vela
Greece

bi-annual report



Vela Greece

VELA, HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION FOR PROTECTION AND EDUCATION

2024-2025



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message from the CEO

2024 marked the beginning of Vela's operational presence in Greece and a defining moment in the evolution of our organisation. Following the transition from Anthropomania to Vela Greece, we set out not simply to continue existing work, but to establish a model grounded in professionalism, speed of response and technical depth in child protection.

This first year coincided with increasing migration pressures and significant strain on the national reception system, particularly in relation to unaccompanied children. In that context, Vela focused on addressing immediate protection gaps while laying the foundations for a structured and sustainable operational presence.

We launched the Safe Zone in Malakasa and played a key role in responding to the surge of arrivals in Crete, where the needs were urgent and complex. At the same time, we began developing integration-oriented programming, including the initial phase of the HELIOS Junior apartments for young adults transitioning out of child protection systems. Alongside these core interventions, we engaged in targeted actions such as the SAFE project combating violence against children, as well as emergency support to Palestinian medical evacuees to Greece, gradually expanding both the scope and depth of our work.

In 2025, we moved from initial deployment to consolidation and scale. The opening of the Safe Zones in Drama and Kavala marked an important step in strengthening the national protection network and ensuring more geographically balanced responses. Across both years, our work remained focused on delivering structured, reliable services in environments where consistency and quality are often difficult to maintain.
Partnerships have been central to this effort. Our cooperation with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, IOM, and other institutional and private donors enabled us not only to operate, but to do so with accountability and clarity of purpose. Equally important has been our coordination with protection actors, local partners and frontline professionals, ensuring that our interventions are integrated within the broader protection system.

From the outset, we have invested in building a strong team capable of operating under pressure while maintaining high standards. We consider this a core element of our work: effective humanitarian response depends on people who are supported, trained and able to deliver consistently.

This period has been one of establishment, expansion and learning. We have moved quickly, but deliberately, focusing on building an organisation that can respond in the present while preparing for the challenges ahead. Our objective remains clear: to be present where it matters, and to deliver services that are both immediate and meaningful for the children and young people we serve.

Pantelis Dimitriou

VELA across borders

The constellation of VELA organisations continues to grow across borders, forming a dynamic and collaborative network grounded in shared values and a community-based approach. VELA now operates in Greece, Poland, and Cyprus, adapting its work to the diverse needs of vulnerable populations in each national context.

In Greece, VELA focuses on supporting unaccompanied children in safe zones and safe areas, working in close partnership with national authorities and international organisations. As an accommodation partner of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), VELA Greece plays a key role in providing protection and daily support to children who are otherwise at high risk of exploitation and marginalisation. Plans are underway to expand programming in 2026 to additional regions across the mainland.

n Poland, VELA delivers structured education programming and integration support with additional ad hoc activities implemented in response to emerging needs. Our interdisciplinary teams provide integrated support focused on social inclusion, psychosocial well-being, and community engagement, with a strong emphasis on vulnerable groups such as women and children.

In Cyprus, VELA provides structured educational activities and recreational programming for children living in refugee camps and in our dedicated education centre in Nicosia city. These efforts aim to reduce social exclusion, promote psychosocial well-being, and restore a sense of normalcy and stability for displaced children.

Together, the VELA network forms a flexible, values-driven alliance—responsive to changing needs, committed to community-led solutions, and united by a shared mission to support people on the move and others at risk of marginalisation, wherever they may be.



how we work

At Vela, putting people first is our top priority. We are dedicated to serving our target communities to the best of our abilities, and constantly enhancing the skills of our team. By implementing effective systems, we support our staff to achieve their best performance, and excel in challenging scenarios. Our focus is on nurturing professionals who can thrive in intricate situations, providing them with opportunities to demonstrate their potential as we progress. Clinical supervision, staff care, training, and support are embedded in our programming cycle, and our daily routine.

We constantly measure the impact of our work on our target communities, striving to engage them in constructive dialogue. Feedback and accountability is essential to our work, as we leverage community input, to push for change in how we work alongside them and for them.

We constantly challenge our operation modalities to ensure we are at the top of our game, and we make efficient and effective use of our resources, while maintaining our flexibility to respond to emergencies and changing situations swiftly.

