



# DCI GREECE ACTIVITIES

2021-2022

*Few words about us...*

Defence for Children International – Greece' was established in 2016 with a clear mandate to develop its own programmes in order to offer high quality protection services to children on the move. Since the DCI Greece's inception in 2016, we are one of the few human rights organizations in Greece acting as a watchdog of the implementation of children's rights and working directly at a UN level in this regard.



DCI Greece defends children's rights by:

**investigating & documenting violations of children's rights, providing direct protection services with a particular focus on legal and administrative proceedings and advocating for structural change.**

To that end, a mobile Children's Rights Helpdesk constitutes the main pillar of our operation. It is equipped with professionals holding high expertise on the field of migration and child protection and since 2016 it has offered extensive case management to more than 2500 cases of children on the move, unaccompanied or accompanied by a caregiver.

In 2019, the director and founder of Children's Rights Helpdesk, Nantina Tsekeri, was amongst the 10 individuals in the world who received the prestigious **CHILD10 Award** from the Swedish Child 10 Foundation for the impactful protection services to unaccompanied children on the move in Greece ( see: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_10AjDuEfi](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_10AjDuEfi))

Defence for Children International – Greece (DCI - Greece) is a member of the global 'Defence for Children International' child protection movement which was established in Geneva, in 1979 and is currently independently represented in 36 countries. DCI holds a consultative status on the United Nations Economic and Social Council, UNICEF, UNESCO, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe.

In 2021 and 2022, DCI Greece's traditional services and activities were further expanded in order to embrace all our beneficiaries in a more profound and holistic approach, bolstering and incorporating new features. During this period, the team developed and implemented a set of activities, from individual legal support to empowerment sessions, capacity-building activities, and advocacy at the national, EU and International level, aiming to ensure the protection of children and vulnerable groups in the Greek territory. It is paramount, not only safeguarding legally our beneficiaries but at the same time unlocking their fragile and traumatized spirit to new possibilities and horizons.



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## 1. Children's Rights Helpdesk

Our Children's Rights Helpdesk has continued to be a focal point where vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, families, and single parents, can be represented, and receive legal support, protection services, and information, all in respect of a safe environment for the beneficiaries.

During 2021 - 2022 our Helpdesk reached out and supported 534 individuals.

Implemented Activities :

- Risk Identification and Vulnerability assessments
- Delivery of legal information on their rights and procedures
- Legal Representation before the 1st and 2nd degree
- Extensive follow-up case management
- Empowerment and Healing Activities

Through our Helpdesk, we aim to fill in the existing gap in the migrant protection system, by offering free direct legal and child protection services to unaccompanied children on the move, single mothers and their children, and families with children and youth. With our intervention, our beneficiaries obtain legal status, find safety and shelter, are protected from smuggling and exploitation, while they access their social rights. They become empowered and informed about their rights. Through the trust bond we create with them, they start to believe in themselves and dream again.



## a. Our Impact in Numbers

**82%** of our homeless, exploited children, and children in danger were transferred into state accommodation

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**100%** of our illegally detained children were released within one month

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**87%** of family reunification cases were successful with the vast majority of the children are already safe in another country

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**93%** of our beneficiaries have managed to grant immediate access to the asylum system

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**100%** of the single mothers that have suffered torture in their country of origin or during their trip to Greece, managed to access protection services, so as to receive proof of documentation of torture.

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**78%** of our beneficiaries received a positive decision on their asylum and/or admissibility interviews

## b. Themida Greece Project

Back in 2019 and 2020, in collaboration with 'Better Days' NGO, we have undertaken the family reunification cases of over 80 unaccompanied children who were living until the outbreak of the fire, inside or outside the Moria Camp in very dangerous for their safety and life conditions, in the context of 'Themida I and Themida II Project'.

After the massive success of this project, back in 2021 both partners decided to expand Themida services for a year and implement a child protection holistic program, named 'Themida Greece' to unaccompanied minors in Athens.

THEMIDA GREECE, onboarded a total of **194 of unaccompanied minors** living on the streets in precarious conditions.

