

# Transitioning to Adulthood

## A Pathway to Autonomy & Self-reliance

- Practitioner's Guide -

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# Introduction

***Transitioning to Adulthood: A Pathway to Autonomy and Self-reliance*** is a pilot project that started in September 2019 and will conclude in August 2021. At the time of writing the project has completed 18-months.

This document has been created to benefit practitioners working in the field of migration generally, but most specifically for those working with children and young people aged 16 plus. Whilst the insights gleaned throughout the pilot so far are set within the specific context of Athens, Greece, many are principle based and can benefit those practitioners working at both the wider Greek, and pan-European levels.

If you would like to start a conversation based on any of the information or data shared within this document, please contact us via [info@veloyouth.org](mailto:info@veloyouth.org).

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# Context & History

Today there are 4,028 unaccompanied children in Greece with 930 experiencing homelessness (EKKA, 2021). Those turning 18 join the least supported cohort of displaced people in Europe: single young men. Unable to access secure housing and integration services, they lose guardianship and access to services which are often targeted at women, families and children.

Since 2017, Velos Youth has been supporting displaced young people to build independent lives in Greece, or to safely and legally reach an alternative destination that is in their better interests. This has been achieved through providing basic services and holistic case management that addresses legal assistance, education, employment, health and accommodation, taking place within a safe space and youth centre. **The *Transitioning to Adulthood* project was designed to further address the complex needs of young refugees residing in Athens**, by adding two more core services, delivered by two specialised partner organisations; livelihoods & social integration support provided by HumanRights360 and mental health services provided by Day Centre Babel.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges young people face, further complicating and restricting their access to secure accommodation, public healthcare, education and employment. Throughout the period the partners continued to adapt, maintaining consistent services and moving them online where possible.



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# Methodology



Youth Worker at Velos Youth running a Learning Support Session

*Transitioning to Adulthood* is therefore based on a holistic approach of working with young refugees and asylum seekers. From their first meetings in the safe space of Velos Youth (a youth drop-in centre) and through participating in various activities, professionals get to know the young people, identify their needs and cooperate to create an action plan. Depending on their urgent needs, their long-term goals, their strengths and their weaknesses, the newly created and now well-established referral pathways are accessed.

In cases where social workers identify psychological issues that need to be addressed, or if the young person him/herself asks for specialised psychological support, a referral is made to Day Centre Babel, located 1 mile from the Velos Youth Centre. If a young person has familiarised him/herself with certain aspects of daily life in Athens, she/he is 18 years of age or more and is in a position to communicate in Greek or in English, then a referral is made to HumanRights360. In both cases, appointments can be made in the short-medium term. For those under 18, Velos Youth provides an education support service, supporting young people to create *Learning and Education Action Plans* (LEAPs), referring and sign-posting them to a number of formal and informal educational opportunities and providing in-house *Learning Support Sessions*. Further referrals to lifelong learning programmes (vocational programmes, tertiary education) are made by HR360. There are certain cases in which all three organisations are involved and work together towards the best interest of the young person.

Generally speaking, interventions and referrals concern the medical, legal, educational, psychosocial and housing issues that young people face. In this respect, a community-based approach that also relies on different collaborations with a variety of other organisations is in place, always retaining the young person in the centre of the plan and at the core of decision making. Respecting the young person's inherent agency and autonomy is essential in aiding them to become fully autonomous within a context that deliberately puts barriers in the way of achieving this. The following page shows diagrammatically the coordination/referral mechanism in place for the *Transitioning to Adulthood* project.

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## SAFE SPACE

Velos Youth Centre is a safer space, that provides **basic services** such as food, showers, material items, and emotional support, and **facilitates access** to essential services. Within the space, a **varied program of activities** centred around well-being, social development and informal education fosters feelings of belonging, self-worth and community.



## CASE MANAGEMENT

Velos Youth's Youth Support Workers meet with young people 1:1 to identify their immediate needs, through a **registration process**. The individual is then connected to specialist services (psychological support, medical care, legal advice and casework, accommodation registration for minors, etc.).

Through the registration process young people are placed on the case management system that **monitors their needs, sets goals and tracks their progress**.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Young people in need of psychological support are referred directly to Day Centre Babel.