We work side by side with our donors, striving to maintain a "partner-on-the-ground' role in our cooperation, providing expertise, and insight into the evolving challenges of target communities, that helps shaping strategy, and focus on what is important to fund. We analyse the general environment where we work, and make valid predictions on government, and other institutional policy makers, that will shape the operational context where we work.

Vela mission

we empower the journey



Where we work



starlight

uplifting spirits during challenging times

Originating as an immediate response to individuals facing distress, whether in transit or situated in emergency facilities like reception sites and shelters, Starlight mitigates the impact of trauma and distress resulting from displacement, loss of familial ties, and disruptions to one's accustomed way of life.

In recent years, Greece has experienced a steady increase in the arrival of unaccompanied migrant children (UMC) via the Mediterranean routes, particularly through the Central Mediterranean corridor. This trend intensified throughout 2024, placing significant pressure on national reception capacities and child protection systems, especially at key entry points in Northern Greece.

Against this backdrop, the Malakasa Reception and Identification Center (RIC) remained one of the main reception points for UMC, facing a sharp rise in arrivals that resulted in severe overcrowding and heightened protection needs. In response, VELA Greece, under the coordination of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), launched MERIMNA III in April 2024, for the establishment and operation of a Safe Area dedicated to the protection of unaccompanied children in the camp . The programme provided 24/7 child protection services, psychosocial support, legal assistance, medical referrals, safeguarding and Best Interest Assessment Procedures, as well as educational, recreational, legal support, and in-kind support for children accommodated in the **Malakasa Safe Area**.

Building on this response, MERIMNA IV was implemented from April to September 2025, ensuring the continuity of emergency protection services at Malakasa and expanding operations to the **Drama Safe Zone** until 14 October 2025. The programme strengthened case management, psychosocial support, and legal assistance, while maintaining round-the-clock protection coverage across both locations.

As of 15 October 2025, operations at the Malakasa Safe Area and Drama Safe Zone transitioned to the EPA funding framework, ensuring continuity beyond MERIMNA IV. Under the same framework, a new **Safe Zone in Kavala** became operational on 20 October 2025, further expanding VELA Greece's child protection capacity in Northern Greece. All activities were integrated under the programme "Strengthening the protection system for unaccompanied minors and vulnerable women."

Despite persistent challenges—including overcrowding, infrastructure strain, high arrival rates, delays in guardianship appointments, and limited interpretation services, VELA Greece maintained a continuous field presence and delivered a high-quality, multi-sectoral protection response. The MERIMNA programmes have become VELA Greece's flagship child protection intervention, demonstrating the organization's capacity to operate at scale in complex humanitarian settings.

starlight



Since April 2024

- 2700 UMC accommodated
- 1329 PSS Individual/Group Sessions
- 197 Educational Activities
- 13 Other Activities



Since May 2025

- 190 UMC accommodated
- 460 PSS Individual/Group Sessions
- 85 Educational Activities
- 110 Community integration and Other Activities



Since November 2025

- 30 UMC accommodated
- 111 PSS Individual/Group Sessions
- 24 Educational Support
- 17 Community integration and Other Activities

starlight



Malakasa Safe Area

Drama Safe Zone



Kavala Safe Zone



starlight

For many unaccompanied migrant children (UMCs) in Greece, turning 18 signifies not only the transition to adulthood but also the abrupt withdrawal of essential protection. Upon reaching legal adulthood, they become ineligible for specialized accommodation and guardianship support. As a result, many are compelled to assume independence without adequate preparation, secure housing, or clearly defined pathways to integration. This fragile transition substantially heightens the risk of homelessness, unemployment, social exclusion, and exploitation.

The HELIOS Junior programme, launched in late 2024 and ongoing until 2027, was designed to address this critical gap. Building on the broader HELIOS framework implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Greece, HELIOS Junior targets approximately 2,000 young adults aged 18–21 who were previously unaccompanied minors in Greece. The programme aims to equip them with the tools, stability, and opportunities necessary to achieve sustainable independence and meaningful access to the labour market.

