



**The Lily Pad  
Project** Afghanistan  
Evacuation Mission

# Annual Report 2023



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## 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. We look to better the world by providing sustainable solutions in order to ensure successful integration to society.

Since our conception in 2016, we have achieved our goals by looking beyond basic needs, sustaining hopes as well as life, while remaining cost-efficient and sustainable. Such an approach is essential in the refugee response in Greece, as the shift from emergency response to long-term solutions continues.

## Update

Building upon our efforts in 2021 and 2022, Elpida Home has remained dedicated to the Lily Pad Project throughout the past year. This initiative focuses on providing temporary resettlement to the 300+ evacuees we helped bring from Afghanistan to Greece in 2021. These vulnerable individuals were evacuated with the support of our founder, Amed Khan, who directly coordinated with the Greek government to ensure their safe entry into the country.

The Greek government established a secure pathway for evacuees from Afghanistan, particularly targeting former parliament members, judges, lawyers, and their families. These individuals were subsequently resettled to various countries, including Canada, through bilateral referrals facilitated by the US government. Leveraging Greece's status as an EU member state, Elpida Home served as a crucial local partner in streamlining relocation procedures.

Among the evacuees are 17 female Afghan MPs, 4 judges, along with numerous activists, medical professionals, and their families, all of whom faced imminent threats upon the Taliban's takeover of Kabul. Elpida Home assumes full responsibility for the well-being of these evacuees and provides essential legal assistance for their visa applications to Canada and/or the US.

The project's objective is to address all basic needs and provide comprehensive support services until evacuees are resettled in their final destination. This includes housing, food aid, healthcare, informal education, protection, and legal aid. Our primary aim is to ensure the dignified resettlement of the 300+ Afghan evacuees currently accommodated in Athens and Thessaloniki.



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Each family receives top-quality services tailored to meet their basic needs throughout their stay in Greece and subsequent resettlement, empowering them to actively engage in the process of rebuilding their lives.





## Case Management & Resettlement

In 2023, Elpida Home had successfully resettled 37 additional Afghan refugees to Canada, USA and Germany. In total, since 2021, we have resettled 297 people under this project, with our first resettlement flight taking place in February - only 5 months after their arrival to Greece.

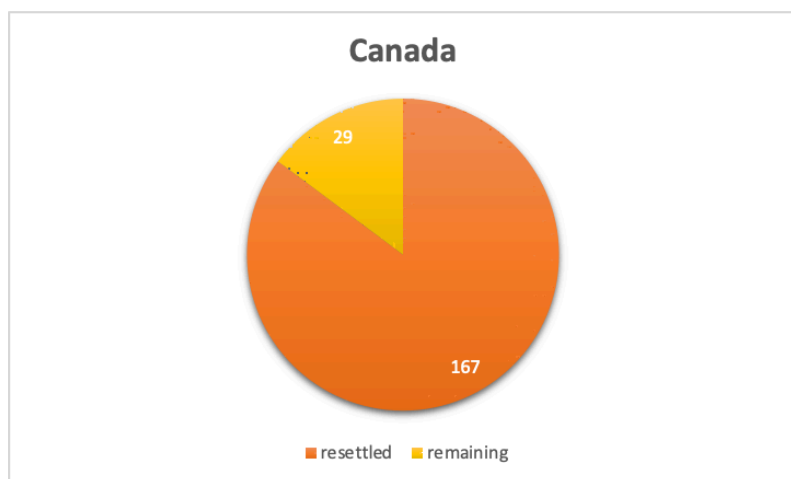


## Canada

Our legal team supported in coordinating and submitting 380 immigration visa applications to the government of Canada in total. Specifically to the department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship which is responsible for matters dealing with immigration to Canada, refugees, and Canadian citizenship.

This number is made up of 196 applicants who were brought to Greece, with the remaining 184 being extended family members of our applicants who still remain in other countries. In this way, once our applicants in Greece are given visas & flight permissions for Canada, the rest of their families in other parts of the world join them in Canada as well.

