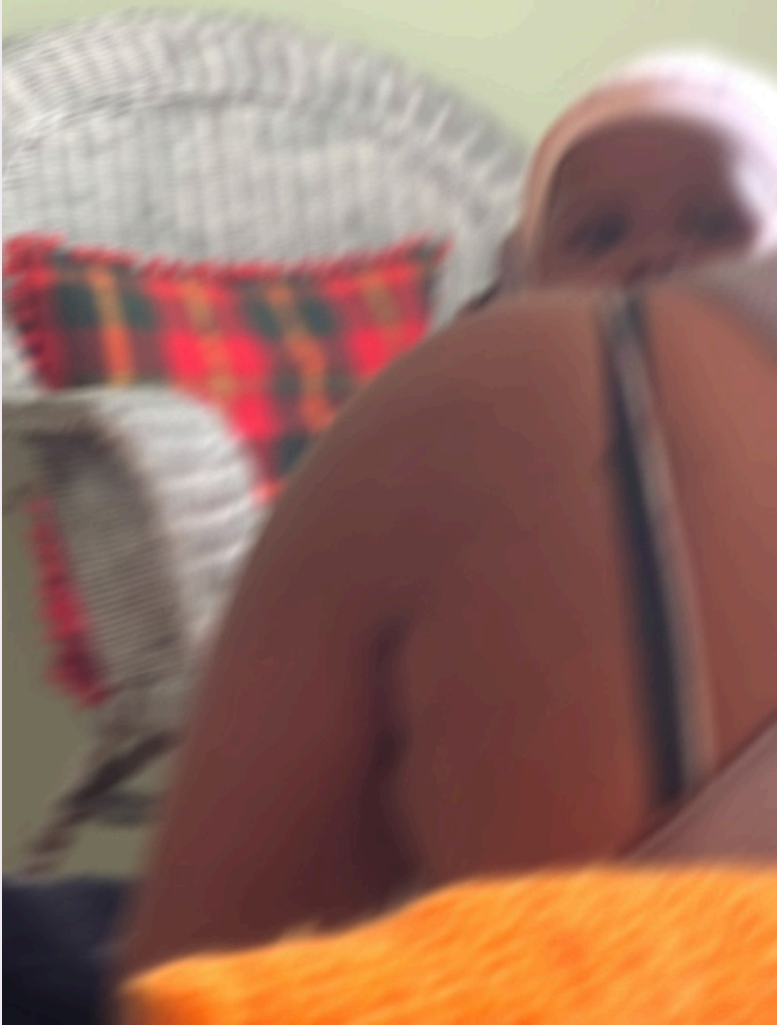
A majority of parents reported better sleep patterns and calmer behaviour at home, reflecting improved emotional stability and energy regulation.

EVERY MOTHER

*deserves support
to rebuild her life*

The Stepping Stone Project delivers an integrated, trauma-informed programme combining legal support, psychological care, empowerment activities, language learning, and skills development for displaced young women and mothers.

Services are provided flexibly to ensure consistent participation, even for women facing unstable living conditions or ongoing crises. Legal support is delivered individually and tailored to each woman's specific protection needs and stage of her case.



Trauma-Informed Legal and Protection Support

“Before, I walked on the street afraid. Now I walk with my papers and my head up.”

Mothers receive specialised, trauma-informed legal support tailored to their individual needs. Legal counselling covers asylum procedures, documentation issues, family reunification, protection planning, and complex cases involving trafficking or severe violence.

Through consistent legal support, many women are able to reactivate asylum cases, secure valid documentation, and progress in their procedures, reducing the ongoing fear of detention, homelessness, or deportation.

Information, Empowerment & Navigation of Daily Systems

The programme also provides practical information sessions on asylum procedures, healthcare, education enrolment, safety planning, and navigating Greek public services. Sessions are designed to respond directly to the everyday challenges and questions raised by participating mothers.

Welcome to
your
Stepping Stone
Space?
Bienvenue dans
votre
espace Stepping
Stone

Hands-On Skill Development, Digital Skills & Vocational Empowerment

“I didn’t know I could learn something new at this age, but I did.”

Stepping Stone provides practical skill-building and digital-literacy sessions that strengthen mothers’ confidence, independence, and future employability. Through workshops and peer-led activities, women build practical skills, strengthen social connections, and gain essential tools for navigating daily life and accessing future vocational opportunities.

Employability Skills, Life Planning

“For years I didn’t know where my life was going. These sessions helped me set goals and believe I can reach them.”

The programme also provides employability and integration support, helping mothers build job-readiness skills such as CV preparation, professional communication, and interview practice, while supporting long-term planning toward education, vocational training, and employment.

Greek & English Language Courses for Integration and Communication

Greek and English lessons strengthen mothers’ independence and social participation by building the communication skills needed to navigate healthcare, education, employment, and public services with greater confidence.

Psycho-Therapeutic Support, Healing & Empowerment

‘I used to feel overwhelmed every day.
Now I have tools to calm myself, and my child
feels that calm too.’

Mothers access trauma-informed psychological support focused on emotional stabilisation, coping strategies, and recovery from violence and prolonged insecurity. **Individual therapy and parenting support** help women better understand both their own emotional wellbeing and their children’s trauma-related behaviours, while group activities reduce isolation and strengthen peer support.



Women's Progress in 2025

- 87% reported increased self-confidence and a stronger sense of safety.
 - 84% enhanced their digital skills for essential daily tasks and communication.
 - 82% experienced improved emotional regulation and reduced anxiety.
 - 79% improved their ability to navigate Greek services and public systems independently.
- 75% of mothers are currently enrolled in a vocational training programme or are already employed.
- 73% strengthened their parenting skills and understanding of their children's needs.'
 - 72% of women with deportation/detention orders had their cases reopened.
 - 69% advanced in Greek communication, enabling greater daily autonomy.
 - 63% set personal goals and identified steps toward work or training.
 - 48% of rejected asylum cases were successfully overturned on appeal.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT US

Defence for Children International – Greece is an organization that stands alongside the most vulnerable individuals, especially those who have faced the harsh realities of war, displacement, and gender-based violence.

Through our Center, we provide a safe haven for those in need: children, youth, vulnerable girls, and young mothers who are survivors of extreme violence. Here, they find more than just support—they discover a space where dreams are nurtured, voices are amplified, and their safety is a top priority.

Our beneficiaries receive socio-legal support throughout the asylum process, psychosocial services, empowerment and therapeutic activities, and access to vital information in an environment that places their safety at the forefront.

Our team of specialists applies a comprehensive, holistic, and trauma-informed approach to ensure the protection and well-being of everyone we serve.

Our services were honored with the Global Child 10 Award from Sweden in 2020, in recognition of their high quality and impact. These achievements are a testament to the effective work carried out by DCI-Greece.

