



## Testimony from a volunteer social worker at Smile of the Child, Greece

### Immigrants, first stop Greece

Thoughts of an immigrant: "You have children and you have no home .... because of the everyday explosions heard from bombs, because some of your friends and relatives ' never return ' home, because you feel strong , but there is nothing to offer and do not know what else to do in order to find food and feed your family every day .... so what do you do? You decide to be brave, you decide to hold on to life, to be saved and to save your children: you are forced to leave your country, a country full of war and poverty... and search for a new home "....

Greece is often a transit country for immigrants, refugees and their children, who are trying to go to a country usually in central or northern Europe for "a better life", but remain in Greece without "existing" anywhere. This is because if they obtain legal documents then they lose the opportunity to leave for their final destination.

A "modern" way to try to live with dignity, if you are an adult immigrant/refugee and have children, is to part with your children and make an "official call" from another European country. In the best case scenario, your children, who continue to live with known or supposed relatives in Greece, are accompanied by adults with official documents at Athens International Airport in order to "catch a flight" and come near you. The pay rate of the adult escorts fluctuates: from very high to quite friendly prices. If you're lucky and the border control "does not catch them", they will be able to take off and come to you. Otherwise....





Since the beginning of this year (2013) the "National Helpline for Children SOS 1056» has been asked numerous times through court orders to make site interventions at Athens International Airport as adults of foreign origin attempted to travel with minors also of foreign origin to another country, presenting valid documentation that did not however correspond to their holders.

After a debriefing of the judicial authorities and social services and agencies, begins the lengthy process for the "reunification" of the family.

But, what happens to these children until the lengthy process is completed and they are able to travel safely and legally in the country where their family is located?

### **To be continued....**

I met 4 year old T. and 6 year old P. at the offices of the Border Control at Athens International Airport; not an ideal place for children.

The two brothers, of Syrian origin, were accompanied by their adult compatriots that held documents which did not correspond to the minors. Their purpose was to travel to a country in central Europe, where, according to reports, their mother was. Their journey and hopes were stopped abruptly at passport control at the airport.





When you have to confront childhood fear and terror, there is little you can do: you have to be patient and accept children's feelings, without trying to turn them around, at least not immediately. Besides, why should they trust me? Neither one had seen me before, or even understood what I was saying to them, since they could only speak Arabic. At this point the contribution of an interpreter-translator for our Association was very significant, since she explained to the children the next steps.

After some time trying to communicate through pantomime and painting, we departed from the Border Control Department with the tears of the 6 years old P. still flowing, while little 'Miss T.' approached me for the first time: by speaking in Arabic, she gave me her hand. Of course I did not understand anything of what she said, but I realized that "something had changed".

The ride to the hospital where the children were to undergo preventive medical supervision until the relevant judicial and police authorities investigated the case was difficult, as symptoms of nausea of the little girl forced us to make many small stops. When we finally arrived and the children settled in their hospital rooms, the roles were reversed: the 4 year old was crying heartbreakingly seeking her mother, a word one understands easily since it is common to most languages while and P. was melancholic but strengthened out of necessity in order to tenderly console T. Very soon our volunteers came who would be with them all night, offering invaluable "human" services.

That evening, the two children slept in the same bed, embracing each other tightly, looking for a little caress and a little rubbing on the back. Pretty soon we received information that their mother had been found in Brussels and had filed a request for reunification.

After spending the next few days in the hospital, the children are now hosted at one of the 'Smile of the Children' houses before leaving for their final destination: their mother.



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