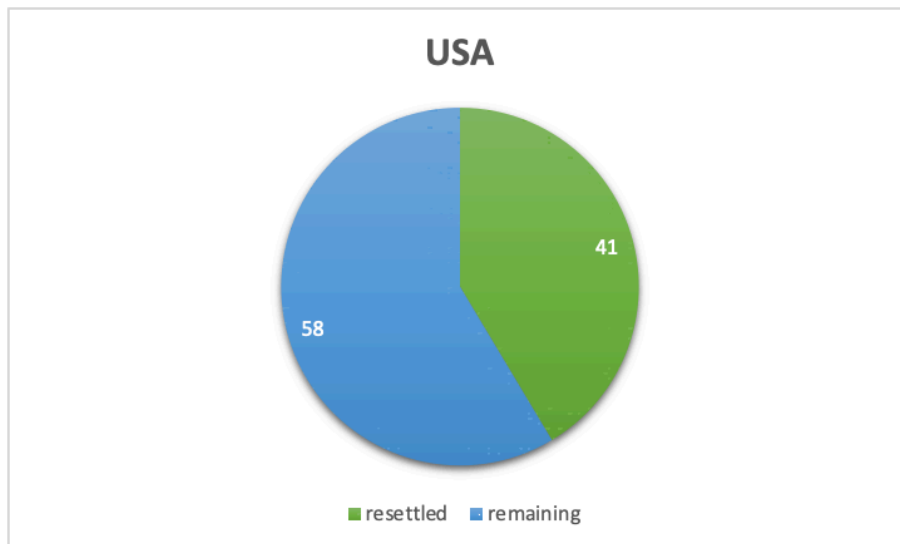
Out of 196 beneficiaries with applications to Canada, 167 have resettled to Canada as of January 2023 thanks to the support of Elpida Home.



## USA

Alongside applications for Canada, we also helped evacuate 99 people with various active applications to the United States. The visa applications vary among the community including SIV, i130, P1, P2 & Humanitarian Parole visas.

To date, we have helped resettle 41 (26 in 2023) beneficiaries to the United States. In contrast to the Canadian process, the US processing is notoriously difficult and lengthy, but we hope to have more departures of our US-destined beneficiaries in 2024.



