

# HUMAN RIGHTS360°

In cooperation with  
**STEPS**

ACTION REPORT  
August 2020  
March 2021

## STREET LAW

providing access  
and promoting  
people living on the



# FRAMEWORK

On the streets of Athens, in the midst of the pandemic, many people find themselves in a state of marginal survival; homeless persons, users of psychoactive substances, sex workers, refugees, migrants, persons lacking legal documents, former prisoners, people with mental health issues.

HumanRights360, identifying the need for legal assistance to these group of the population, decided to work in the field together with [Steps](#), an organization that works on the streets on a daily basis consisting of street work groups, offering food and harm reduction material to people living on the street and persons making abuse of psychoactive substances.

As of the end of August 2020, HumanRights360, in partnership with Steps, has launched the Street Lawyering project, an innovative pilot program of legal aid on the street. The inspiration was the pioneering project of the Danish [street lawyers / gadejuristen](#), who since 1998 have been providing legal assistance to homeless users of psychoactive substances and their project still has a huge impact on improving the health and fostering the rights of the population.

A lawyer of HumanRights360 has joined the *Steps* street work team and has been actively participating in the project, in order to offer legal counselling, to provide information to people who are in homelessness, in transitional hosting facilities or in inappropriate, inadequate or precarious housing conditions about their rights and to identify the problems that these population groups face and to support them in accessing them. At the same time, through documented advocacy actions and public interventions, the organization seeks to promote and defend the rights of this population, as well as to contribute to the achievement of substantial institutional changes.

# METHODOLOGY OF ACTION

In these difficult times for the general population, especially for the vulnerable population groups, HumanRights360 and Steps have applied in the field an effective way of assisting people who live in the streets through the resolution of their legal claims and the raising of issues related to their fundamental rights. The basic principle was reaching out to people in their familiar place with the aim of informing them about access to rights and services, of supporting them in the exercise of their rights and of resolving their legal claims.

The Street Lawyering project, in its function as a fully inclusive project, is aimed at all those persons who have a hard time finding answers to their questions, claiming their rights even when they seem obvious and resolving longstanding issues, sometimes due to the situation in which they find themselves, and other times due to frustration or their fear of the police, the judicial system, or the bureaucracy of the Administration.



## The mode of action in the field is based on four axes:

A

Approach - personal contact – personalized legal counselling and information provision

B

Constant touch with people - building of a relationship of trust - Koukkida & ECHOHub

C

Dealing with individual cases with the aim of an integrated intervention

D

field mapping - problem identification - dialogue with the authorities - representation of the population

### A. APPROACH - PERSONAL CONTACT - INDIVIDUAL LEGAL COUNSELLING AND INFORMATION

The approach of the target population of the project, combined with the personal contact and the communication on issues related to their legal affairs, was considered a difficult task from the outset. The channel through which the provision of legal assistance on the street was made possible, was the street work of the team of *Steps*, whose volunteers have stood firmly by the homeless people in Athens in recent years. The intervention and contribution of *Steps*, through its continuous activities in the field, led to the identification of the complex needs of the population including the immediate need for individual legal counselling and investi-

gation of possible violations of the rights of people on the streets. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Steps team was close to the people, distributing food, masks and harm reduction material, an action which stood out as an example of remarkable solidarity, for which it was awarded with a prize by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in February 2021.

Street work actually provides the possibility of approaching the population, for the provision of alternative legal services, in the sense of place, time and manner. Having as our main method of action the peripatetic outreach work, in the sense of meeting and having contact with vulnerable groups of the population in places where they carry out their activities and where they live, in combination with detached outreach work, which concerns contact at fixed points of reference, we managed to address but also to become accessible to a large part of the population living on the street.

The establishment and consolidation of contact was built gradually and was based on the constant presence of the lawyer on the street, but mainly on the already established presence of the street work team of Steps in the field. The volunteers of the organization in addition to the distribution of basic essentials (food, water, sanitary ware, blankets, etc.) health protection material (masks, gloves, antiseptics, etc.) and harm reduction material (syringes, condoms), informed the population during the meetings about the possibility of contacting a lawyer. This was thus the start of the individual legal counselling on the street, which was based on the monitoring and evaluation of each individual case, the management of each case according to the needs and priorities of the person and the provision of information to the person about her capabilities and rights.

The main goal of the intervention of the organizations, apart from providing solutions to the individual requests of the population living on the street, was the mobilization of the individuals themselves to take action and to improve their living conditions, following an approach that does not stigmatize, nor does it require them to change their lifestyle if they do not wish to.

The Street Lawyering program started in August 2020 and despite the difficult conditions due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the periods of lockdown, it managed to continue uninterrupted until today. Personal protection measures (masks, gloves) ensured the protection of the street work team but also of the beneficiaries of the program, as well as our unhindered presence on the road - which, especially at this time, was of fundamental importance.

## **B. CONSTANT TOUCH WITH PEOPLE - BUILDING OF A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST**

The Street Lawyering project is based on building a relationship of trust through constant touch with people. For this reason, continuous communication, timely provision of information and immediate resolution of the requests of individuals, which leads to the consolidation of trust, was deemed particularly critical. At the same time, since the first contact, but also in the continuation of the process of resolving legal issues, the establishment of a framework of roles and expectations has been considered crucial.

### **The Koukkida and ECHO Hub Athens as service, meeting and reference points**

Koukkida is the seat of the Steps organization and at the same time a place where people have the opportunity to find food, products for the care of their personal hygiene, lockers for their personal belongings, laundry services, but also to discuss, to get close to other persons. In the site of Koukkida, the street work team communicates, coordinates, trains, while individual legal counseling sessions also take place, in cases where further communication is required for the next steps and for the empowerment of individuals as regards decision-making. At the same time, the Social Integration Service of HumanRights360 operates at the ECHO Hub-Athens facility in the center of Athens. The area facilitates the meetings with the beneficiaries of the Street Lawyering project, the online application service and the connection with the social integration service for further actions.

### C. DEALING WITH INDIVIDUAL CASES WITH THE AIM OF AN INTEGRATED INTERVENTION

To achieve the goal of an integrated intervention and addressing the multiple requests and complex needs of people on the street, as early as November 2020 the street work team of the Street Lawyering project is accompanied once a week by a professional of the social integration service of HumanRights360. Through the connection with the social integration service but also the constant efforts of communication and synergy with public services and civil society bodies, additional requests are resolved and needs are served through specialized services. The purpose of this referral is to settle administrative issues, strengthen the life plan and facilitate access to healthcare services and benefits, but also to the labor market. At the same time, Steps volunteers are always assisting in the actions and activities of the program, offering accompaniment to services and agencies and support in the management of requests.