By joining THEMIDA GREECE, these children received:

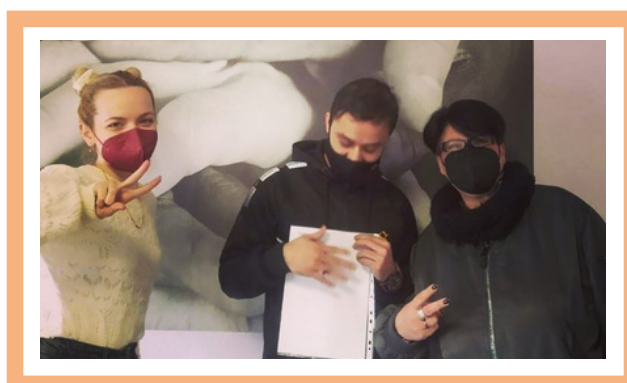
- Basic assistance
- Legal aid and child-friendly guidance
- Access to medical care
- Access to protection services, including PSS
- Social services, translation and escorts



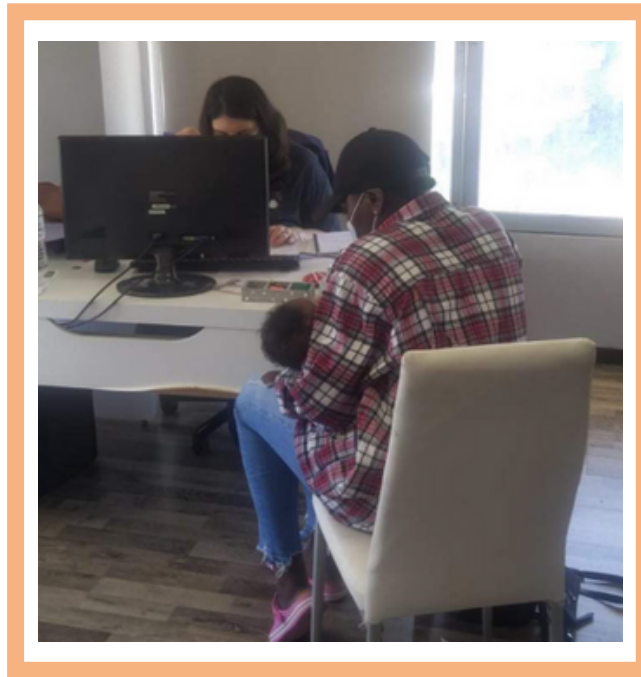
*'Do you think I will ever be able to leave this place and start a normal life? I dream about it every night. Will it happen?'*

When we first met D., he never smiled. He was unregistered, homeless full of anxiety and sadness. Through the Themida Project we provided holistic support and legal support with his family reunification application.

After a long, but rewarding process, we got a positive result. When he came by the office to receive his tickets, he could not stop smiling. A few hours later, he was finally reunited with his relative.



### c. Our work through Real stories



A. is a 19-year-old mother, coming from Congo to claim asylum in Greece. She was 8 months pregnant, unregistered, and homeless. She also faced unprecedented obstacles in her effort to find safety for herself and her unborn child.

After our intervention, the mother received all the necessary support in order to deliver her newborn safely. However, that was not enough. The mother and her baby remained unregistered, invisible to the Greek State, and unable to exercise their social rights.

After intense legal actions, they both got registered and obtained the relevant documentation as asylum seekers. Finding permanent housing and access to social rights is the next big obstacle to overcome. We will keep supporting them until we ensure all their rights are being respected while living in dignity and safety. We will also remain by their side during the next steps of their asylum journey, the asylum interview, in order for their pain to be recognized.



*'Thank you. I thought I would never leave this place'*

J. left his home country because of his religion. After reading the Bible, he decided to become a Christian. When he arrived in Athens, he was unregistered, invisible to the official protection system. He lived in a shared apartment with 16 other adults, sleeping on the balcony while being exposed to high risks of exploitation.

After our intervention, he managed to get registered within a few days, and also apply for family reunification with his sister in Italy. In the meantime, after activating the competent Authorities, placement in a safe shelter was arranged for him. The family reunification process was long and with many bureaucratic obstacles to override. After intense legal actions, a month ago, J. traveled to Italy to find comfort in his sister's presence.