As an implementation partner, VELA Greece plays a vital role in ensuring safe accommodation and comprehensive daily support. During 2024, VELA focused on preparatory activities for the accommodation component of the project, including a comprehensive market assessment and the mapping of potential apartments in Thessaloniki. These efforts ensured that suitable housing options would be ready for timely implementation.

Through the operation of apartments in Thessaloniki, VELA provides not only secure housing but also a stable and supportive environment in which young people can develop essential life skills, prepare for employment, and engage actively in their host community. By ensuring safe housing, daily support, and pathways to labour market integration, VELA Greece helps young adults who were once unaccompanied minors avoid marginalisation and build sustainable futures. Although still in its early implementation phase, the programme already represents a cornerstone of integration policy in Greece, with VELA's role in Thessaloniki underscoring a strong commitment to youth self-reliance, dignity, and long-term inclusion.



starlight

Objectives

- Ensure safe, stable accommodation for young adults transitioning from UMC status.
- Provide daily support and practical guidance that helps beneficiaries develop independent living skills.
- Facilitate labor market integration, ensuring beneficiaries gain access to training, internships, or employment opportunities.
- Promote social inclusion and psychological stability, addressing the specific vulnerabilities of this age group.

Output

145 verification visits

44 accommodation places

58 males, 1 female

70 applications

17-20 years old

59 beneficiaries accommodated

11 nationalities

In 2025, a sharp increase in arrivals of UMC, combined with a persistent shortage of transportation and accompaniment services—particularly after March 2025—placed significant strain on Malakasa Safe Area. These challenges resulted in serious overpopulation, deteriorating living conditions, an increase in violent incidents, and the spread of infectious diseases.

In response to these critical gaps, VELA designed and implemented a privately funded **transportation and accompaniment mechanism**, coordinated from Malakasa but serving the national UMC accommodation system. The initiative aimed to alleviate pressure on the Malakasa Safe Area by facilitating the safe and timely transfer of children to alternative accommodation options across the mainland. Through this mechanism, VELA supported the decongestion of Malakasa, improved living conditions for UMCs, and maximized the use of available capacity in Northern Greece and other mainland locations. A total of 15 transfers were conducted over a period of 7 months for 520 children.

Central to the intervention was the provision of safe, accompanied transfers between Safe Areas, Safe Zones, and long-term accommodation facilities, ensuring that all movements were conducted in line with child protection standards and the best interests of the child. By maintaining a high level of safeguarding throughout the transfer process, the initiative contributed to strengthening continuity of care within the national protection system and mitigating risks associated with prolonged stays in overcrowded reception settings.

Output

Transfers ranged from single high-risk medical cases (1 child) to large decongestion movements of up to 90 children at a time.





Examples of documented routes in 2025:

· From Malakasa Safe Area to Diavata Safe Area (Northern Greece)
· From Malakasa Safe Area to Drama Safe Zone, Vagiohori Safe Zone and Alexandria Safe Zone
· From Fylakio Safe Area and various Safe Zones (Alexandria, Vagiohori) to Diavata and Drama Safe Zone
· From hospital (Sismanogleio) to long-term accommodation in Athens
· From Malakasa Safe Area to multiple long-term accommodation shelters in Athens and Northern Greece

Education for a future

Between April and July 2025, VELA implemented a structured Education Programming initiative at the Attiko Alsos site, addressing the educational and psychosocial needs of 15 Palestinian children residing at the facility after the direct request by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. The programme was delivered through regular sessions and continuously adapted to the evolving realities of the site, including fluctuations in attendance, varied age groups, and diverse educational backgrounds.

The intervention aimed to establish a stable, supportive, and child-friendly learning environment by integrating educational content with play-based and creative activities. Sessions were conducted in small groups or, when necessary, on an individual basis, enabling facilitators to tailor their approach to each child's learning level, pace, and emotional needs.