### D. FIELD MAPPING - PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION - DIALOGUE WITH THE AUTHORITIES - REPRESENTATION OF THE POPULATION IN THE COMPETENT BODIES AND AUTHORITIES AT CENTRAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

Through a structured social history form, an effort is made to obtain the necessary information with the aim of adequately mapping the scope of action and drawing conclusions. At the same time, through public interventions on issues concerning groups of the population, documentation texts and advocacy actions, we aim at a strategic defense of the rights of the target group based on the experience in the field.

Participation in networks and groups, as well as communication and information dissemination activities, aim to create synergies for the most effective advocacy of the rights of the population and the exchange of good practices with specialized professionals. Finally, the constant communication with bodies at central and local level aims to represent the people who find themselves on the street and highlight their basic demands.

# CHALLENGES

The Street Lawyering project is a live project that deals with real-time street situations while at the same time these situations are constantly changing.

The multiple parameters involved (health issues, use of psychoactive substances, mental health problems, the foreign origin of the beneficiaries, the lack of legal documents, the challenging intervention setting, the need for multiple support) make the work of a professional particularly demanding in the face of both the challenges he/she is called upon to face and the needs he/she is called upon to manage. The support from the street work team of Steps with their experience in the field is crucial for the implementation of the project. In more detail:

- The challenge of locating people on the streets, as many of them do not live in a fixed place, nor do they have a fixed schedule or contact details and their inability to be informed when their circumstances or situation do not allow them, are factors that affect the action and inhibit the effectiveness of the intervention.
- Contact and communication with people of different nationalities and consequently spoken languages, makes the intervention even more complicated, due to the lack of interpreting services.
- The treatment of the population (mainly of users psychoactive substances) and the violent repulsion by the police authorities without an operational plan for their accommodation and care, is repeatedly seen in the field during the intervention in the community, with a negative impact in the services provided by the project.



Despite the aforementioned challenges, however, the project of HumanRights360 has managed to meet the needs of the field and become a point of reference for some people in conditions of homelessness.

Since the end of August 2020, through the collaboration of HumanRights360 and Steps, a large number of requests that arose from the street population and often seemed unresolved, have been processed effectively. At the same time, the presence and representation of a lawyer enhanced the access of individuals to the rights they were already entitled to, and the realization of that fact, *i.e. the feeling that they are rights holders*, led many of them to move towards a gradual reintegration. People on the streets now return to discuss their next steps, to ask for information and directions, to inform us about their progress, to communicate.

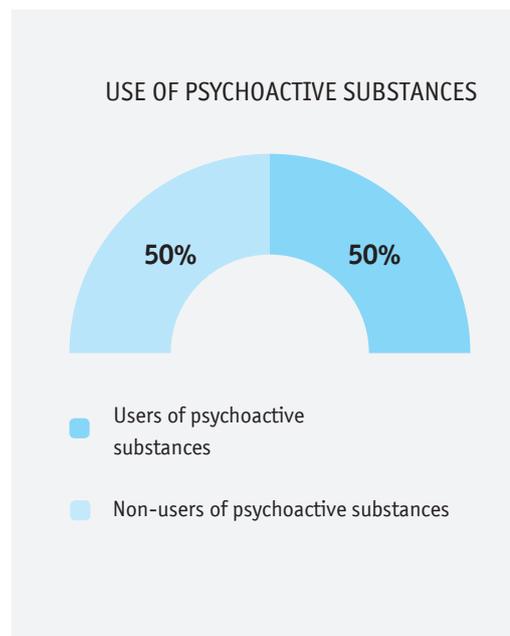
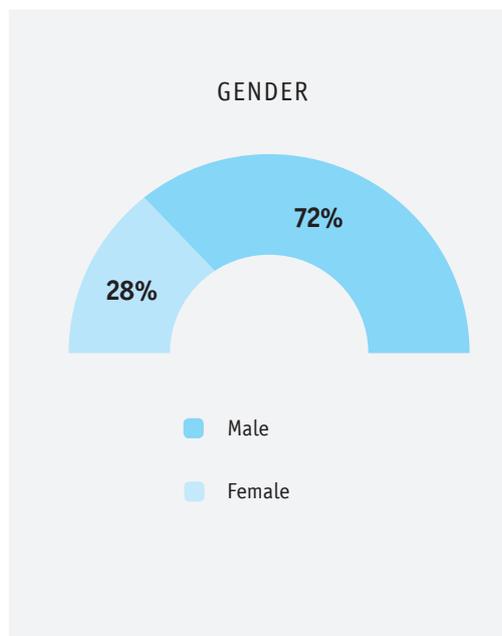
The contact maintained even today with people who have been served and have built a relationship of trust with the project, whether they now live in the countryside, have rented their own apartments, are staying in accommodation facilities or are being held in detention centers, proves that the goal has been achieved.

# PROVISION OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO VULNERABLE POPULATION GROUPS

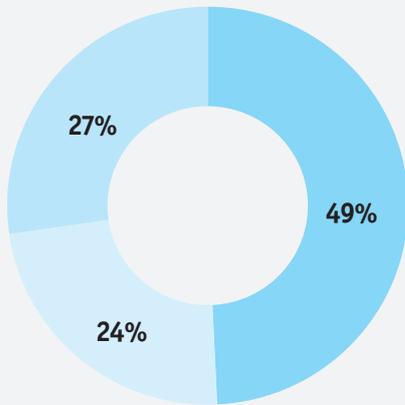
From August 2020 to February 2021, the program provided legal assistance to 132 people [95 men (72%) and 37 women (28%)] of whom 46 were assisted more than once for different requests and cases.