*'All I want is a place to sleep and rest. I am so tired and scared!', 15 years old from Afghanistan*

We first met M. in one of our information sessions. While in despair he came to us by saying "all I want is a place to sleep and rest. I am so tired and scared". We then met him again at our offices and started working together. 15 days later, he found safety in an official shelter. M. continued to take part into our empowerment sessions while our legal team was also preparing him for his asylum interview. Some months later M. also obtained the international protection status. He goes to school and he wishes one day to become a teacher



#### d. Our support for the Ukrainian refugees in Greece

DCI Greece has always been by the side of all refugees, regardless of their country of origin. During this crisis, through our Helpdesk we were ready, once again, to offer our support to the victims of this new armed conflict.

Since the beginning of the armed conflict, in February 2022, **122** individuals have been provided so far with legal support and healing/empowerment activities.

Being a key actor in the Ukrainian refugee crisis in Greece, we have been cooperating with various shelters, hosting refugee mothers and their children, undertaking their whole case management.

DCI-Greece has also developed an emergency response toolkit that reflects on our experience in the management of refugee flows from 2015 until today that was disseminated to several front-line professionals, working at the borders of Ukraine's neighboring countries, and dealing with this emergency situation. The toolkit provides field professionals with guidance in the form of a checklist, the initial actions to be taken in response to protection risks of children on the move.



Read the toolkit [here](#)

*"Back in Ukraine, I had my own fashion design atelier. My daughters had a beautiful life too. All I want now is this war to stop and be able to choose the way we live again" Svetlana with her two daughters flew to Ukraine a week after the war started and reached Greece for safety."*



## e. Legal intervention project on Lesbos Island

In October 2021, DCI Greece lodged a legal project providing legal aid to vulnerable asylum-seekers on Lesbos, including single mothers, unaccompanied minors, youth, and families. Under the guise of Covid-19, asylum-seekers are being placed in quarantine for the first two weeks after their arrival. They have no access to legal support and do not receive information on their rights. Once they are released from quarantine, asylum seekers have their admissibility or merit interview one or two days after their release, making it almost impossible to access legal support before the interview.

**Through this program, we manage not only to have immediate access to the new arrivals but to also guarantee their fair access to the asylum procedures by receiving quality legal support and representation before the authorities, while having access at the same time to their social rights.**

Our beneficiaries receive legal support and representation through individually tailored legal sessions and asylum interview simulations. Personalized legal memos are being drafted and submitted to support the above-mentioned legal actions before the 1st and 2nd degree for both Admissibility and Asylum interviews.

Vulnerability assessments of their situation are being conducted, in order to determine their needs and to provide our services accordingly, in an attempt to fill the existing gap in the state mechanism. Referrals for health and psychological support are also being made, to ensure their holistic support.

Since the program launched back in October 2021, we have already been able to support more than 150 individuals in their admissibility and asylum claims.



Read our latest Impact Report [here](#)





321  
individuals participated in our  
legal information and  
empowerment sessions,  
during 2021- 2022

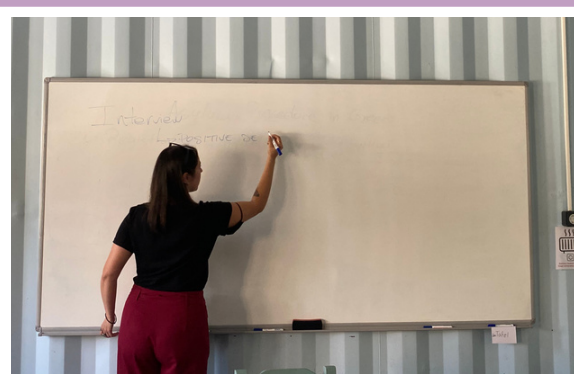
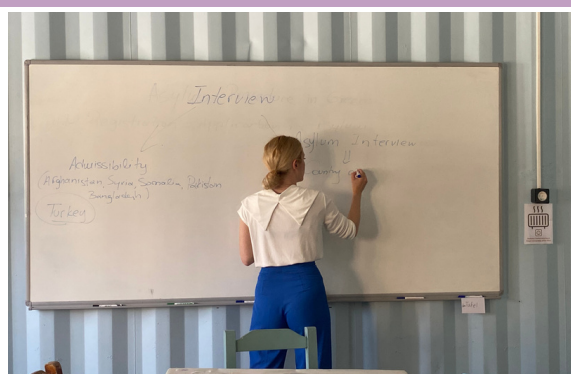
## f. Information- Empowerment Sessions

