

**2020 & 2021
Annual Report
Elpida Home**





A word from our Executive Director

2020 was undoubtedly a year in which Europe and the rest of the world were in a state of emergency. Many of what we took for granted until recently have changed dramatically and values such as humanity, love and solidarity have once again proved to be humanity's most important resources. On behalf of Elpida Home I want to thank all those with whose help we managed to remain stable in our offer and work for another year.

Sincerely,

Vaggelis Xafinis



About

Elpida Home is an innovative Greek non-profit organization based in Thessaloniki, Greece committed to providing a humane, dignified, and empowered living experience for refugees and other vulnerable groups since 2016. We look to better the world by providing sustainable solutions in order to ensure successful integration to society.

Located in the center of Thessaloniki, our community center serves as a sustainable integration hub from which a range of services can reach the city's most vulnerable communities. The aim is for communities to access these services and engage in available programs and opportunities for their own empowerment and independence. Our goal is to provide vulnerable groups in Greece a means to a sustainable future by relieving burdens of everyday life.

Introduction & Update

In March 2020, the world came to a halt as the Covid19 pandemic spread globally. Amongst them, Europe too, went under complete lockdown. On 13 March 2020, Elpida Home's Community Center, like all other social centers and businesses across Greece with large gatherings of people, closed its doors until June 1st, all the while continuing to service Thessaloniki's refugee community. The center operated regularly until the second nation-wide lockdown.

This report covers the work of Elpida Home throughout 2020 & 2021 ; a period of unprecedented changes. We will discuss the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the beginning of our new project in the last quarter of 2021.

Flexible and adaptable as ever, the Elpida Home team worked tirelessly to help book medical appointments, provide legal advice and mental health support virtually and via telephone. Unfortunately, due to the national health guidelines, we have had to stop our Greek language lessons and Therapy dog sessions for refugee children with special needs, until further notice. Our center was forcibly closed due to the pandemic from March until June and again from November until the end of the year.

This report will outline the work done by the community center team both during the lockdown periods as well as after when the center reopened.



Legal Department

In such a challenging framework, Elpida Home managed to maximize its impact on various sub-areas of legal work.

Our legal work is divided into 4 sub-areas:

- interventions in detention centers
- open- door project providing legal counseling and legal representation
- research and education projects
- complementary actions on the basis of the activities of the members of the legal team, which coincided with the overall plan of Elpida Home.

Interventions in detention centers

For a significant period of time due to the lockdown, our presence in detention centers was limited. During the lockdown and shortly after we could not have access to detention centers. We received the first positive response during July, for our July-August visits. We have since continued to visit detention centers on a regular basis.

Because of Covid-19, we could not conduct our visits to Paranesti and Xanthi detention centers. Still, we kept receiving cases- as mentioned below. We will resume our interventions there, as soon as the circumstances with the pandemic allows us to do so, given that there were cases of Covid-19 and the two facilities were placed under strict lockdown.

During our interventions in the detention centers we came across the issues that we continuously encounter:

- The situation in police departments continues to be bleak, failing to meet international, European and Greek law standards.
- Mass administrative detention has grave psychological, health, social and legal implications for the detainees; lack of interpreters, psychologists, clothing, and hygiene materials.
- Administrative detention is a standard solution for tackling the number of asylum-seekers.
- There is a tendency towards lesser people in detention, partially due to the fact that the influx of potential asylum- seekers has been reduced, both through the Aegean Islands and Evros.
- There are very few NGOs paying regular visits to detention centers- with the exception of GCR and to detention centers for minors of ARSIS.



- There is a substantial need for legal representation of detainees at significant levels. Thousands of people are entrapped in a vicious circle of ellipsis of legal residence and of detention.

Number of beneficiaries supported in detention center outreach

Metagogon Police Department: 85

Agios Athanasios Police Department: 260

Thermi Police Department: 250

Liti Police Department: 157

Total: 752 detainees

Vulnerabilities identified

- Extreme psychological pressure
- Detainees with serious health issues
- Lack of medical care
- Poor living conditions - fleas, lice

Open - door project effectiveness

Elpida Home maintains and expands its presence on the field, given that it remains one of the very few open- door projects in Thessaloniki and in the whole of Northern Greece. Our work is continuously expanding in terms of numbers as well as areas of law.