## PROVISION OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE

132  
people

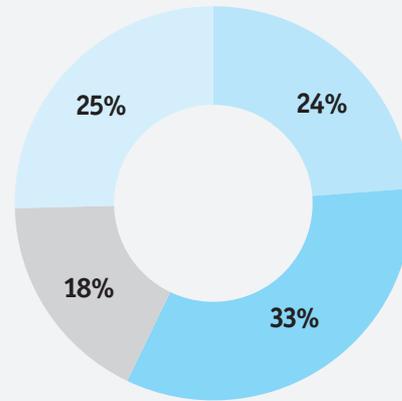


HOUSING CONDITIONS



- Homeless
- Living in transitional accommodation structures
- Living in precarious housing conditions

LEGAL STATUS OF 63 FOREIGN NATIONALS BENEFICIARIES



- Asylum Seekers
- Without Legal Documents / Undocumented
- Refugees
- Migrants

NATIONALITY



REQUESTS

**231**  
cases

- 82** requests for criminal cases
- 57** requests from refugees and migrants regarding the renewal of asylum seekers cards, residence permits, the issuance of legal documents or the registration of applications for international protection
- 27** requests for administrative support and referral to health services
- 23** requests for access to transitional housing structures
- 15** requests for the issuance of identity cards
- 9** requests for objections to fines imposed for non-compliance with measures linked with Covid -19
- 9** requests for civil law cases
- 7** requests for referral to an addiction treatment program
- 2** recordings of incidents of racist violence



A. lives in an accommodation facility in Athens and had to present regularly to a police station in the province due to the inability to move amid the pandemic, fearing that he could be arrested for non-compliance with the restrictive terms imposed on him. Following our contact with the competent authorities, he is now able to report to a police station in Athens.

M., 35 years old, was homeless and made abuse of psychoactive substances, while she had criminal cases pending in Athens and in the province. She asked for assistance for the update and settlement of her criminal cases. After having been informed and after having appeared before the competent authorities, she left with the assistance of Steps for her place of origin, coordinated her change of address in order to ensure her reporting to the police and today she is attending a treatment program.

A TOTAL OF 231 REQUESTS WERE RECORDED, NAMELY:

**82 requests for criminal cases:** review of criminal cases, determination of trial dates, change of address and of police department when there is a need of physical appearance to the police to report, contact with experts for the diagnosis of addiction to substances, contact with public prosecutors and judicial authorities for handling cases, referral to legal aid.

Regarding the assistance provided to the above requests, a lawyer of HumanRights360, following the granting of authorization, checks at the Prosecutor's Office of First Instance and the Court of Appeals of Athens for any pending criminal issues, warrants or criminal decisions that have not been enforced. People living on the streets, especially those with issues of substance abuse, the vast majority of whom have a criminal record, have experienced detention or imprisonment, they have to report to police stations and often due to homelessness, they do not have the opportunity to be informed about court appointments resulting in constant insecurity as there is a risk of being arrested and taken to prison. After all, prison, street and homelessness, are often a vicious circle. For this reason, in all the above cases, the beneficiaries are informed in writing about their criminal cases while their court appointments are being monitored. In addition, in cases where necessary, the police departments and the competent prosecutor's offices are contacted in order to change the address - mainly of people living in transitional hosting facilities, while in other cases, in consultation with the respective expert, we support people in arranging an appointment for diagnosis of their addiction, which is fundamental for the criminal treatment of psychoactive substance users.

### 15 requests for the issuance of identity cards

The loss or theft of legal documents of people living on the street constitutes an extremely common incident. This incident leads to the inability to access social and medical services, as well as the inability to receive welfare benefits in all cases in which they are granted. At the same time, many homeless people are unable to go to a police station to report the loss of their identity card, due to possible pending issues or due to previous violent or racist behavior by the police authorities. HumanRights360 and Steps, in addition to providing information regarding the process of re-issuance of identity cards and the monitoring of criminal cases in order to take the person safely to the police station, they also financially support the process in cases where it is required (payment of the required fee, cost of photographs) , while at the same time accompany the beneficiaries until the completion of the process.



R., a guest in a transitional hosting facility, lost his identity card and in every attempt to issue a new one, he faced constant denial from the police on the pretext that he was constantly losing it. Without it he could not receive the allowance he is entitled to at the end of each month. With the support of the project, he issued a new ID and continues to receive the allowance.

## 2 recordings of incidents of racist violence

HumanRights360, as an active member of the Racist Violence Recording Network, frequently records racist crimes reported in the field. As part of the Street Lawyering project, the following two incidents were recorded: a) an incident of a homeless recognized refugee, who in 2013 had fallen victim to a homicide attempt by members of the Golden Dawn party and suffered a severe neurological problem and b) an incident of a transgender person, who faced verbal assaults by police officers on her way to the police station for identification. At the same time, through the legal aid program for victims of racist violence implemented by HumanRights360, victims are informed about the possibility of legal representation in case they wish to formally report their targeting to the Authorities.



B. is a recognized refugee, a victim of racist violence with a serious neurological problem caused by the violence inflicted on him, he lives on the street without any resources and ability to work. Today he has obtained VAT and AMKA and has started his medical examinations, in order to be judged by a disability certification committee.

**57 requests from refugees and migrants** regarding the renewal of asylum seekers cards, residence permits, the issuance of legal documents or the registration of applications for international protection

Many of the persons who approached the project (48%) were refugees, asylum seekers and migrants with or without legal documents. These individuals addressed us asking questions about the asylum procedure, the renewal of their asylum seekers cards or residence permits, the conduct of interviews, as they could not be informed by the announcements of the Asylum Service and they had realized the complexity of the online applications, since many of them do not have access to the internet or are digitally illiterate, while the reception of the public at the Regional Asylum Offices of Attica was not allowed due to the pandemic. Within the framework of the program, moreover, there were cases of beneficiaries who wait for more than six months for the issuance or the renewal of their residence permit (ADET) and consequently the issuance of a Greek Social Security Number (AMKA /PAAYPA).

At the same time, there were people who for months could not register via skype and others who, while they had lived in Greece for many years, for various reasons, which had to do with their health status, the use of psychoactive substances or the lack of a supportive network and consequently their inability to renew older permits or the rejection of their application for international protection, were unable to make themselves legal and had to wait for the resumption of the appointment for the issuance of residence permits for exceptional reasons, which did not start until 22-1-2021. The above persons lacking legal documents (undocumented persons), are in fact excluded from the health system, the social services and the accommodation structures.