Counselling and psychotherapy services are conducted either in Day Centre Babel or Velos Youth, according to the needs of the young person. Day Centre Babel also provide **direct and indirect support to the environment of the young person** including family members and services/professionals that support/care for the young person in order to provide a more holistic approach.



### 16-17 years old

### 18+ years old

## EDUCATION

- Velos Youth's **educational engagement activities** connect young people to informal language classes, educational institutions and extra curricular activities, etc.
- Social workers give guidance on **how to navigate processes** to get the required papers for education.
- LEAP (Learning and Education Plan) tool is used to assist you people in thinking about engaging in education and their future goals.
- **Support with homework** is offered at Velos Youth.

## EMPLOYABILITY

- **Individualised support and workshops** on CV writing, searching for jobs, training and internships, soft skills, labor rights, etc.
- Guidance **navigating processes** to obtain required papers and numbers (AFM, etc.)
- Facilitate access to **Greek language courses, vocational trainings and other educational opportunities**
- Livelihoods officer **networks with employers and locating opportunities**.



## INTEGRATION PROGRAM

Young people in need of extra support on livelihoods and employability are referred to HR360's current integration program.

## Preparation for 18

Individualised support and workshops, held at Velos Youth by HR360, aimed at **preparing 16-17 year olds for turning 18**. These aim to mitigate the consequences of the drastic reduction in support when turning 18. For example, **workshops on autonomy, employability and planning**.

## Support Securing Accommodation

With the guidance of a Social Worker, participants are aided in securing accommodation. The project **supports young people at similar life stages to work together** to source, share the cost of accommodation and maintaining their accommodation. Additionally, Livelihoods Officers conduct referrals to supported accommodation schemes.

# Impact Data

- 80 young people** built a pathway to self-reliance and autonomy, of which;
- 8 young people** secured safe accommodation;
- 34 young people** received consistent psychological care, with 441 sessions conducted;
- 16 young people** found jobs;
- 8 young people** registered in public education;
- 10 young people** were supported to create Learning & Education Actions Plans; and
- 2 young people** succeeded in furthering their education with a scholarship at the University of People.

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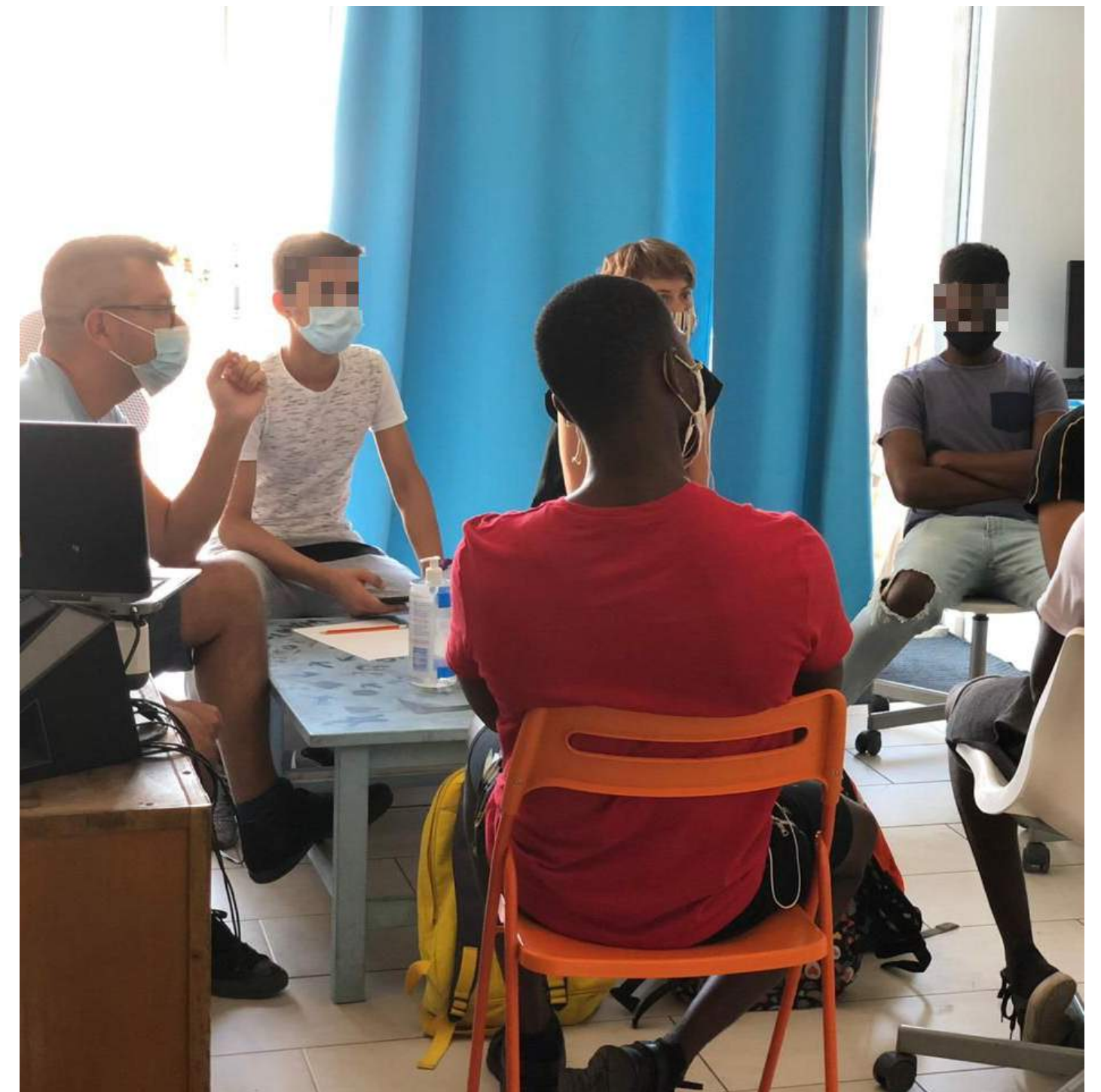
# Lessons Learnt & Recommendations