### DCI-GR promotes the due implementation of the Right to information

Outreach to the people who need our support the most and delivering our services to them in a mobile way has always been the cornerstone of our Helpdesk Operation since 2016. Information sessions are of critical importance for individuals on the move considering the vast majority of them are not aware of their rights. They receive information from the smugglers, who benefit from their lack of knowledge and vulnerability. This situation makes them an easy prey for people wishing to exploit them. At the same time, not being aware of the procedures and existing deadlines can have a negative impact in their asylum applications.

The Information sessions have several purposes:

- protection tool, working on a preventive approach
- provision of proper legal information about their rights, the asylum legal procedures, and any durable legal option available to them.
- information about the dangers
- Reporting mechanism for any kind of violence
- Check in –Identification of people in high protection risks such as exploitation, mental health state, homelessness etc. This is being followed by specific action plan before the relevant Authorities

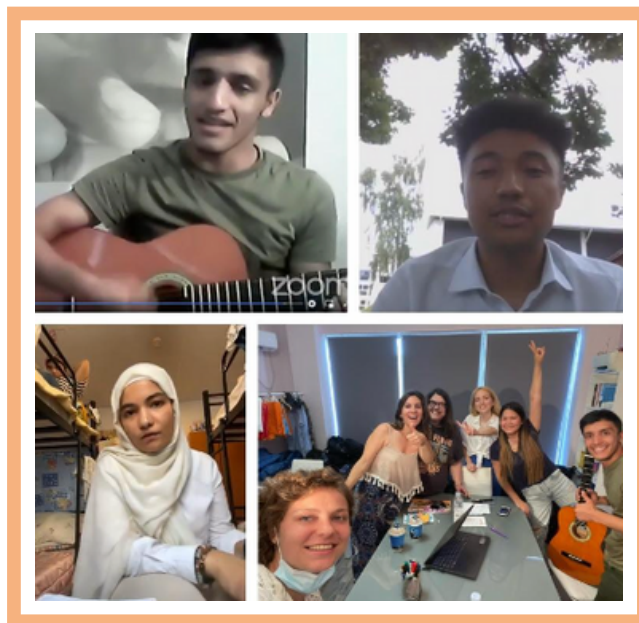


## 2. Youth Ambassadors Cluster

In DCI - Greece we strongly believe that children are advocates for their rights. They are not only rights-holders in need of protection and safety but also active members of a society, capable of voicing their own rights.

**Child participation** is a key principle guiding our work and we strongly advocate for the right of all children to be heard and have their views taken seriously, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this light, we always encourage our children to come together and exchange experiences, while communicating their opinions with the rest of the world.

In 2021, we organized a big number of youth participating events, including an entirely youth-led online event *“We are More Than a Refugee”*.



During this event, four young people discussed their experiences 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 an Unaccompanied Minor 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.

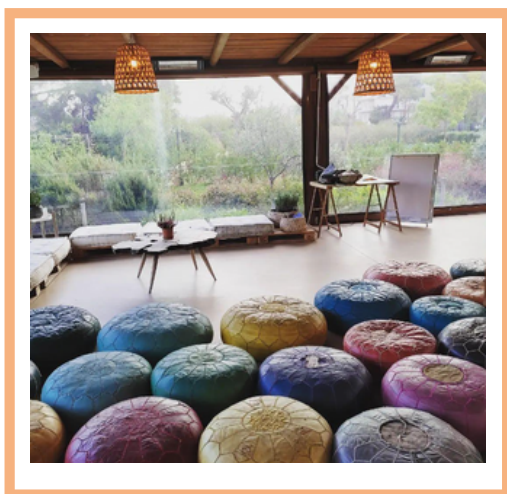
This event showed us once more that young refugees have immense talent, resilience, and drive, that they deserve all the support, protection, and care in the world - and that they need to be included in decisions that affect them. Giving a voice to young refugees is one way to empower them, and make the world a better place.