For some of those who were users of psychoactive substances, an attempt was made to include them in the category of issuance of residence permit on humanitarian grounds due to attending a treatment program. There are difficulties in this endeavor, both because of the restrictive interpretation of the term “detoxification” by the competent Ministry (which does not grant a residence permit on humanitarian grounds to those undergoing treatment

with substitutes or attending counseling programs - such as that of KETHEA MOSAIC which is also the only one addressed to beneficiaries of foreign origin) and due to possible previous criminal convictions against them that are erroneously regarded as a reason for their exclusion, as any danger has disappeared due to undergoing a treatment program and the subsequent treatment of their addiction, which in the majority of the cases has constituted the cause of delinquent behavior.



Ch. And L. have been in Greece for over 20 years. Due to the use of psychoactive substances at some point they were not able to renew previous residence permits resulting in the current lack of legal documents. They are awaiting a response to their requests for an appointment to be included in the issuance of residence permit for exceptional reasons. X.'s application for the issuance of a residence permit on humanitarian grounds due to attending a treatment program was rejected as he did not meet the conditions according to the administration. For L., who is also attending another institution's treatment program, despite the verbal refusal of the competent officials, the appointment has been set in one month's time.

### 9 requests for civil law cases

Many of the people living on the streets have been driven there due to the extreme economic crisis and the rapid rise in unemployment in recent years, but also due to the lack of a supportive family framework, while others are in immediate danger of losing their homes. The claims related to civil law cases, which were addressed through legal counseling and referral to the legal aid process, mainly concerned information regarding the eviction process, divorce and termination of civil partnerships, communication for debt settlement, issues of parental care and involuntary hospitalization.

### 23 requests for access to transitional housing structures

Although according to the emergency measures for the protection of the population “Homeless and drug-addicted people on the street shall be transferred, with the care of the relevant municipal authority, to appropriate municipal accommodation facilities and shall be provided with all possible care, food and treatment”<sup>1</sup> the majority remained in homelessness in the conditions of the pandemic. Unfortunately, due to bureaucratic obstacles, inaccessibility and long waiting times for entry into transitional accommodation structures operating in the Municipality of Athens, combined with the absence of broader housing solutions, many people fail to fit into existing structures. Sometimes due to their legal status or lack of documents and sometimes due to mental health issues or inability of self-care.

At the same time, many beneficiaries of international protection, who were invited to leave their accommodation places in the reception system within a month of the granting of the status, but also guests of the ESTIA and FILOXENIA programs who had to leave their houses or hotels **due to the expiration of the programs, were found in a condition of homelessness**. Many recognized refugees were also unable to join the HELIOS program either due to bureaucratic hurdles or due to the high level of autonomy required

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1 Article 7 JMD No.71342, G.G. B’ 4899 of 2020

for their integration (language proficiency level, pre-existing integration, etc.), and they were therefore left homeless.

The lack of adequate housing for these people (as there is no possibility of accommodation in the transitional hosting facilities of the municipalities due to the lack of interpreting services as well as due to lack of vacant posts but also due to the lack of overall integration policies), affects their integration process and leads to their exclusion from social services. HumanRights360 contacted all those in charge of the transitional housing structures to be informed about the admission criteria which are often unclear and sought to assist its beneficiaries by informing them of the process, sending referral notes and seeking alternative housing solutions (through cooperation with other organizations and alternative housing programs through the social integration service of the organization).



G., a user of psychoactive substances, had recently been released due to a certified disability and was living on the street without being able to receive the appropriate medication. He addressed us when the prosecutor requested the revocation of the decree with which he was released, due to the non-updated verification of the disability rate. Following our referral, he now lives in the IONIS hostel, he got an ID, started an addiction treatment program, started receiving his medication and the process of being referred to the KEPa was initiated, so that he would avoid going back to prison.

**27 requests for administrative support** (issuance of administrative documents, VAT, AMKA, unemployment cards, opening of bank accounts, referral to accountants for submitting tax declarations, KEA KEPA allowances, etc.) and referral to health services

During the period August 2020 – February 2021, both due to the suspension of work and reduced staff in the social structures of the Municipality and in the community centers, and due to the inability of the population to understand the process, we received requests for administrative support and provision of information regarding administrative procedures and the issuance of VAT and A.M.K.A., the opening of bank accounts, the process of submitting tax declarations and the issuance of a certificate of homelessness. The above documents are necessary and complementary for access to social services, the welfare system, housing structures and healthcare services.

In collaboration with the Social Integration Service of the organization, whose coordinator once a week supported the street work team, through escorts to the relevant Services and referrals to other civil society organizations (such as the accounting services of SolidarityNow and the program “Epikentro” of ActionAid), HumanRights360 and Steps have been in a position to address the needs of the population for administrative support.

The extremely important issue of the non-inclusion in the Guaranteed Minimum Income (formerly KEA) of people living in transitional hosting facilities and the consequent dependence on other structures and inability to autonomy, due to a complete lack of financial support is analyzed below in the section of advocacy actions. It is crucial to emphasize that the inclusion of homeless people in the Guaranteed Minimum Income is particularly difficult, due to the large number of documents required, the collection and safeguarding of which often encounters bureaucratic obstacles.



H., a homeless recognized refugee, wanted to apply for the guaranteed minimum income. After many failed attempts to issue a bank account, he approached us and finally managed to open an account and start receiving the allowance.

### **7 requests for referral to an addiction treatment program**

In the context of communication with people on the street and especially with users of psychoactive substances, who constitute 50% of the people who contacted us, sometimes requests arose regarding the referral to a treatment program. Our collaboration with the street work team of Steps, which stands by the people offering harm reduction material, enabled us to talk to people and understand the difficulties they may face regarding their treatment, especially in the current situation of the pandemic. The absence of a place for physical detoxification (detox) in Athens makes it difficult to direct active users to programs without substitutes (KETHEA, 18 ANO), while homelessness makes it difficult to provide treatment and leads to simultaneous use of substances or relapse.