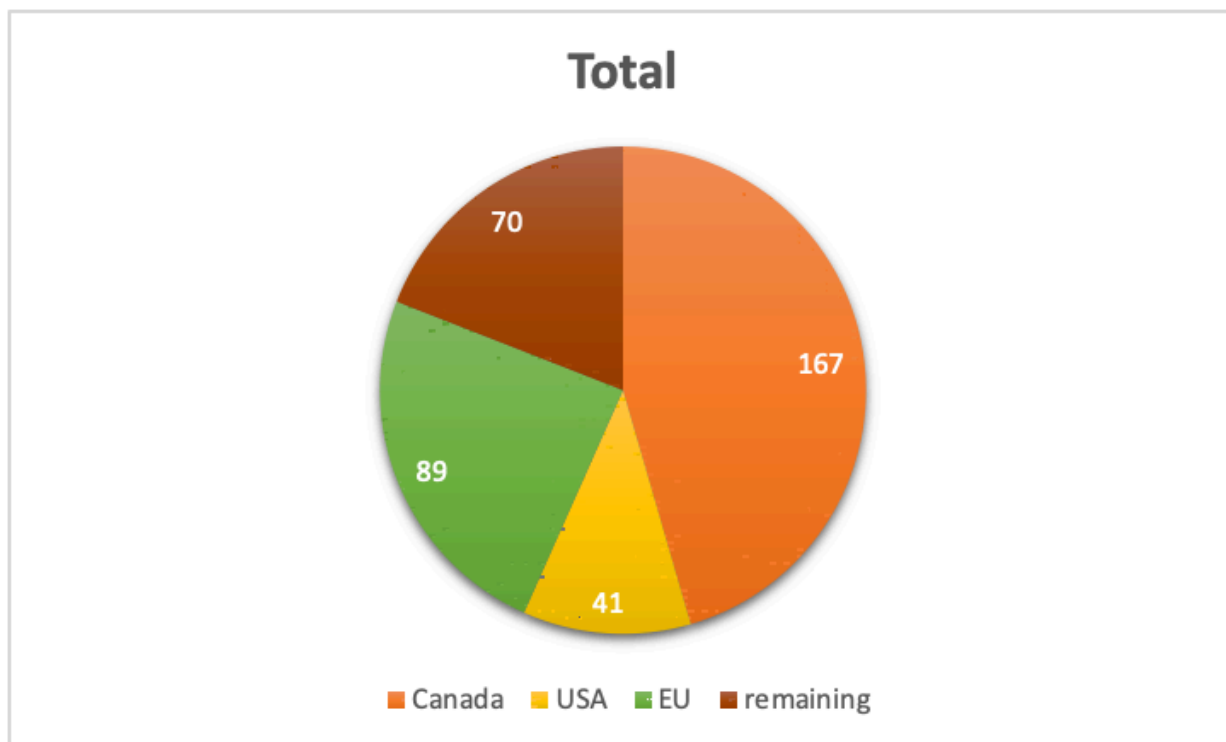
## Germany

Some of our beneficiaries initially destined to go to the United States, opted for family reunification within Europe while they await their US visas. Thus, we assisted 58 (3 in 2023) members of our population to reunite with their families in Germany.



## Conclusion

In total, out of the group of people we brought, within the 2 years and 3 months of the project we have helped 297 people successfully resettle - an achievement Elpida Home's small team is very proud of. As of December 2023, our population stands 70 people in total. 66 are in Thessaloniki and another 4 in Athens.







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## Advocacy Mission to Washington D.C & New York



In May 2023, our Mental Health & Protection Manager, Jumana Abo Oxa went on an advocacy mission to Washington D.C & New York in order to advocate on behalf of our remaining beneficiaries in the hopes of expediting their pending cases. We were able to meet with U.S. government and legislative officials and international and non-governmental actors over the space of 2 weeks. Ms. Abo Oxa was also invited to speak about our efforts in DemocracyNow! Interview.





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Additionally, with the assistance of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, we organized a roundtable discussion with a variety of civil society stakeholders on the topic of Afghan resettlement.



AFGHAN-AMERICAN FOUNDATION

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



*Friends of the  
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
OF AFGHANISTAN*

**BLUMONT**

**ASP**

American Security Project

ALLEN & OVERY

**VETS** *for* **AMERICAN IDEALS**



IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN  
VETERANS OF AMERICA



**CWS**  
Church World Service



MUSLIM GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT



**CHIRLA**  
Coalition for Humane  
Immigrant Rights

**NPNA**  
NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP  
FOR NEW AMERICANS



**LIRS**

## Medical & PSS Department

### *Achievements*

- 504 medical appointments booked in public hospitals in 2023 for both adults & children
- 2 medical appointments booked in private hospitals or clinics
- 301 people supported for embassy & visa related medical exams

We are happy to collaborate with Medecins du Monde Greece (MDM), through their polyclinic in Thessaloniki along with Medical Volunteers International (MVI), who have been kind enough to donate supplies for the health department. Additionally, as most of our Afghan community members are doctors and dentists themselves, both MDM & MVI have allowed them to volunteer their time with them as healthcare professionals.

For our PSS collaborations, we are happy to collaborate with Diotima, MDM, Blue Refugee Center, Irida Women's Center & Metadarsi.

Additionally in 2023, we were able to register all of our school-age children to kindergarten, elementary & high school in Sindos.

### **Other Services**

- Housing in urban accommodation - Studio Apartments
- Food Support - LIDL Cards & Sklavenitis Vouchers
- NFIs - Diapers, Hygiene Products, Clothes & Shoes
- School Supplies for children
- WiFi
- Additional winterization items - carpets, duvets, blankets



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## Lily Pad Partners & Supporters



**GIUSTRA**  
INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION



**ATHANASIOS C.  
LASKARIDIS**  
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

**MALALA**   
**FUND**



**AMERICAN  
FARM SCHOOL**  
Thessaloniki · Greece

  
HellenicAmericanUniversity





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## Volunteer Partners

In order to further support our families with integration and psycho-social wellbeing we partnered with the University of South New Hampshire's Sociology Department & the Greek America Corps to provide activities for the youngest members of our community over the summer. We also enjoy an ongoing relationship with the American Farm School, where children from the Lily Pad Project enjoy monthly field trips to the school's premises to attend various activities.