The event can be viewed here: [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch\\_permalink&v=1631332677059845](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=1631332677059845)

DCI Greece has been working closely with the children wishing to become facilitators this past year, aiming to provide them with all necessary tools and knowledge so as to be trained and qualified in their new role as Youth Ambassadors.

During June 2022 the first consultations with unaccompanied minors took place where our youth facilitators discussed with the children about their rights, the dangers that exist, ways to cope and to support themselves and all together started the preparation of advocacy material.

**Moments from one of our training for Youth Facilitators, 15th - 16th of October 2021**





### 3. Healing Me Project



In 2021, DCI Greece launched the 'Healing –Me' project aiming to offer to our beneficiaries a safe refuge for their soul.

The -healing me – project aims to empower children, youth, and professionals, to offer them the tools to relax their minds and bring ease into their daily life, increase their sense of value, safety, and belonging, and develop the quality of gratitude and resilience and realize how incredible and capable they are of becoming who they truly wish to become.

Breathing, sound therapy, meditation, yoga, art, and mindfulness are some of the techniques that the healing me project chooses to go with and share with our participants.

In our work with children as humanitarian actors, we have realized that healing moments happened in the most unexpected ways. It was when a child was truly seen, understood, and heard when a minor was given the space, they asked for when our consistency created safety, and our love and support restored the faith in humanity.

On top of that when we introduced the healing techniques to the children and young people we work with, we witnessed a major shift in their sense of wellbeing and belonging.

*"It is the first time I feel safe to stay in silence with myself and feel the presence of all of you at the same time",* a 16year old participant from Syria shared with us.

*'I feel my body and my mind so relaxed. It's like I had a mind- clearing',* 16 year old from Afghanistan



The healing me project is addressed to the children and youth on the move, as well as, to the professionals on the field. Training in community members is taking also place aiming to multiply the impact of these benefits on the community.

The healing me suitcase can also travel and find children, community members, and professionals where they are.

Through the project, we envision a step closer to a world of compassion, understanding, justice, and love.

**-By healing me I heal you-  
-By healing me I heal the justice system-  
-By healing me I heal the world-**

Watch here the first healing retreat for unaccompanied children on the move:  
<https://www.facebook.com/DCIGREECE/videos/1480844932291753>





#### 4. Capacity Building activities

At a capacity building level, our team of experts has been delivering trainings to professionals working within the national child protection system, in accommodation facilities, in Camps and/or in the third sector.

Every year, DCI Greece hold a series of trainings to lawyers, legal advisors, social workers, humanitarians and other professionals sharing its expertise on:

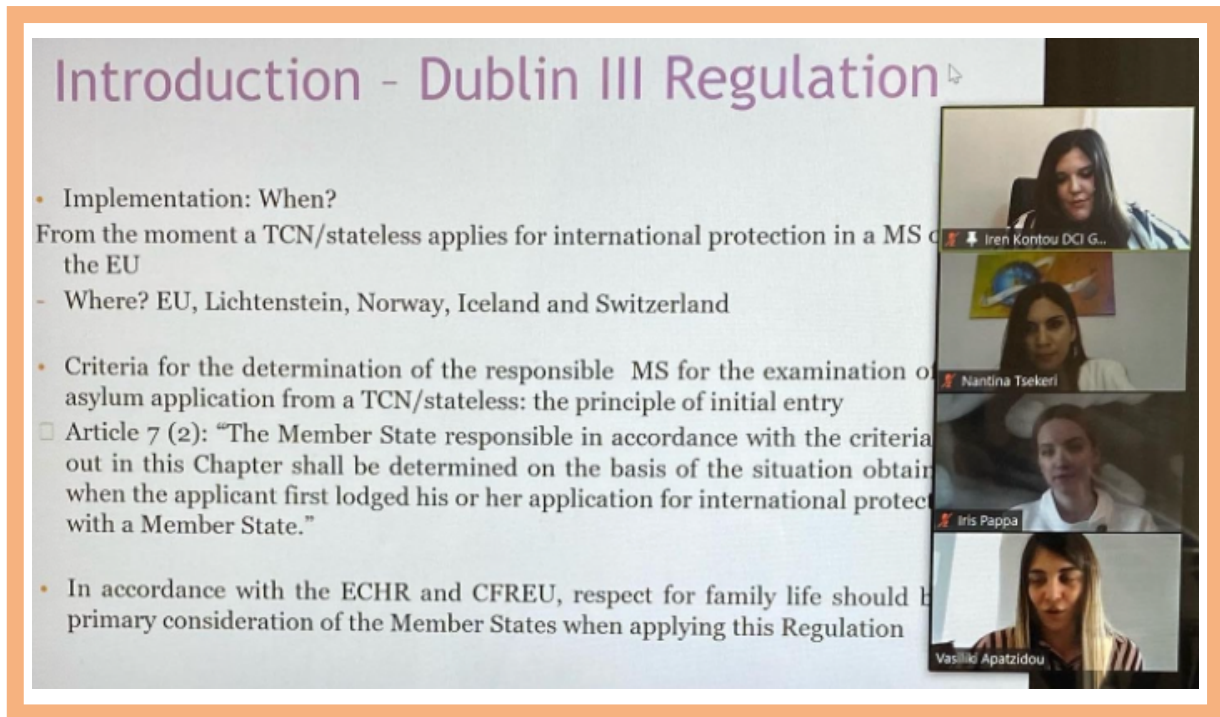
- Child Protection
- The Convention of the Rights of the Child
- How to influence and use the framework of Children's Rights for sustainable change at national level
- Refugee Law and Asylum Procedures
- Institutional Violence
- Child Safeguarding and Child Protection in Emergencies
- the well being of children rights' professionals