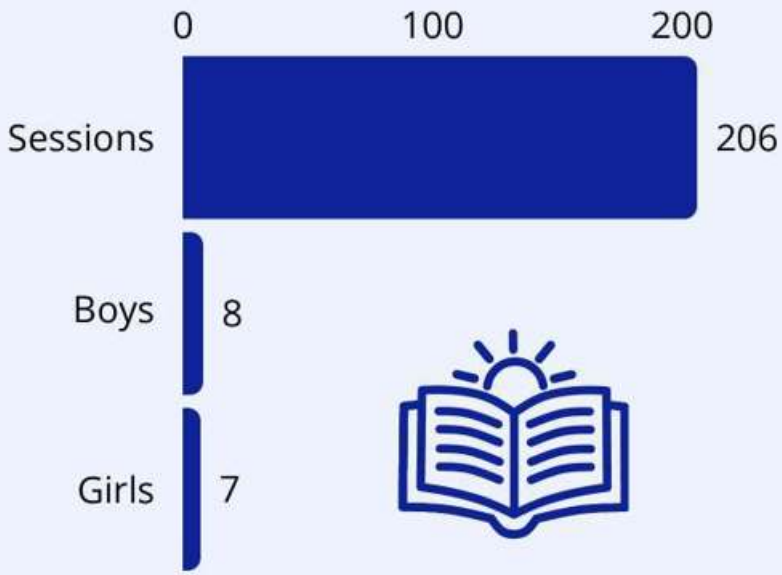
Education programming was implemented six days per week, following a clear and consistent timetable. Each day included three distinct educational groups corresponding to pre-school, primary-school, and secondary-school-age children (Gymnasium/Lyceum). Every group participated in a structured educational programme on a daily basis, ensuring regular engagement and continuity for all participants.

The programme was delivered through a collaborative model involving VELA staff alongside members of an established volunteer group already active on site. This approach ensured continuity of care, familiarity with the children and their families, and effective coverage of educational needs, while also providing formal recognition and remuneration for the educational services delivered.

Educational activities focused primarily on the development of foundational learning skills and language acquisition, with an emphasis on repetition and gradual progression. Children participated in introductory Greek language activities, including familiarisation with the Greek alphabet, basic vocabulary related to everyday life, and simple phrases used in daily communication. Numeracy sessions supported early mathematical skills through counting, number recognition and writing, and the use of games and objects to connect numbers with quantities.

In addition, group-based and experiential activities—such as cooperative games, movement-based exercises, and creative workshops implemented both indoors and outdoors—were incorporated into the programme. These activities played a key role in supporting emotional expression, strengthening social interaction, and gradually restoring a sense of routine, safety, and normalcy for children affected by displacement.



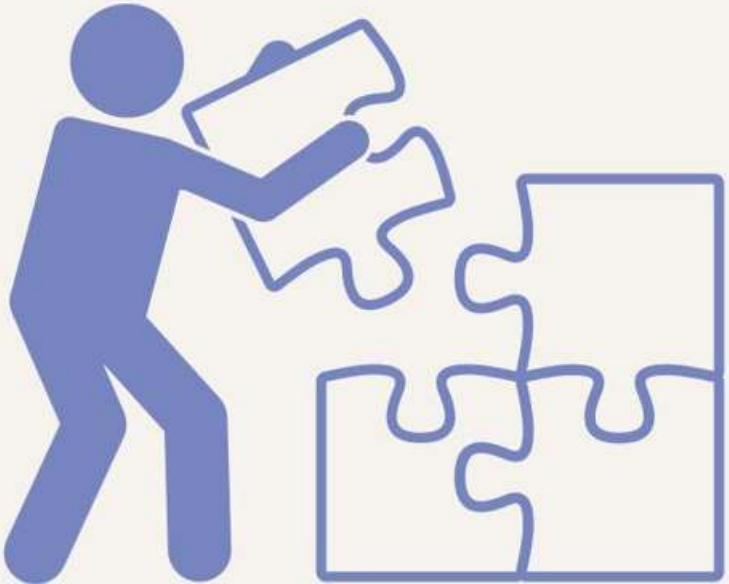


Strengthening Communities

In 2025, VELA Greece further strengthened its child protection and youth empowerment portfolio through the implementation of two complementary, EU-funded initiatives addressing violence prevention, accountability, and the social inclusion of young migrants.