We have to work on a steadily deteriorating environment as:

- People cannot have proper access to asylum services. These conditions practically entrap them into a bureaucratic, vicious circle;
- The withdrawal of several actors leaves hundreds of people without any access to services, as well as homeless;
- Refugees trying to receive their travel documents from only one police station for the entire region of Macedonia find it almost impossible to find an appointment at a period shorter than one year following their requests;
- Zero integration policy, other than school for children;



In terms of one on one legal services, we continued working during the pandemic and taking cases. During 2020 & 2021 we received referrals for more than 830 direct beneficiaries, in the course of our open-door project.

It is noteworthy that we not only receive referrals from other actors but also spontaneous arrivals and contacts from self- referred beneficiaries.

Regarding the actors who make referrals to us, they practically include all relevant NGOs and public institutions, including- but not limited to: Mobile Info Team, Arsis, IOM, GCR, Caritas, UNHCR, Municipality of Thessaloniki.

Indicatively we received cases of the following types:

- 45 cases during the pandemic for representation of people for offenses related to Covid-19 related violations and offenses;
- 30 cases for cases of preparation of notary documents for parental care and custody- mainly by IOM;
- 230 cases about cases related to asylum offices and service;
- 80 cases about detention of asylum-seekers;
- 100 cases about administrative law judicial remedies;
- 15 cases about penal law offenses;
- 30 cases about civil law delicts involving asylum- seekers and refugees;
- 300 cases for legal- counseling for various reasons;

The majority of beneficiaries continue to be Iraqis and Syrians- both of Arab & Kurdish ethnicities, whereas a significant portion consists of Afghani and Pakistani nationals as well.

Research Activities

Since the initiation of its open-door project, one of the main ambitions of Elpida Home was to liaise with research institutions and universities in order to promote education and research.

We have forwarded our collaboration with the School of Political Science and Economics of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki with significant results.

We have been a motivating force behind the organization of the first international conference for mass migration which was hosted by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, under the School of Political Science and Economics and the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. The conference was held on September 30-31, gathering more than 40 presentations from around the world.

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In addition, we are working again with Aristotle University on a project of a new Masters degree on Mass Migration, which will be combining political science, law, journalism and economics, focusing on the training of NGOs staff and public employees, apart from the general students population.

We are proud to say that we are the first NGO in the wider area of Northern Greece, with such strong ties with University institutions.

Additionally in October 2021, Elpida Home helped organize a football tournament between local and refugee children along with Aristotle & Panteion University. Many of our community center's beneficiaries attended. The tournament was a great success and we hope to be able to continue organizing it annually in the future.



Interventions in camps of Northern and Central Greece

One additional part of our activities is through various contacts of our legal team staff to promote our work in relation to camps, despite the strict governmental restrictions in terms of access to camps.

Through a variety of actions we managed to have interventions in 6 camps: Nea Kavala, Veroia, Alexandria, Laggadikia, Koutsochero Larissa and Mozas Volos.

In the course of these interventions we managed to provide services including counseling and representation to 624 beneficiaries from the beginning of the year. It is important to note that we did not stop assisting beneficiaries during any period of this year. On the contrary, we had a particularly strong impact during the Covid-19 months.

The types of cases that we have handled besides general counseling involved cases such as:

- Sexual abuse;
- Physical Abuse;
- Family Law;
- Penal law;
- Contact with the authorities of asylum;
- Contact with public prosecutor;
- Contact with foreign actors;
- Unaccompanied minors;

Employability Department

The employability department suffered greatly during the lockdown and due to the aforementioned reasons, all seasonal jobs in the tourism and hospitality sector that most of our beneficiaries depended on fell through as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, we did increase the amount of work with regards to integrational assistance, such as supporting and guiding our community in navigating the complex, bureaucratic public service system in Greece. We helped over 150 people access their tax declaration codes, sign up at the local unemployment office, created CVs & supported job search.



Elpida Home attended 3 Working Group committee meetings established on the topic of employability in an attempt to discuss the different obstacles employability advisors face in trying to help refugees access the local labor market in Greece.