During 2021 and 2022, we conducted a number of trainings and workshops on the abovementioned thematics, that reached more than **150 professionals**.



*Trainings in Lesvos and Athens on 'Response to Institutional Violence as Professionals', on February and June 2022*

-Online Training on family reunification under Dublin III Regulation



**Introduction - Dublin III Regulation**

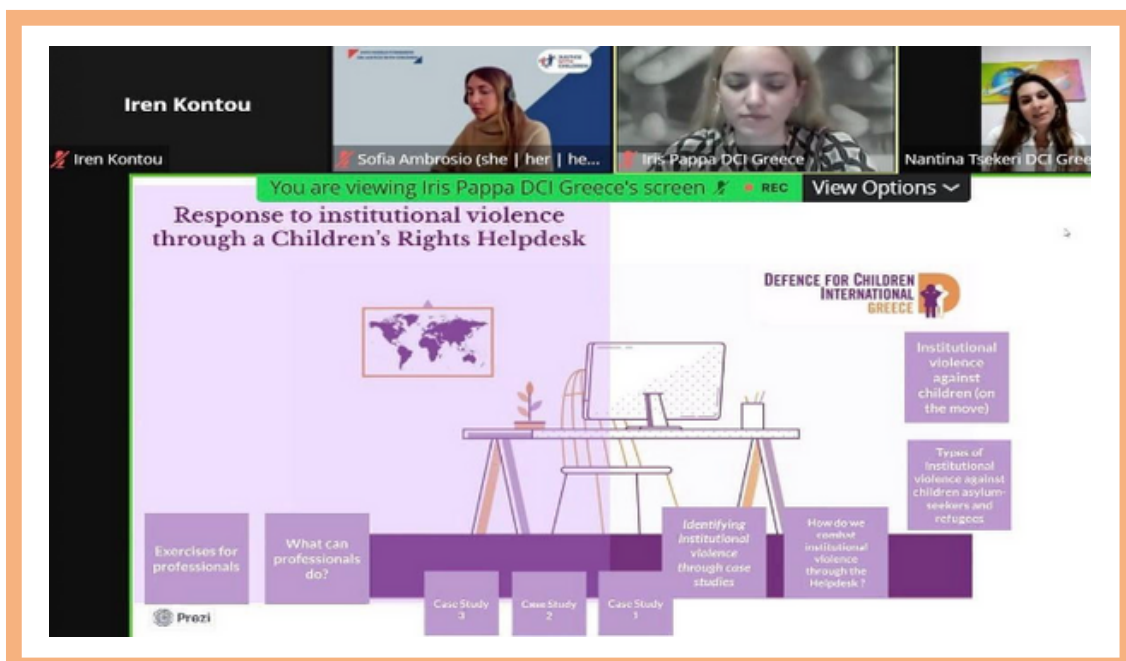
- Implementation: When?  
From the moment a TCN/stateless applies for international protection in a MS of the EU
- Where? EU, Lichtenstein, Norway, Iceland and Switzerland
- Criteria for the determination of the responsible MS for the examination of an asylum application from a TCN/stateless: the principle of initial entry
- Article 7 (2): “The Member State responsible in accordance with the criteria set out in this Chapter shall be determined on the basis of the situation obtained when the applicant first lodged his or her application for international protection with a Member State.”
- In accordance with the ECHR and CFREU, respect for family life should be a primary consideration of the Member States when applying this Regulation