Vela launched an EU-funded project under the Daphne-CHILD Programme, **SAFE: Support and Awareness for Future Empowerment,** running from April 2025 to May 2026. Implemented in close coordination with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, the General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection and other local authorities, the project aimed to enhance children's understanding of violence and their rights, strengthen the capacity of non-specialist frontline staff to identify and respond to violence, and establish a child-friendly digital reporting mechanism. VELA conducted participatory consultations with unaccompanied children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds through focus group discussions, creative workshops, and participatory exercises on safety and disclosure, ensuring that the reporting mechanism reflects children's lived experiences and is accessible, confidential, and child-friendly. In parallel, VELA completed the design and testing of the SAFE digital reporting platform, integrating GDPR, safeguarding, and consent protocols, while delivering targeted trainings that enabled 100 frontline workers to strengthen their capacity to prevent violence and respond safely to disclosures, contributing to a more protective environment on site level.

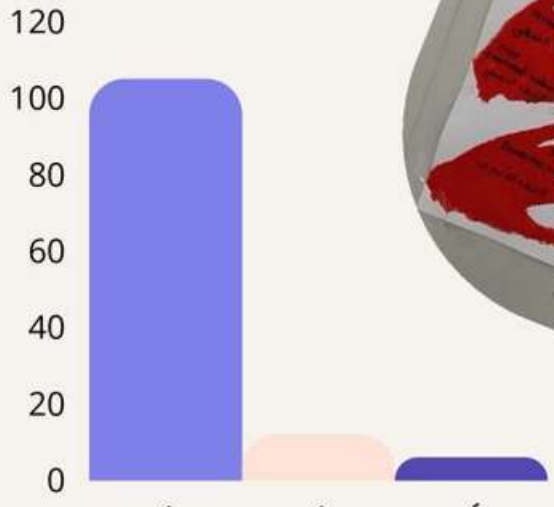
In September 2025, Vela joined the **BRIDGE** Project, a transnational initiative funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ KA220 programme, coordinated by IOM. The project aims to strengthen the capacity of youth workers and youth-serving organizations to prevent marginalization and radicalization among young migrants through comparative research, training, and peer education methodologies. It is implemented by "Parsec Cooperativa Sociale" in partnership with four organisations from five European countries: Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, and Greece. During the initial implementation phase, Vela focused on foundational research and coordination activities. Throughout 2025, VELA conducted extensive desk research mapping the Greek reception and integration system for unaccompanied and accompanied migrant minors, national youth work structures, and intercultural mediation practices, completing the core sections of this research by the end of the year and contributing to a comparative report to be finalized in early 2026. In parallel, VELA plans to develop focus group discussion guides, participant selection criteria, and ethical and safeguarding protocols to be applied consistently across the project's five partner countries, adapting these tools to the Greek context to reflect the realities of reception facilities, youth centres, and community-based organizations. These activities constitute the groundwork for subsequent project phases, including training needs assessments and field-based research.



aurora

Output







Our Donors

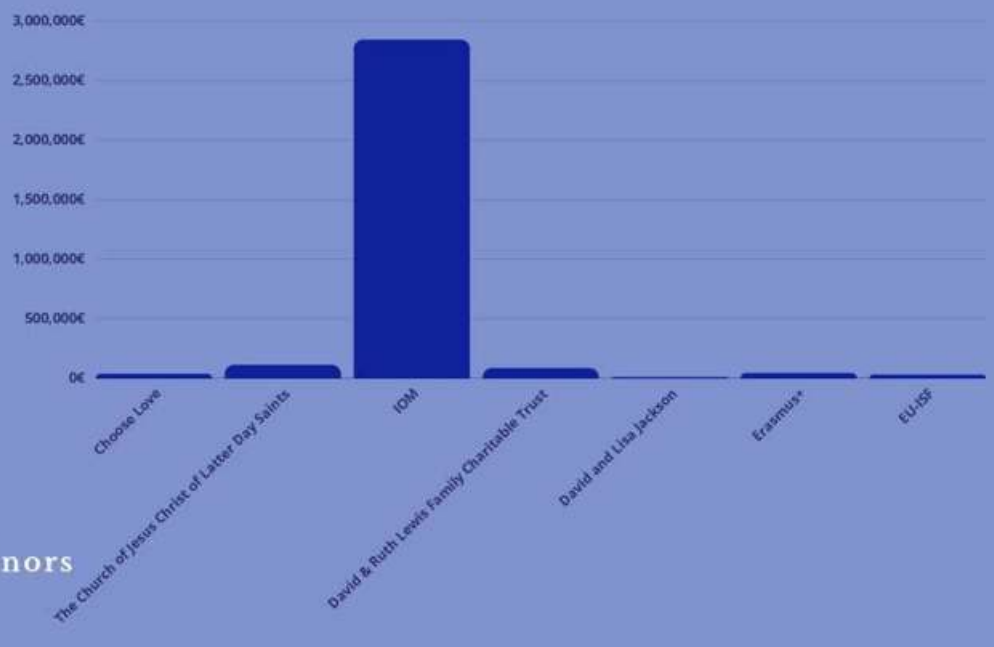
At VELA, we take great pride in fostering strong and lasting relationships with our donors—relationships built on transparency, collaboration, and shared purpose. We actively involve our supporters in our work, creating meaningful opportunities for them to engage with our activities, see the challenges firsthand, and witness the impact their contributions make in the lives of vulnerable individuals and communities.

