



PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE: GREEK NGOS CARE FOR NEW MIGRANTS

THREE LOCAL NONPROFITS - METADRASI, HUMANRIGHTS360 AND FAROS - ARE DIRECTLY CARING FOR MIGRANTS ARRIVING IN GREECE, FLEEING DEPRIVATION AND VIOLENCE. MANY OF THESE MIGRANTS ARE REFUGEES, INCLUDING NUMEROUS UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND YOUTH. WHILE THE CHALLENGES ARE MANY, THESE GREEK ORGANIZATIONS ARE COLLABORATING WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO MEET THE VARIED NEEDS OF THE MOST VULNERABLE NEWCOMERS.

In spite of the world shutting down in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, more than 82 million people were on the move in 2020. "Migration is after all, a very human issue," explained Epaminondas Farmakis of HumanRights360. "It is an essential part of human history - for as long as it's been recorded, people have been moving due to conflicts, climate change, or to search for a better future." For millions of migrants

and refugees, Covid-19 accelerated the conditions that catalyzed their movements to Europe.

Greece, a country of 10 million citizens, serves as one of the main gateways to the European Union (EU). The country sees new arrivals from Somalia, Afghanistan and Syria, many of whom are children or young adults. A full 60% of them fit the UN definition of refugees - those



who have been forced to flee their countries because of persecution, war or violence.

On average, a refugee arriving in the EU stays in a detention camp for 18 months. At times, the refugee population has exceeded the number of local residents, especially on islands like Lesbos. And the flow continues.

Lora Pappa of METAdrasi underscores that “the idea that we can stop migration ignores the reality - what we have to do is to learn to manage migration.”

Three visionary Greek non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, provide a range of services to migrants arriving in Greece. The pressure on this small gateway country has been enormous. METAdrasi, HumanRights360 and Faros act as a service network to migrants and refugees in Greece, with focus on young, unaccompanied migrants.

NO CHILDREN IN DETENTION

The oldest of the three organizations, METAdrasi has provided programs for migrants since 2010. The name is a combination of Greek words translating roughly to “Take action!”.

METAdrasi’s founder, president and CEO, Lora Pappa, winner of the prestigious European Union North-South Prize in 2015, exemplifies forwardness. “It is not acceptable to allow children to live in detention or in camps,” says Pappa. The motto of METAdrasi -- “No children in detention” -- has led the organization to focus on constant innovation.

She says people tell her that, “What METAdrasi does is amazing, but I tell them ‘Really, we only provide the most normal, typical things that you would offer to a friend or to a neighbor in a dire situation.’

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LORA PAPPA

To help migrants and refugees integrate successfully into Greek and European society, METAdrasi’s programs include four primary focus areas: the provision of quality interpretation, the provision of education programs to refugees and migrants, the protection of unaccompanied and separated children, through a comprehensive safety net of activities, and the protection and support of other vulnerable groups.



Credit: Fanis Logothetis

THEY ARE THE FUTURE

METAdrasi has opened not only temporary shelters, but also apartments for teenagers and a dormitory. Pappa speaks of there being no time to waste in getting refugee children into normal, safe routines and into formal education, which should be done as quickly as possible.

“These children are children of the world. They are the future. They deserve access to education and to all forms of care - health, legal and psycho-social care.” In addition to providing children with Greek language lessons, Pappa’s team also teaches other European languages to facilitate the children’s assimilation into other countries, if they have relatives who settled in other parts of the EU.

Because of its positive impact on the migrant and refugee situation in Greece, METAdrasi received the prestigious Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize in 2019. METAdrasi has used the proceeds to create the first dormitory for homeless children in Athens, and launch new programs and activities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

LEGAL AID FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The newest of the group of Greek organizations, HumanRights360 (HR360) was co-founded in 2017 by Epaminondas Farmakis, Rania Papadopoulou, and Eleni Takou. HR360 focuses on legal aid for vulnerable populations and on advocacy to provide accurate information about migrants and refugees. They also act as a ‘fiscal sponsor’, re-granting funds to other NGOs providing critical services.

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DAN BISWAS

HR360 collaborates closely with government projects and affinity groups working to assist migrants and refugees. During the pandemic in 2020, HR360 conducted advocacy work with the Greek government to provide migrants temporary Social Security cards, which in turn allowed these individuals to receive vaccination against the coronavirus. They also used METAdrasi’s interpretation services to convey Covid protocols to migrants regarding mask wearing and hand washing.

THE POWER OF SPORT

Springing to life from the power of sport, Faros was founded in 2014 to provide protection services for unaccompanied minors. Dan Biswas and his wife Patricia chose soccer as a means of reaching refugee youth. Dan describes the roots of the Faros program, saying “in the beginning, our work was an outreach program, finding unaccompanied children on the streets. We created a soccer

academy to give them the opportunity to be kids again and as a way to connect with them - to find out what was at stake and how we could best support them." From there, they started Faros - which means lighthouse in Greek - as a beacon of protection for refugee youths.

Today, Faros runs a drop-in center providing immediate protection, a carefully-staffed shelter facility, and a vocational training center for unaccompanied refugee children and youth. Finally, Faros works to reunite unaccompanied minors with family members in other parts of Europe. An estimated 40% of refugee youth arriving in Greece has family living in the EU.

WORKING BETTER TOGETHER

Like HR360 and METAdrasi, Faros works closely with collaborative partners to care for vulnerable youths. The close working ties between METAdrasi and Faros reunited three homeless brothers, ages 12, 15 and 16, into one safe living situation. The two organizations praise HR360's efforts to bring greater understanding to the Greek and European public about both the plight and the strengths of the refugees entering the EU through Greece.

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EPAMINONDAS FARMAKIS

"There is a myth of the refugee having nothing to contribute to society. We have to turn that idea upside down. These youth have so much potential; we just have to unleash it," says Biswas.

The interrelated work of METAdrasi, HR360 and Faros has attracted much-needed support from international organizations and philanthropists. Faros works with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) D-Lab and has established a school where refugee youth acquire technical and soft skills, and understand how to apply it to solve problems. Its success led UNHCR to support Faros to enable students to continue classes online during Covid-19 shutdowns. METAdrasi also enjoys a long-standing partnership with UNHCR, and its programs have been adopted by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), which supports migrants and refugees elsewhere in Europe.

A SUPPORTIVE PARTNER

KBFUS acts as a supportive partner to all three of these leading nonprofits. With an American friends fund at KBFUS, they can receive tax-deductible contributions from donors in the United States. Farmakis explains, "It's an easy and very productive relationship with KBFUS. Without their support we couldn't have reached U.S. donors at this critical time."

<http://metadrasi.org/en/home/>

<https://www.humanrights360.org/>

<https://faros.org/>

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