Elpida's employability department negotiated with a large hotel chain on the island of Crete, but due to the documentation given to refugees and asylum seekers, the employers were unable and unwilling to hire our beneficiaries. A centralized incentive scheme must be created in order for employers to start hiring refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, as that is the only way true integration can be attempted, if not fully reached. A lot of seasonal agricultural employers notoriously exploit refugees and asylum seekers whom they hire. Very often, they will not be paid insurance and are paid under the table, in very low amounts and under very difficult and undignified conditions. In fact, seasonal migratory workers from Albania have recently gone on strike in order to stop the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers from being employed in the agricultural sector. At the end of 2021, Elpida Home's employability department ended.

Health Support Department

Throughout 2020 & 2021, the health support department supported over 1,200 beneficiaries with booking medical appointments as well as case follow up. Our impact on refugee children with developmental issues and special needs was amplified even further during the pandemic throughout 2020 & 2021.

Types of medical appointments

- Physical therapy
- Vaccines
- Blood tests
- Nephrologist
- Orthognathic surgeon
- Pathologist
- Cardiologist
- Orthopedic
- Dentist
- Ultrasound
- AMR
- Ophthalmologist
- Gastroenterologist



Mental Health & PSS Department Services

- Individual therapy sessions
- Psychological support sessions
- Following up on the cases of the health support department
- Establishing a referral pathway with other organizations to ensure that the POCs are receiving the best services that the city offered during Covid-19.
- Consulting on cases of other organizations to complement their work and make sure that the beneficiaries are receiving the best possible services.

Achievements of the Mental Health & PSS department:

- Conducted over 150 intakes of new beneficiaries through WhatsApp, either referred by organizations or self referrals.
- Continued weekly individual therapy (through WhatsApp) to 20 cases from (Iraq, Syria, and Cameroon, Morocco, Senegal, Congo, Kuwait)
- PSS to over 80 beneficiaries (Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Morocco, Congo, Senegal).
- Continuing the outreach to communities in camps, organizations and the street.
- Weekly session with the teenage girls support group through Zoom

Community Testimonials

"My family consists of 5 people: Myself, my husband and our 3 children. During the pandemic, it was very difficult for me, especially having the children at home all the time. The most difficult thing was helping my children with their schoolwork - they know the language very well and because I don't, it was very hard to support them with their school.

Elpida Home helped us medically, they helped us out with translation for our medical appointments in the hospital. As my husband is currently in hospital, this required a lot of backs and forths with medical professionals and Elpida Home supported us throughout the process, thank you so much. I hope that the Coronavirus pandemic will end soon so we can be safe and life will return to normal, because we fled from war so that our children can live normal and peaceful lives." -Nazlieh, Syria

"At the beginning of the pandemic, the coronavirus was frightening. However, after some time and knowledge on preventative measures, our fear was alleviated. This is a very serious pandemic and we have to practice precautionary measures. We faced many difficulties in 2020 such as isolation at home, stress, depression, no access to doctor's

appointments and until now, no work on the horizon. Elpida Home played a crucial role for my family in terms of explaining what the pandemic is and how to protect ourselves. They provided us with all information and would update us as new information would come out. Even during the lockdown, they continued providing my daughter with weekly physiotherapy sessions. Hopefully in 2021, this epidemic will be over and the world will return to normal.”
- Haifa, Iraq

“My name is Basma from Iraq and my family consists of 5 people, my husband and I and 3 children. The year 2020 was very difficult for us and with a lot of psychological pressure. We thank Elpida Home for the services it provided to us during the Coronavirus period, especially Jumana. We hope that in 2021 God will ease the epidemic on us and have mercy on us”

- Basma, Iraq

“The year 2020 was very difficult for us because we traveled from Syria to Turkey and then to Greece and we then stayed in a camp during the Corona epidemic. Our inability to complete our papers quickly due to the quarantine as a family of 7 people was extremely difficult. The circumstances were difficult financially and morally. Elpida Home helped in providing us with clothes as well as medical appointments. In 2021, I hope things will be better and that my children can start going to school to complete their education.”