### **9 requests for objections to fines imposed for non-compliance with measures linked with Covid -19**

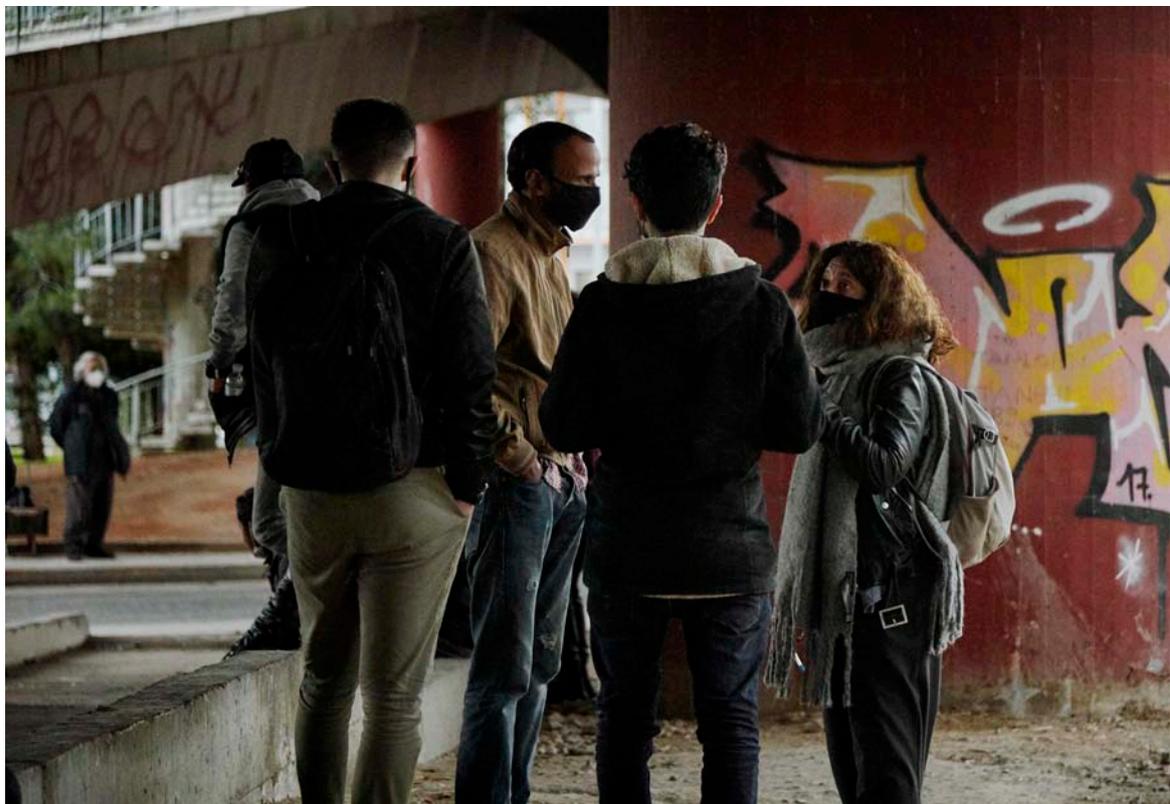
Since the beginning of the implementation of measures to address the pandemic, we have observed the phenomenon of imposing fines, both to the homeless and to people living in precarious conditions and working on the streets, without prior information by the Municipal Authority or other competent bodies with regard to the amendment of the legislation and the new regulations imposed and without previous warning or recommendations by the competent bodies.

HumanRights360 provided legal assistance as regards the objections to fines, invoking the principles of good administration and proportionality, the lack of public information in a language that people understand, and the inability of the population to obtain the necessary sanitary equipment and to have access to travel certificates or a mobile phone to send a message and of course the obvious inability of the homeless to “stay home”.

In four (4) cases the objections were accepted and the fines were canceled,<sup>2</sup> in three (3) cases they were rejected without justification, while in two (2) more cases concerning a homeless recognized refugee the objections were never answered.

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F., an asylum seeker and sex worker, was fined for not abiding by the restriction measures linked with the pandemic, because she did not wear a mask during the first days of the measures. F. was not informed, she was not provided with personal protection equipment by the authorities, nor was she given any recommendation before the imposition of a fine. The objections were accepted and the fine was canceled.



<sup>2</sup> See the relevant announcement of the organizations <https://www.facebook.com/HumanRights360org/posts/1723303294502054>.

