



## The camp of Katsika: Epirus' Achilles' heel

The Camp of Katsika hampers the efforts of Epirus to embrace the refugee children

### MISSION TO EPIRUS



Katsika Refugee Camp, leisure time

This field survey was carried out in the region of Epirus in April 2018, aiming at mapping the status of refugee children's rights and identifying the existing needs in the region. Having as a basis the fulfillment of *Children's Right to be heard*, we asked them to share with us what they themselves consider important to bring up.

For the purposes of this quick scan, **DCI-Greece** spoke with non-governmental and international organizations present in the region, local authorities, lawyers as well as social workers and other professionals in the field of immigration and child protection. We also visited the refugee camps of Katsika and Phillipiada and we conducted interviews with the refugee children and their parents placed there. The majority of children are between ages 5 to 16 and come mostly from Syria, Iraq or are of Kurdish origin.



DCI GREECE informs talks to refugee children in the Katsika Refugee Camp

In Ioannina, the city of 113,000 inhabitants due to the immediate decongestion of the Aegean islands, more than 1200 refugees are currently hosted, with the number expected to rise up in the coming months. Undoubtedly, the outrageous conditions prevailing in the Aegean islands and in other regions of the mainland are not met in the region of Epirus, since a more coordinated and effective approach has been employed by the local authorities and stakeholders. It is remarkable that we have not identified unaccompanied homeless minors in the area.

However, crucial issues were found in the Refugee Camp of Katsika and Phillipiada where, despite the significant efforts by the present stakeholders to address the existing needs, the total lack of constant security in conjunction with the limited presence of lawyers and doctors have placed serious restrictions on the fulfillment of Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding children's best interests.



Katsika Refugee Camp, unprotected child

**Lack of Security and Protection: Article 19, 34, 22**

One of the most urgent issues identified in the Camps of Katsika and Phillipiada has been the total lack of constant security in and outside the camps. This fact hampers the protection of the refugees let alone children since it exposes them to serious risks such as sexual violence, abuse or even possible trafficking incidents. Although, the police is the competent authority that must be responsible for the security and the maintenance of order within the camps, its presence is non-existent and the actors involved cannot offer the protection refugees are entitled to.

*'Every Monday I come back with terror to the camp as I do not know what I will face'*

*NGO Official working in the field of child protection*

What is also crucial in the Camp of Katsika is the fact that it hosts single mothers together with men in neighboring containers and as a result women and children live in a constant state of insecurity ,unable, for example, to visit the shared WCs in the evening.

*'We are afraid. There is no security. As soon as the people who work here leave, we stay in the containers. Men often get drunk, become violent and threaten us. We are afraid to visit even the toilets as there have been many attacks there. Recently, the body of a man who was living here was found. We do not know whether it was a suicide or murder '*

*Single mother of two children in Katsika Refugee Camp*

### **Access to Education: Article 28**

The issue of the education of refugee children in the case of Katsika has not yet been resolved, despite the persistent efforts of the parents. Although some courses are delivered within the Refugee Camp and some valuable educational activities are being carried out by NGOs, they are not able to substitute the formal schooling and fulfill children's right to education.

*' I want to go to school! In a real school! What I miss most from my life in my hometown is the school and the company with my classmates'*

*8-year-old refugee girl from Iraq*

*'I want my children to go to school and study. I do not want them to end up on the margin and isolation. We still wait to see it happen'*

*Refugee father of 5-year-old minor*



Refugee child playing with stones

An essential element of each child's development has been according to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child the right to play, leisure and participation in cultural and artistic activities. Despite the existence of playgrounds within the Camps and some creative actions, many children asked for toys such as dolls, balls and creative work material. Their refugee status should not hinder their development.

*'The only games I have are these stones. You ask me if I need anything?'*

*9 year old refugee girl*



Philliada Refugee Camp

**Legal information and protection: Article 17**

*'There is a need, cases of children asylum seekers to be handled by lawyers with substantial knowledge on the subject. The number of lawyers is inadequate'*

*Ngo Lawyer*

Despite the fact that most refugee children residing in the camps of Epirus are registered, the need for substantive and direct legal representation throughout the whole asylum process by lawyers with expertise in Children's Rights Law is urgently needed. The presence of a sufficient number of lawyers with specialized knowledge is imperative.

## **Medical care: Article 24**

Another important issue has been the limited presence of doctors, which in combination with the absence of translators, have impeded refugees to receive appropriate health care. The recent replacement of the competent authorities responsible for the camp's supervision and management has urged refugees to temporarily close the camp of Katsika in an effort to primarily demand doctors not to leave the camp, since this change has left a gap that has influenced negatively their medical care. Refugees have also posed issues such as technical work-repairs that have not be done yet (eg, the washing machines have been damaged for a few days), as well as disinfection requests in the wider camp area.

*'There are not many doctors here. Once, I had to wait a whole day to get tested'*

*Refugee boy aged 15 years old*



Katsika Refugee Camp

DCI-Greece **welcomes** the effective response to the needs of unaccompanied refugee children in the region, as well as the intense efforts by the local authorities and other stakeholders, including present non-governmental organizations and international organizations, to effectively address identified needs through coordinated action.

DCI-Greece **welcomes** the establishment of the Asylum Office in the region and looks forward to its immediate and orderly functioning.

DCI-Greece **highlights** the need of creating a network of lawyers with expertise in International Children's Rights and Refugee Law aiming to enforce children's rights to international protection children applicants by offering immediate and effective legal assistance.

DCI-Greece, **acting to ensure that children's voice is heard and their rights are fully respected in practice, calls on the Ministry of Immigration Policy and the Greek Authorities to:**

- **Ensure that every child in need of international protection - recognized as having international protection - will have access to formal education at the start of the new school year without discrimination.**
- **Immediately resolve the issue of security in the Camps of Katsika and Filippiada in order to ensure that children are protected from serious risks incompatible to their childhood.**

For Defence for Children Greece

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