## Volunteer Testimonies

*I really enjoyed volunteering during my time in Greece. I loved interacting with the people and staff, as well as gaining enormous satisfaction from volunteering. It was a pleasure to meet new people and talk to them. It was a humbling experience and incredibly rewarding. I felt I was able to build good rapport with the people and staff. It was also nice to learn from the people. Overall, it was a positive experience all around. - Jianna (SNHU)*

*First of all, thank you, for everything. It is difficult to put into words how meaningful this experience has been for me as a student, as a professional, and as a person. I had the opportunity to work with the community from the Lily Pad Project delivering English lessons and discussing life in the US and Canada. True to their mission, Elpida Home has created an environment devoted to dignity, humanity, and community. Since setting foot on chalk-covered ground in Greece, it was evident that Elpida Home has established a welcoming and inclusive space. The Elpida team was supportive throughout my entire experience, helping me grow as a learner and as a teacher. What I am most grateful for, was my connection with the community of the Lily Pad Project. That word, community, was evident through every conversation, English lesson, culture discussion, and impromptu soccer game. Genuinely, this has been an incredible experience, and I am honored to have volunteered with Elpida Home. - Abigail (SNHU)*



*I spent 2 weeks in June teaching English to some of the population at Elpida Home for an internship. This was such a challenging yet rewarding experience and I will take the lessons I learned, not just from doing the work but also from the population, with me through my personal and professional life in the future. The staff are all incredibly passionate about the work they do and treat everyone with dignity and respect. They do not define them by the trauma they have been through, or narrow their experiences down to the label of “refugee.”*

*Doing this showed me the power of human resilience. While these people have endured trauma and displacement, they continue to live. The adults were welcoming and willing to share their culture and ideas with us, and the children there were creative, eager to learn, and full of energy. I am incredibly grateful for the experience of working with Elpida Home. It has changed my life, and given me hope for the people that I have encountered. - Lauren (SNHU)*

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## New Website



We are thrilled to introduce our newly launched [website](#), designed to enhance accessibility and support for refugees in Thessaloniki and beyond. At Elpida Home, we are committed to leveraging technology to empower and assist refugee communities, and our new website represents a significant step forward in achieving this goal.

Our website serves as a place where both refugees & partner organizations can ask for help and get in touch with us. Recognizing the importance of accessibility and ease of use, we have ensured that our website features a user-friendly design that caters to individuals with varying levels of digital literacy. Through intuitive navigation and clear layout, users can easily find the information and resources they need to navigate the challenges they face.





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## Impact and Success Stories

### Our Work

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#### Health Support

Healthcare case management and support in accessing the Greek national healthcare system.



#### Legal Assistance

Legal support and counseling & monthly visits to detention centers in Northern Greece.



#### Mental Health

Services related to integration, protection and psychosocial support.



#### Employability

Support in finding employment in Greece.



#### Distribution of Non-Food Items

Occasional distribution of NFIs to vulnerable populations.



#### Education

Greek & English courses for adult asylum seekers.

### Our Impact

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Our work since 2016, in numbers.



800+  
people

Provided  
accommodation

2,000+  
appointments

Health Support

3,200+  
hours

Mental Health  
Counseling

3,800+  
individuals

Legal Support

700+  
individuals

Relocations to  
EU, Canada & the  
US

The impact of our website is best reflected in the success stories of refugees who have benefited from its resources and support services. From securing employment to accessing legal assistance, our website displays Elpida Home's work in empowering refugees to rebuild their lives and pursue brighter futures.





