

My name is Eleni Karabali and I have been working as a psychologist in a camp safe zone for the past 2.5 years. This is a facility where unaccompanied minors should reside for a very brief period, but there are children that have stayed with us for over a year.

Every day, I witness the difficulties experienced by these children. When they come to us, they find it difficult to trust professionals. They are experiencing the loss of their family, of their country and culture. During their journeys they are frequently re-traumatized and exposed to all kinds of exploitation, while upon reaching Greece, they are frequently detained. Thankfully, we see detention being used less and less, though conditions in the camp are similarly unsuitable for them. They need a shelter; a home where they can feel safe.

I also see how resilient most of these children are. It is this resilience that we aim to strengthen. We are trying to find their strong points and build upon them; trying to help them regain their trust and establish safe relationships of trust, because otherwise we can't do much for them. The process, however, is very difficult and conditions do not help. There is no stability.

The children live in a prolonged state of anxiety and insecurity. They are always waiting; waiting to reunify with their families; waiting to undergo their asylum procedure; waiting even up to 7 months just to be registered. The resulting anxiety, the insecurity is highly detrimental to their mental health. Especially this past year, with the pandemic, the children became isolated. They didn't go to school and the psychological impact on them was evident. We saw more symptoms of depression, sleep disorders, even cases of self-harm.

Then they turn eighteen and the situation worsens, because no matter how much we may try to prepare them for adulthood, conditions again do not help. They must suddenly move alongside the camp's adult population. The lucky ones may be transferred to an apartment. They tell us they feel good living in a home, in humane conditions. But they know that if they are granted asylum, they must leave again. And then what?

We have many cases of children that reached adulthood, went to an apartment, were granted asylum, and were then left completely hanging. They didn't know where to stay, where to work; they were faced with many problems of survival but had scarce opportunities available to them.

There should be a framework to ensure these children can have stable support after reaching eighteen, because reaching legal adulthood doesn't really change something. They are still vulnerable. They are still alone, in a foreign country. They need to have a roof, to be able to continue their education. They need to be able to go to the University, to find a job, not to be forced to become victims after running out of money. They need genuine opportunities, and when they have access to them, they can become more resilient in everything; they can establish healthy relationships, engage in activities and care for themselves. For me, this is the most important thing, and it is what I insist on the most.