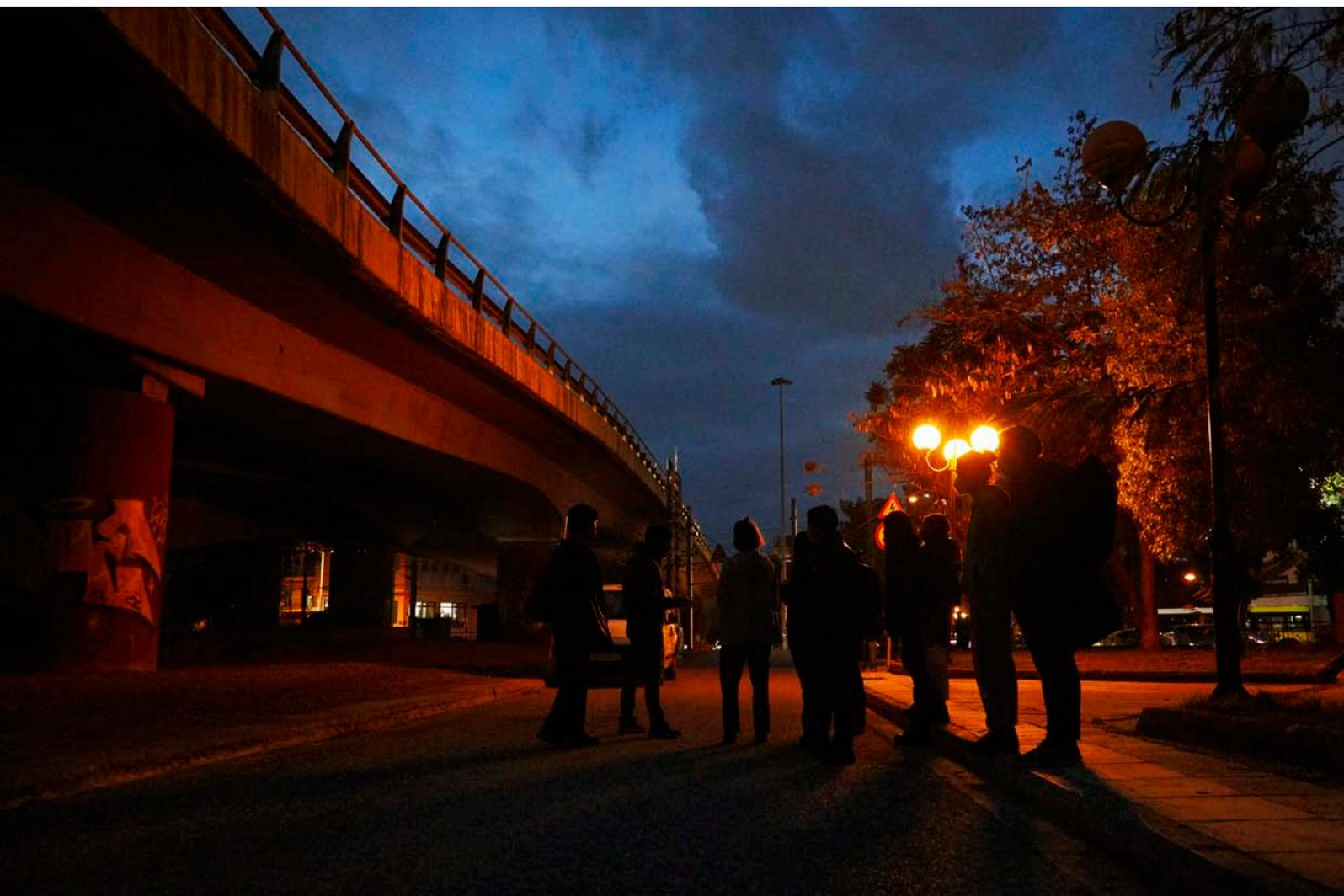
# ADVOCACY ACTIONS

HumanRights360 has actively participated in the public consultation of the draft law of the Ministry of Labor “Measures to strengthen workers and vulnerable social groups, social security regulations and provisions to help the unemployed” and specifically in the consultation of Article 4 entitled “Homeless Persons”, as beneficiaries of the Guaranteed Minimum Income. The definition of the homeless persons was updated with article 22 of Law 4549/2018 with the inclusion of the homeless people who made use of the dormitories (until then, only those who used the services of the Open Day Centers for Homeless People were included, but the people who were hosted in the Transitional Hosting Facilities were excluded from the program).

The above-mentioned exclusion combined with conditions of abject poverty and lack of welfare support, often led people to homelessness or made them stay in the dormitories for a short period of time in order to be eligible for the Guaranteed Minimum Income. In the cases of persons staying in transitional hosting facilities instead, persons were deprived of the necessary support in order to be able to proceed to the next steps towards an autonomous living.

Indeed, on 26-11-2020 Law 4756/2020 entered into force (Official Government Gazette A 235 / 26-11-2020). This law, which was welcomed by HumanRights360, provided for the inclusion in article 235 (2) (c) of persons who use transitional hosting facilities and accommodation facilities for survivors of violence that operate under the Municipalities, as beneficiaries of the Guaranteed Minimum Income. Unfortunately, until today, ie almost four months after the enactment of the law, no Joint Ministerial Decision has been issued that determines the terms and conditions of inclusion of the guests of the transitional hosting facilities in the Minimum Guaranteed Income.

As a result, people living in transitional housing structures may not be able to receive the above Guaranteed Minimum Income and their applications will be rejected due to the absence of a JMC. On 8-2-2021, Human Rights 360 and Steps published a text calling on the competent ministers to sign the JMC for the implementation of the law. At the same time, through the Street Lawyering program, two guests in a transitional facility for homeless people, whose applications for inclusion in the Guaranteed Minimum Income were initially approved and then canceled, have already appealed to the competent body of OPEKA and have filed a complaint with the Greek Ombudsman.



# COLLABORATIONS - NETWORKING

HumanRights360 is a member of the Greek Housing Network since 2018, and, since year 2019, a member of the Board of the Network.

Participation of HumanRights360, together with Steps, in the meetings of the platform for addiction with the National Coordinator for Drugs, which take place on a monthly basis and which provided the opportunity for further discussion and cooperation on issues that arise in the field and concern persons with issues related to drug abuse.

HumanRights360 participates in the Working Group being set up to draft the National Action Plan for Homeless Persons by the Secretary-General for Social Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty

Communication with experts in charge of the transitional housing structures for issues related to their operation, the conditions for the admission of people in homelessness and the referral procedure.

Communication with the social services of the transitional hosting facilities as well as treatment programs for the referral of the legal requests of the beneficiaries.

Communication with organizations in charge of street work therapeutic programs (KETHEA EXELIXIS, OKANA) for coordination in the field and referrals.

Liaison and communication with agencies and organizations that provide specialized services and programs for the referral of beneficiaries.

# COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

The announcement of this project was considered a separate challenge in itself, already from the beginning. More specifically, prior to the pandemic, there were very few publications and reports that focused on people in street conditions. It was crucial for us to get this action widely publicized so as to draw attention to the vulnerability and needs of these groups. To a limited extent, the debate started with the imposition of restrictive measures in the first lockdown (March 2020) but came back in the center of the public sphere through our interventions, resulting in a significant increase in reports.

The interest and approach of the media for the program were important parameters. In fact, it was a pleasant surprise both due to the awareness and the attention to detail which was paid by the respective media that hosted articles by the contributors of the project and /or reportage on the subject.

Simultaneously with the publicity in foreign media, our team participated in conferences on relevant topics, focusing on the issue and highlighting aspects that emerged from the daily experience of the project and from and contact with people who were / are on the street.

Here are some of the most important publications regarding the project:

- ▶ Interview for the [presentation of the Street Lawyering project](#) to the Greek team of the international news agency PRESENZA.
- ▶ Interview together [with a Steps representative and presentation of the project](#) on the Drug Reporter of the Rights Reporter Foundation website.
- ▶ Article in the [newspaper of Kathimerini](#) regarding the Street Lawyering project.
- ▶ Article in the Respect column of the online magazine VICE.
- ▶ Article in the [online newspaper News 247](#) with reference to the Street Lawyering program.
- ▶ Participation on 12-2-2021 [at the online conference organized by HumanRights360 and Epanodos](#) on “Education - Family and Culture. Reintegration factors “. The topic of the presentation was “ Former prisoners in homelessness and lack of a support framework”.
- ▶ Participation on 5-3-2021 [at the international conference organized by Interalia](#) on “Perspectives and limitations of subnational responses to the migration issue in Europe” and specifically in the panel on “Migrants and marginalized groups in the local context. Towards a cross-sectoral framework for the inclusion of diversity “.

# CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

## Accessibility to services

Our experience in the field has shown that people living on the streets lack access to basic health, social and legal services, mainly because the services of public support which could strengthen them and “bridge the gap” between their marginalization and the real access to them, may be typically but not in fact available. At the same time, there is a problem of lack of a central-common “portal” for the management of the requests of the population, which, results in them being forced to turn to many different services and agencies for the same request, without the services communicating centrally for their more efficient management and resolution.

For this reason, the central - non-specialized - services must find ways (professional training, reception of persons without the need for prior appointment, approach actions, extroversion) in order to improve the access of the homeless and other vulnerable people to them and to become open door services and on the other hand to overcome the many bureaucratic obstacles and the intricate paths that this population is called to face.

## Possibility of information provision

A common denominator of all the requests addressed to us by people on the street is the lack of information about their rights and capabilities, as well as the intricate paths to achieving their goals: If public administration is often an inaccessible, reluctant institution for the average citizen, let us try to imagine how much the difficulties are multiplied for our fellow human beings living in a

homeless state. The next goal of the project will be to disseminate information to the target population through brochures, cards about their rights and a “survival guide”, after gathering all the necessary information (as of today) by the competent authorities and actors in the field. In this way and following a step-by-step explanation of the stages and necessary conditions, it will be possible to understand basic rights as well as the way in which they can start claiming them.

### Accommodation in transitional housing structures

As regards the part of accommodation in transitional housing structures, the lack of immediate access and of emergency housing should be emphasized. The main goal, if available, should be the temporary accommodation of individuals until the resolution of procedural and administrative issues (eg issuance of identity cards or renewal of legal documents), with emphasis on the immediacy of the intervention. At the same time, we have observed the paradox that on the one hand there is no response to the housing needs of some groups of the population (of users of psychoactive substances due to the existence of a single accommodation facility of 90 places, of refugees and migrants due to lack of interpreting services, people with mental health issues or persons with disabilities due to the lack of specialized structures) and on the other hand the Multipurpose Center of the Municipality of Athens usually appears to have available accommodation places.

## Mapping of the population and the needs of each group: Women, people with mental health issues or disabilities, people who make abuse of psychoactive substances, former prisoners, recognized refugees, asylum seekers, people lacking legal documents.

The program also highlighted the need to truly map the population living in street conditions and provide care for the different needs of each group.

### WOMEN

Women for instance are a minority (28% of our beneficiaries) and are often “covertly homeless”, meaning that they have a temporary and precarious home, often remaining in a relationship with someone, and may be physically and sexually abused without being able to leave because they have no alternative housing options. Many times they work on the streets in precarious conditions in order to ensure a drug dose or the necessities for their survival, while neglecting their health. It is characteristic that, within the framework of the project, there were cases of women in advanced pregnancy, who had never visited healthcare services. The lack of information about the postpartum process and the consequent removal of parental care from women who use psychoactive substances increase their stigma and do not solve the problem.

For this reason, emphasis should be placed on approaching women living on the streets, informing them and facilitating their access to healthcare and welfare services. At the same time, safeguarding the rights of their children should be a key priority.

HumanRights360, observing the big problems that exist in the field regarding the access of the population to healthcare services, the existence of pregnant women living in the aforementioned inappropriate conditions and the urgent need for medical examinations for gynecological problems, communicated the idea

of creating a pilot mobile unit of outpatient clinics (for pregnant women) living in homelessness to the administration of the Elena Venizelou hospital and the President of the Center for Reception and Solidarity of the Municipality of Athens.

### B) PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH OR DISABILITY ISSUES

Moreover, an often invisible factor for people living on the streets is the mental health problems that many people face, which are often closely linked to homelessness. At the same time, people with disabilities living in homelessness face particular issues. These people, in addition to the fact that they are very difficult to reach, are often treated as “undesirable” by non-specialized services and structures. The lack of intervention and holistic care of homeless individuals with mental illness or disability, leads to a phenomenon of complete exclusion, both from social services and from housing structures of psychosocial rehabilitation and from accommodation structures. At the same time, the involuntary hospitalization of people with mental health issues and their referral to a psychiatric hospital, in cases where urgent treatment is needed, is used as a “panacea” to address the problem. The State should place special emphasis on the care of this population, through the creation of mobile mental health units, the establishment of prevention programs and especially the provision of housing and care through specialized structures.

### C) PEOPLE WHO MAKE ABUSE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

Another key category of the population living on the streets consists of people who make abuse of psychoactive substances. 50% of our beneficiaries belong to this category. The harm reduction services provided by actors in the field aim to prevent the onset of diseases and their transmission, as well as the prevention of phenomena of overdose and contribute to this purpose, but the absence of a plan and social integration of psychoactive substance users living in the street is a given fact. The creation of a tran-

sitional hosting facility for homeless users of psychoactive substances (at the IONIS hotel) a year ago was a first step towards the housing of this population, while the extension of its operation with the simultaneous creation of a dormitory by OKANA will certainly contribute to tackling the phenomenon.

It is of course necessary in the direction of safeguarding the rights of this population to ensure transparency regarding the conditions of entering and leaving the hostel, as well as the linking of individuals with the treatment programs. There is also an imperative need to create detox areas to treat the symptoms of the withdrawal syndrome in opioid users and to prepare for a further referral to an appropriate detoxification program as well as the creation of supervised injection sites (SIS) whose operation has been dramatically delayed although there is a ministerial decision that defines the terms and conditions for their establishment and operation as early as May 2019.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the phenomenon of violent repulsion and displacement of homeless users of psychoactive substances by the police - without any business plan for their housing and care- seen on the streets of Athens is particularly worrying. The Municipal Authority and the competent Ministries should cooperate and resolve the issue, so that people living on the streets and who are victims of the institutional deficits, receive support and access to basic services and do not experience violent behavior, especially by the police forces.

#### D) FORMER PRISONERS

Care should be also taken of former prisoners who are often part of the homeless population. Indeed, the effectiveness of successful social reintegration policies is mainly judged by its success in reducing relapse. And although imprisonment itself is a per se unfavorable condition for social reintegration, the drug abuse, the lack of family support, and the potential mental health issues, as mentioned above, exacerbate this difficulty and often lead to relapse. For this reason, in order to mitigate the risk of relapse and

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<sup>3</sup> Ministerial Decision No.40101( G.G. B 2266 of 11.06.2019), now No.25602 (G.G. B' 1607 of 27.4.2020)

stop the vicious cycle of imprisonment-homelessness-re-imprisonment, the first step for every released person is to have access to safe and stable accommodation. This can be achieved by developing clear cooperation protocols between detention facilities, EPANODOS and housing services, in order to properly plan the release of persons from prison and their subsequent reception by the housing services, in order to prevent any discharge that could bring them back to the street.