- Fadi, Syria

Partnerships & Updates

→ Donation of 5,000 masks to the camps of Diavata and Nea Kavala, with the kind help from the [Wings of Help](#) organization



- Received a donation of 10 laptops for our Tech Support Area of the Community Center kindly donated by the Wings of Help as well.
- Art collaboration with [SolidariTee](#), choosing art created by the Elpida Home community as their new shirt designs, sold in order to raise efforts for legal support for refugees in Greece in cooperation with Elpida Home.
- Purchase of school supplies for 50 children in the Elpida Home community for the entirety of the academic year
- Formally joined the [TechSoup Greece](#) network
- Became one of the contributors for [Techfugees' Data Hub](#) mapping the impact of COVID-19 on the refugee community around the world. Elpida Home's impact has been contributing data relevant to Northern Greece. In June 2020, Elpida Home organized a Live Session on the aforementioned findings in collaboration with Techfugees. As a result of that initiative, we have created a partnership with the Swedish [LIVI](#) helping us conduct professional medical, legal and mhps consultations safely and virtually without depending on WhatsApp or Facebook.

Activities & Media

SolidariTee Tshirt, inspired by a painting from the Elpida Home community

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Donation of 5,000 masks to camps in Northern Greece with Wings of Help



The switch to individual, online Greek language lessons



Weekly clothes distribution at the center



Daily Social Service Support at the center

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Since the end of September 2021, Elpida Home has been assisting in the temporary resettlement of 324 evacuees from Afghanistan to Greece. These at-risk Afghans were evacuated thanks to the efforts of our founder, Amed Khan, who liaised directly with the Greek government to facilitate their safe, temporary entrance to Greece.

The Greek government created a safe corridor for those being evacuated from Afghanistan - primarily former members of parliament, judges, lawyers and their families - before their subsequent resettlement to other countries, including Canada, through bi-lateral referrals by the US government. Greece is an EU country, which allows easier relocation processes to take place with the support of Elpida Home, the local implementation partner.



The groups in question consist of 17 female Afghan MPs, 4 judges, as well as numerous activists, medical professionals and their families, all of whom were on the Taliban's death lists upon the fall of Kabul. Elpida Home is responsible for the entirety of the wellbeing of these evacuees, while delivering critical legal assistance for their visa applications for Canada



and/or the US. To date, Elpida Home has helped 228 individuals complete and submit visa applications to Canada.

The project began in September 2021, by initially supporting a group of 57 evacuees. The list of evacuees was referred to by the organization Mina's List, awaiting resettlement to Canada. Afterwards, more evacuation flights followed.

The project's scope is to provide all basic needs and wrap around services to evacuees until they are resettled at their final destination. The scope extends to housing, food & cash assistance, health care, non-formal education, protection and legal support. The main goal of this project is to provide dignified resettlement for a group of 318 Afghan evacuees, currently housed in Athens & Thessaloniki.

All families are provided with high-quality services which meet all of their basic needs through the duration of their stay in Greece and resettlement in their final destination country, resulting in their ability to actively participate in their resettlement process and begin to rebuild their lives.



Split between Athens & Thessaloniki, Elpida Home has been assisting the groups with the following services:

- Accommodation (a mixture of hotels & individual apartments)
- Medical & pharmaceutical support
- Medical case management
- Access to the Greek public health system
- Accompaniment to hospitals and clinics in Athens
- Provision of all necessary pharmaceuticals & medicine
- Management of difficult medical cases with long-term/chronic diseases
- Provision of temporary P-AMKA (social health numbers) numbers for all individuals in order to schedule COVID vaccinations
- Scheduling of & payment of COVID rapid tests (lasting 48 hours) which as of November 19th, are necessary (for those unvaccinated) in order to enter any public space (hotels, banks, offices, restaurants, cafes, conference halls)
- Medical test scheduling & coordination with the Canadian & US Embassies
- Legal Support

- Support & case follow up for all those seeking resettlement in Canada. Liaising with various embassies & the IOM
- Supporting with visa application forms to Canada, USA and other EU countries
- Support with issuance of Greek temporary visas
- Transport/Logistics & accompaniment
- Elpida Home covers the full cost of any and all transportation needs the group has had and may have in the future:
- Meeting with Greek civil society
- Meeting with Greek government officials (President, Prime Minister, Minister of Migration)
- Conference Attendance (Athens Democracy Forum)
- Community empowerment & support
- Working with the community to establish good relations
- Establishment of "parliamentary" meetings amongst the various groups
- Post Traumatic Stress & Mental Health Support