The years 2024 - 2025 marked a significant affirmation of these relationships. We strengthened our collaboration with long-standing donors, many of whom have been with us since VELA's inception and continue to stand by us today. We were also honoured to welcome new donors who joined our mission along the way, and we are deeply grateful for the trust they have placed in us to deliver the change they want to see in the world.

Our partnerships are rooted in shared values, a common understanding of the challenges faced by displaced and vulnerable populations, and a mutual commitment to providing meaningful, dignified support. This collective dedication brought us even closer together in 2025, as we worked hand in hand to improve people's lives—whether through long-term programming or rapid emergency responses.

We are especially grateful for the swift and unwavering support many of our donors provided during urgent response operations. Their responsiveness reflects a shared mission: to be present, adaptable, and compassionate—supporting people when and where it matters most.
To all our donors: thank you. Your generosity fuels our work, and your partnership inspires us to continue with diligence and integrity. We remain committed to ensuring your contributions have the greatest possible impact on the communities we serve.

Our Donors' Contributions



IOM

Funded Starlight (SA Malakasa, SZ Drama/Kavala, Helios Junior)

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Contributed to the operation of Peak and Helix

Choose Love

Contributed to the operation of Peak and Helix

Erasmus+

Funded the Daphne-Child Project

David & Ruth Lewis Family Charitable Trust

Contributed to the operation of Peak and Helix

European Commission

Funded the BRIDGE Project

David and Lisa Jackson

Contributed to the operation of Peak and Helix

our partners

Helios Junior

implemented in consortium with PRAKSIS, MetaDRASI, Iliaktida, SolidarityNow, EKPOSPO Nostos, Faros Elpidas, Ploigos

PEAK

General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons & Institutional Protection, Ministry of Migration and Asylum

Aurora Daphne

EUROCHILD AISBL

Erasmus+

Parsec, QBS, Creativa Association, Changes&Chances



looking ahead
-
strategy 2026

As we enter 2026, VELA will focus on consolidating its operations, strengthening quality assurance and safeguarding standards, and ensuring the continuity of essential services for children and young people in highly pressured reception contexts. Building on the experience and lessons of 2025, we will prioritize effective coordination, timely referrals, and system-level responses that help reduce overcrowding and enhance protection outcomes for the most vulnerable.

At the same time, we will continue to balance emergency response with longer-term integration, prevention, and capacity-building approaches. We remain committed to staying adaptable and responsive to evolving humanitarian needs, while maintaining a child-centered and rights-based approach across all interventions.

In 2026, we will further expand our child protection capacity by investing in specialized staff, strengthening case management systems, and reinforcing inter-agency collaboration. We will also explore new and sustainable integration pathways for teenagers and young adults, with a focus on education, employability, psychosocial support, and community participation. In parallel, VELA aims to broaden its service provision to reach additional vulnerable population groups whose protection and inclusion needs remain insufficiently addressed.

Looking ahead, our priority is clear: to deliver high-quality, accountable, and impactful services that not only respond to urgent needs but also contribute to durable solutions and stronger protection systems. With the continued support of our partners, donors, and communities, we remain committed to safeguarding the rights, dignity, and future of every child and young person we serve.