#### E) RECOGNIZED REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS, PERSONS LACKING LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Finally, special care must be taken of recognized refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented persons who are homeless or living in precarious housing conditions. Even more urgent is the need to care for unaccompanied minors living on the streets and whose number has increased dramatically in recent months following the abolition of the institution of protective custody and the creation of an institutional vacuum regarding their protection.

Out of the 132 people who contacted us, 63 were recognized refugees (25%), 17 asylum seekers (35%) (three of them not yet registered as such) and 20 migrants (40%) of whom the majority (12 persons) were undocumented, although they had lived in Greece for many years, waiting for the appointment for the issuance of residence permits for exceptional reasons (article 19 L.4251 / 2014). In terms of nationality, the sixteen different nationalities highlight the cultural diversity of the population we address. 70% of the people who contacted us come from six countries: Iran (18%), Bulgaria (12%), Pakistan (12%), Bangladesh (10%), Afghanistan (10%) and Syria (8%). 14% come from Maghreb countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya) and Egypt, while we also have beneficiaries from Sudan, Cameroon, Jordan, Russia, Iraq and Myanmar. It is noteworthy that out of the 49 people, 32 are homeless, 5 lived in the IONIS transitional hostel and 12 lived in precarious housing conditions. The afore-mentioned data highlight the absence of policies for the social integration of refugees and migrants, as well as the vast housing issue that arose after the end of the accommodation schemes.

Out of the 132 people who contacted us, 63 were refugees, asylum seekers and migrants with or without legal documents. Of these, 15 were recognized refugees (24%), 21 asylum seekers (33%, three of them pending international protection), and 27 migrants (43%) of whom the majority (16 persons) were undocumented although they had lived in Greece for many years. In terms of nationality, the nineteen different nationalities highlight the cultural diversity of the program's target population. 71% of those served come from six countries: Iran (16%), Bangladesh (14%), Pakistan (13%), Afghanistan (11%), Bulgaria (11%) and Syria (6%). 11% come from Maghreb countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya) and Egypt, while beneficiaries also came from Sudan, Cameroon, Jordan, Russia, Iraq, India, Albania, Palestine and Myanmar. It is characteristic that, out of the 63 people, 36 were homeless, 8 lived in a transitional hosting facility and 19 lived in precarious housing conditions. The aforementioned data highlight the absence of effective policies for the social integration of refugees and migrants, as well as the vast housing issue that arose after the end of the accommodation schemes.

It is sure that the absence of policies for the social integration of refugees and migrants, leads to their marginalization, excludes them from access to healthcare and welfare services and deprives them generally of all their fundamental rights. In the current context, the interconnection of services, the information provision in languages they understand and the implementation of integration policies are crucial.

All of the above groups and categories of people living in street conditions are intertwined with each other resulting in many having more than one of these "identities" and some others having them all. The Secretary General for Social Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty has already announced the re-census of the homeless population (following the previous pilot census in May 2018). It is important in the above census to capture and prioritize the basic needs of each group of the population, in order to ensure the improvement of the lives of people living in homelessness so that they cease to be victims of institutional deficits. At the same time, it is necessary to start designing and implementing social housing programs in Greece, with emphasis on the inclusion of all the above vulnerable groups of the population.

## Healthcare

As regards the component of healthcare, it should be emphasized that people living on the streets are particularly vulnerable to infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, most have underlying diseases, are users of psychoactive substances, exposed to the risk of contagion and infections, while there is no provision for mass tests for this group of the population. During the interventions in the community, there was a lack of care even in very serious cases due to the inability to access healthcare services, while the delay in providing first aid through EKAB has been impressive in all cases where the team had to intervene. Concerning the HIV-positive persons, the examination for monitoring the viral load is delayed due to the fact that the majority of the doctors of the infection units have been transferred to Covid reference hospitals.

At the same time, asylum seekers face a huge problem in their access to healthcare services as, despite their asylum seekers cards having been extended until March 2021, their P.A.A.Y.P.A. is automatically deactivated upon the expiration of the card without the possibility of activation being ensured due to the legal extension of the cards, while due to the digitization of the services and the lack of interpretation, it often becomes impossible to refer these people to healthcare services. Finally, unfortunately there is no plan for the time after their discharge from the hospital, for a subsequent follow-up of the homeless patient, with the result that the continuation of care after discharge from the hospital is non-existent. All of the above highlight a huge deficit in the healthcare of these population groups.

At the same time, due to the conditions of the pandemic, the need for vaccination of this population is imperative as their exclusion from vaccination in any way raises a major issue of discrimination and is a very important issue of public health. A campaign to inform the homeless population in languages they understand,

the conduct of mass tests before vaccination, the creation of mobile primary health care facilities in homeless environments to make access to health services easier and more direct and the possible prioritization of vaccinating particularly vulnerable individuals as well as individuals with underlying diseases, is of outmost importance.



# THE VISION

Through our action in the field, providing legal counselling to the most vulnerable population groups, we have realized both the complex problems they face and the complex needs that we are called upon to serve. Always based on the principles of empathy, respect, mutual trust, transparency, but also the perception of the trauma, we try to provide choices to people through an anthropocentric care, without discrimination.

Our vision is for the Street Lawyering pilot project to continue to be implemented and expanded both at a spatial level (in other neighborhoods of Athens and other cities in Greece) and at the level of technical staff with more lawyers, but also with mental health professionals and people from the community (people who have been homeless, persons who have undergone treatment programs) as case workers, so that through understanding and support from peers and an integrated intervention we can offer holistic care to the population.

As early as March 2021, our vision began to be implemented, as our team expanded through the current commitment of two lawyers in the field, as well as through training positions funded by Steps for the participation of mediators from the community and case workers for the most effective holistic case management.

At the end of the pandemic, it seems, more people will find themselves in homeless settings, experiencing the most extreme form of social exclusion and marginalization. The Street Lawyering project aspires to stay close to the vulnerable groups of the population and to become their “voice” with the aim to safeguard their fundamental rights.

Photographer: Yannis Zindrilis

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