The following items are arranged into two core headings, and have as much as possible been generalised in order that they be considered within other contexts. We see that the profiles of young people on the move in different contexts overlap, as a number of common challenges exist; many find themselves within inefficient systems, with limited access to the services and support they need to re-start their lives, to become autonomous, and to integrate into their new society. Young person's feedback was collected via focus groups as part of this evaluation and reflection.

## What we have learnt about the needs and resilience of young people

**1** The young person's ability to make decisions, and their motivation to implement actions that will move them forward and integrate, do not often correlate with the progress they make. Autonomy is therefore a complicated issue, and the level of autonomy that can be fairly expected from a young person, and the rate at which this can be achieved, should be (and is) determined by the context. In Athens, for example, autonomy is notoriously difficult to achieve, due to the systemic failings of and inaccessibility of state services that are designated to aid integration and reduce reliance on the state; whilst young people wish to integrate, they are actively excluded from doing so. All young people referred to experiencing discrimination and an unwillingness for productive communication in their contact with a variety of public services. In this way, having someone to accompany them there would give them back a sense of security, although the issue seems to be more structural than it appears.

**2** Different stages in a young person's reality in Greece, can mean different coping strategies and ways of resilience. For a newcomer, frequent visits to a safe space like Velos Youth can help with the fulfilment of basic service needs such as food, shower and laundry, but can, also, give to the young person a sense of belonging and feelings of closeness to other people with the same problems. In this sense, the creation and development of an initial social network apparently gives them some sense of stability and a way to go forward. Furthermore, the adaptability to new situations and the existence of short-term and long-term goals, together with a developed sense of belonging, can act as powerful resilience mechanisms.



*Feedback discussion with young people in the Velos Youth Centre*

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*Creative Bloggers workshop in the Velos Youth Centre*

**3** Our aim is to facilitate young people to connect with their already existing resilient parts, assets, strengths, and retained levels of functionality, despite their adversities. Beyond that, we try to also shed light to the new positive parts emerging because of the encounter with changes and adversities, for example the development of new skills, increased strength and maturation; an empowering process for them. Of course, being resilient does not mean remaining untouched by adversities; an individual can show resilience and vulnerability at the same time.