Participants visible in the video feeds: Iren Kontou DCI G..., Nantina Tsekeri, Iris Pappa, Vasiliki Apatzidou

-Online Training on Institutional Violence at the 2021 World Congress on Justice with Children “Ensuring access to justice for all children: towards non-discriminatory and inclusive child justice systems”

Takeaways of the Session:

- Best practices on how as practitioners or Organizations can bring the children on the move and the justice system into a restorative process
- Best practices on how to enhance child participation and strengthen resilience on children
- Best practices on how to work with State Actors in order to combat institutional violence



**Response to institutional violence through a Children's Rights Helpdesk**

DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL GREECE

Exercises for professionals

What can professionals do?

Case Study 3

Case Study 2

Case Study 1

Identifying institutional violence through case studies

How do we combat institutional violence through the Helpdesk?

Institutional violence against children (on the move)

Types of institutional violence against children asylum seekers and refugees

Participants visible in the video feeds: Iren Kontou, Sofia Ambrosio (she | her | he...), Iris Pappa DCI Greece, Nantina Tsekeri DCI Greece

## 5. Advocacy

One fundamental component of our work is to translate the services we offer on the ground into concrete advocacy initiatives aiming for structural change. DCI Greece has been strategically litigating before EU and International Human Rights Bodies for the rights of children and their families. We advocate for improving existing law, introducing new legislation, amending policy practices and raising awareness within the society.



DCI's Side Event during the 50th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva

### On an International Level:

-On the 30th of June 2022 and during the **50th Session of the UN Human Rights Council**, DCI Greece organized together with DCI Headquarters, a side Event on Institutional Violence against Children on the Move that took place in Geneva.

Following the issue of the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on migration, DCI Greece took the opportunity to put the spotlight on **Institutional violence against children on the move**, the forms it can take in cross-border situations, as well as, in reception contexts, in times of emergency. This event provided the necessary fertile ground for further discussion between the speakers around the importance of forming a European Alliance against Institutional Violence.

->You can watch the whole discussion here: <https://youtu.be/8LaUYluqgd8>

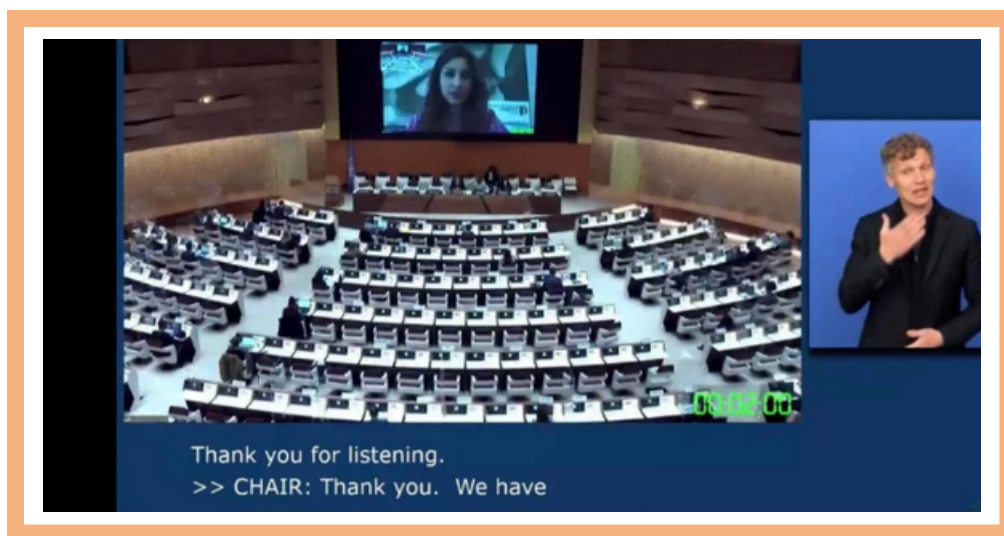
### Featured speakers:

- H.E. Ambassador Marc Bichler Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
- Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary- General on Violence against Children
  - Mr. Rahmat Amiri, Former child on the move from Afghanistan, youth representative
  - Ms. Claire Pavlaki, Representative from the Special Secretariat of Unaccompanied Minors , Greece
    - Ms. Nantina Tsekiri, Director of Defence for Children International Greece
    - Mr. Vassiliy Yuzhanin, Head, International Migration Law – IOM
- Prof. Tinia Apergi, Clinical Psychologist and Associate Professor of Psychology, American College of Greece
  - Prof. Philip Jaffé, Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

- On 9th of March 2022, Nantina Tsekeri, DCI Greece Director, delivered a **statement** on behalf of the DCI International global movement, in front of the **49th Session of the UN Human Rights Council** on the Annual Day of discussion on 'The Rights of the Child and Family Reunification'.

*'We urge States to commit to a well-established inter-state structure that places best interest procedures at its core, where children on the move are seen as children first and foremost and their voices can be heard, where all bureaucratic obstacles are replaced by accessible, effective, and child-friendly procedures. And for this to happen, States will need to commit to the allocation of budget for family reunification.'*

->Read the whole statement here: <https://defenceforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/DCI-statement-HRC49-ADRC-Family-Reunification.pdf>



**Our Director, Nantina Tsekeri, in front of the 49th Session of the UN Human Rights Council on the Annual Day of discussion on 'The Rights of the Child and Family Reunification'**

-In August 2021, DCI Greece won a UN interim measure against the State of Tajikistan on behalf of 80 Afghan refugees who were tortured and placed in incommunicado detention on a remote island between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. DCI Greece has also activated the UN Special Human Rights Procedures Scheme and initiated appeals against the State of Tajikistan issued by the UN Special Rapporteurs.



## DCI Greece's Active Role during Universal Periodic Review

- Greece has been under examination by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the situation of the children's rights on its territory (UPR mechanism). UPR has emerged as a key mechanism to scrutinize the human rights record of all UN Member States, but robust civil society participation is crucial to ensuring effective counterbalances to States' self-reporting of their human rights records.

DCI Greece has actively participated in the consultation process with the OHCHR submitting experts report to the Committee and delivering key information. Our reports highlights the current issues in Greece related to children on the move as it touches on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and other international human rights instruments.



**Check our report and our observations [here](#)**

-DCI Greece participated in the 'High Panel Conference launching the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2022-2027', taking place in Rome at the beginning of April. We discussed the crucial role of strategic litigation, law clinics, and our key contribution to children accessing justice.



### On a national level

DCI Greece participates in meetings, cooperates, and advocates with other non-governmental Organisations, local authorities, and agencies in the field of child protection for the building of better responses for vulnerable children. At the same time, we take part in the monthly working groups of UNHCR and the Ombudsman's of Children's Rights in child protection, aiming to bring a greater change at a structural level for a bigger group of children in need living in Greece.

### Advocacy reports:

In 2022, DCI- Greece also introduced the Country of Host Information trimestral report.

The name of this report comes from the “Country of Origin Information (COI)”, referring to information on countries from which asylum seekers originate. The availability of and the expertise on COI is one of the cornerstones of decision-making in the asylum process and as such can enhance harmonization. Through this new “Country of Host Information Report”, DCI Greece wishes to shift the narrative to focus on the host country, gathering targeted, relevant, reliable, accurate, and up-to-date information on Greece in a transparent and impartial manner. With this report, we want to expertly inform the reader on the current situation and the latest developments from the ground affecting asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece, with a focus on children.

Read the first one [HERE](#)



For more information about DCI Greece work and activities you can visit:



<https://www.defenceforchildrengreece.org/>



<https://www.facebook.com/DCIGREECE/>