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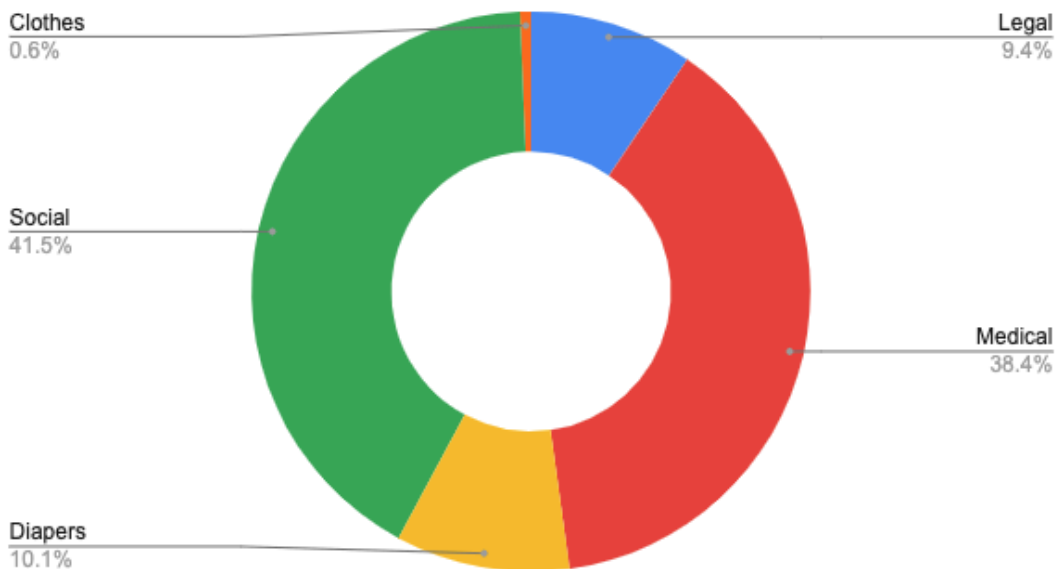
## Community Center

In addition to the Lily Pad Project, Elpida Home has maintained operations at its community center in downtown Thessaloniki, catering to the needs of the city's most vulnerable demographics. This center serves as a sustainable integration hub, facilitating the delivery of a wide range of services to Thessaloniki's marginalized communities. Our objective is to provide these communities with access to essential services and opportunities for self-empowerment.

Embracing an open-door policy, our team offers comprehensive support to the local community, allowing individuals and families to access a variety of services crucial for their daily lives and eventual integration into Greek society.

Our daily efforts at the center are concentrated in four key areas: legal assistance, health support and social integration support along with occasional clothes donations. Elpida Home collaborates closely with asylum-seekers residing in refugee camps in Northern Greece, individuals on the move, and the six detention centers we visit on a monthly basis.

Community Center Support 2023





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## Legal Department

Throughout 2023, Elpida Home's legal department, enhanced the impact of its services provided to vulnerable populations. We sustained and expanded our interventions across three levels, including the community center, interventions in detention centers, and ongoing participation in the Lily Pad Project. Simultaneously, our staff actively contributed to the planning and execution of actions beyond the conventional framework of humanitarian organizations. An example is our collaboration with the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in implementing the interdepartmental postgraduate program on mass migration issues.

Our services were in demand amid significant changes in the legal landscape surrounding refugee migration, accompanied by new challenges in the field. In 2023, our efforts to expand outreach included visits to new sites and maintaining existing services.

## Community Center

Throughout 2023, our legal open door project at the community center served a total of 105 beneficiaries, primarily from Palestine, Afghanistan, Syria, Algeria, Morocco, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Sri Lanka, and Sudan.

The cases we handled included legal counseling, representation to asylum (writing of appeals-communication for the stage of the case), legal representation in courts, in police and administrative authorities and communication with foreign embassies. Most of our beneficiaries required multiple services.

## Detention Centers

We concentrated our efforts on Paranesti PROKEKA and police stations in the Thessaloniki area, with a total of 1,128 beneficiaries. In addition to PROKEKA, we visited police stations of Thessaloniki, such as Metagagon, Agios Athanasios, Kordelio and Thermi.

A significant number of detainees had previous convictions on penal law grounds, and the detention period for the majority ranged from 3 to 8 months, with some exceptions. Asylum seekers faced delays in interviews, largely due to the lack of official interpreters. Weather conditions including cold and heat, posed challenges. There is no free legal aid. Communication with the police authorities relied on detainees who spoke Greek, given that there are no official



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interpreters. Our assistance consists of legal aid for asylum interview preparation, identification of potential minors, representation in administrative authorities, support for detainees claiming unlawful detention.

### Lily Pad Project

In the Lily Pad Project, we continued to provide services to all the beneficiaries, assisting with facilitating access to Greek asylum service, maintaining contact with Greek authorities, and offering representation whenever needed.