**Resilience is developed in a relational matrix.** Contextual factors and the interaction between individuals and the various systems to which they belong (family, school, work, community) can influence the emergence of resilience. The existence of a consistent, caring and supportive environment can therefore facilitate a young person to become more resilient and professionals working with young refugees can function as ‘important adults’; mainly for the ones who lack parental figures. Moreover, peer support is critical for these young people. Strong peer relationships and the perceived peer acceptance are associated with the young person’s well-being. Activities shared with peer groups work, also, as effective distractions from the painful parts of life.

**4** Young people underlined **the importance of meaningful referrals to specialised organisations, in an otherwise rather “blurry” map of services.** They referred to the significance of direct communication with different professionals from all three partners and to the availability that professionals provided to listening to their needs or simply be there for them when a young person was having a hard time. The links that are created between partner organisations and the ways in which one addresses different needs, is something that young people find helpful because it also maps more clear boundaries and distinct roles.

**5** There is a common feeling of temporality that undermines all the efforts and the decisions that the young people make. Each individual has of course different needs and challenges but this feeling seems to be common for most young people that we work with. This demonstrates an instability which doesn't aid long term educational engagements and aspirations for a better future. This sense of temporality along with the economic pressures lead the young people to seek short term solutions regarding education and employability. This is also underlined by the fact that most young people believe that they would be better off in another European country where they would have a steadier environment and therefore time to study and improve their livelihood.

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## What we have learnt about the methodology, its effectiveness and shortcomings

**1** As much as possible we observed that **creating personal contacts and collaborations** both in other organisations and in public services (tax offices, schools) **can be beneficial in trying to surpass key barriers to entry or access**. Fundamentally though this is a *necessary evil*, as it could be argued that this goes against the principal of equity. Who you know should not determine what access you receive.

**2** Linked to point one, **cross-cutting focused advocacy is therefore a critical element to any project that aims to achieve equitable access to services and rights within the public system**. Advocacy actions may include reports, articles, ad hoc support and collaboration. This is not to say that it excuses the use of personal contacts and relationships, but that over time any future negative consequences may be gradually reduced.

**3** On the topic of autonomy, **more consideration is needed for young people without basic legal protection documents and young people who do not speak either a national or a vehicular language**. Accompaniment by non-professional personnel (e.g. youth assistants or mentors) would make allowances for the significant initial barriers to achieving even the most seemingly basic level of autonomy. Accompaniment by local people who understand bureaucratic systems, have some basic training in safeguarding and youth work and can help young people get past the initial stages associated with integration, and could therefore greatly enhance the methodology. This type of 'leveling-up support' would enable initial access to public services that cover asylum, tax, healthcare and possibly public education.



Employability workshop by HR360 in the Velos Youth Centre

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1-1 discussion between a young person and a Social Worker in the Velos Youth Centre

**4 Sustainable long-term partnerships bring benefits that short and ad hoc partnerships often cannot.** The formalised referral pathways created, enable the provision of consistent services whilst managing young people’s expectations. Well managed partnerships can reduce waiting times by understanding, and not going beyond, capacity within an agreed level of service provision; enabled by the setting of realistic targets and the regular revaluation of these targets. Sustainable long-term partnerships also allow for the setting of beginning and end dates, and for safe closure of services if funding is not secured beyond a foreseen date. The ongoing and increasing needs of the specific population, together with the present unstable socio-economic situation, underline the urgency for a continuation of the project, so that fragmentation and disruption of available services is avoided.

**5 There is a need for centralised systems/databases, updated in real time, in order to maximise the number of cases and actions attainable.** Apart from the databases created, there is a need for communication between professionals. This is achieved through bi-weekly structured case meetings in which evaluation and planning of active cases is done. Moreover, we have succeeded to have an active and frequent communication when significant changes in young people’s conditions take place or when urgent actions are needed, always taking in mind a young person’s safety and welfare. Within any new partnership time must also be apportioned to monitoring and evaluation of the partnership itself, in order for professionals to adjust to new organisational ways of working.

Find out more about each of the organisations here



**Velos Youth**

<https://velosyouth.org/> | [info@velosyouth.org](mailto:info@velosyouth.org)



**HumanRights360**

<https://www.humanrights360.org/> | [contact@humanrights360.org](mailto:contact@humanrights360.org)



**Babel Day Centre**

<https://babeldc.gr/en/homepage/> | [babel@syn-eirmos.gr](mailto:babel@syn-eirmos.gr)

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