

EL SISTEMA GREECE

Athens - Greece

Report
2023



Alix Didier Sarrouy

YouSound Research Project

‘Music education as an inclusive tool for underage refugees in Europe’

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www.yousound.eu

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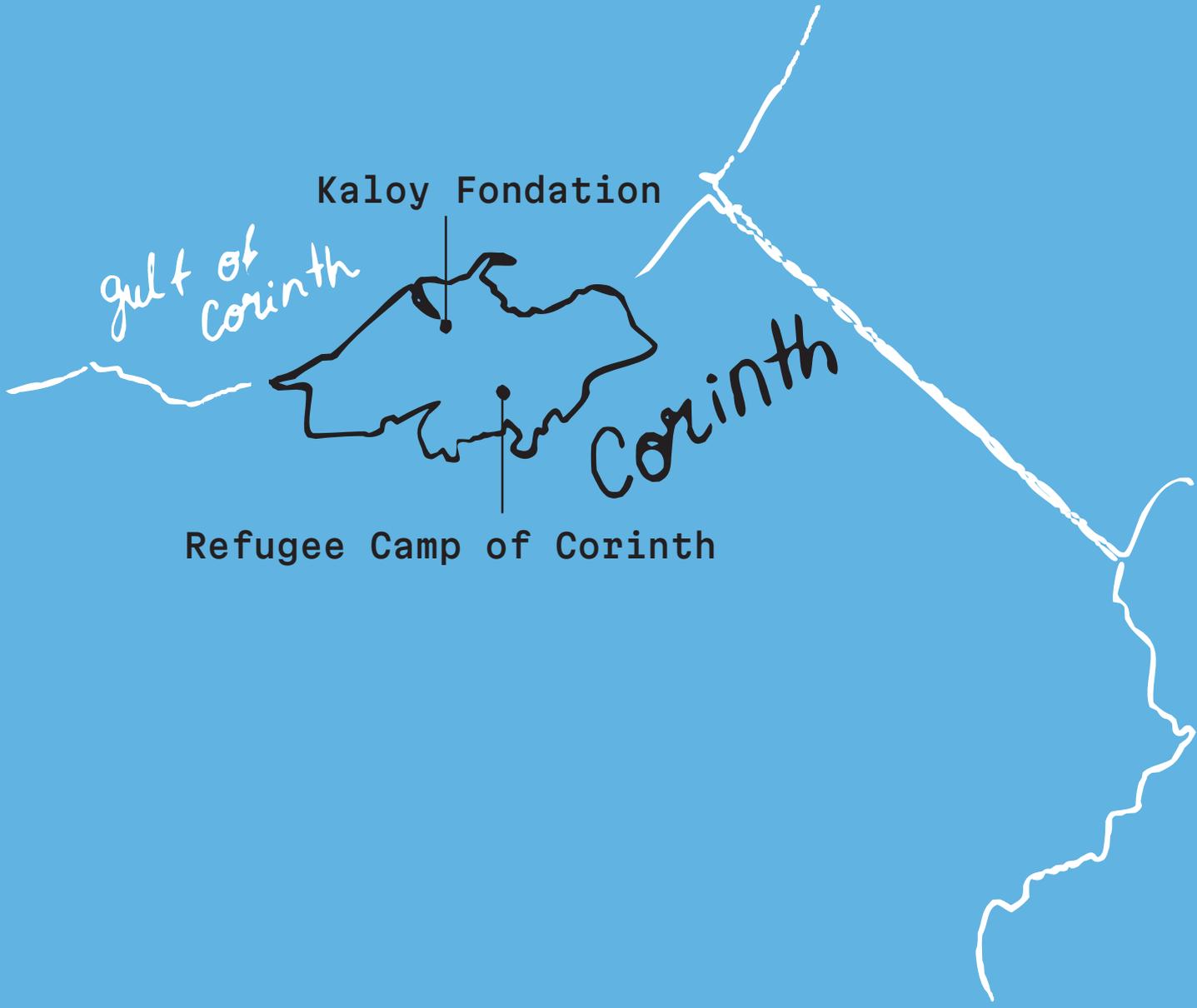
This is a report about the El Sistema Greece, a non-profit organization based in Athens, Greece, that supports children, specifically young asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, using music education as their main tool.

This report documents the results obtained from a month and a half-long ethnographic study held on site, which was led by Alix Didier Sarrouy, principal investigator of the research project 'YouSound - Music education as an inclusive tool for underage refugees in Europe' (2022-2023). The social science research project is based at the Institute of Ethnomusicology - Music & Dance, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Lisbon Nova University. This project is financed by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (grant agreement EXPL/SOC-SOC/0504/2021), guaranteeing research independence and no conflict of interest. GDPR and ethical research concerns have been approved by the Data Protection Office of the University. For further information, please visit the research project website: www.yousound.eu

El Sistema Greece has been welcoming, caring for and teaching young asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and Greek youths by providing music education since 2016. As this report makes clear, the educational context is demanding, particularly with regard to social skills, pedagogical knowledge, emotion management and resilience. We find this to be true for all participants involved, including students, teachers, parents and caretakers, volunteers, directors, institutional partners and financiers. ESG has proved its effectiveness, adaptability and resilience over the years. It is a dynamic organisation, capable of weathering instability and challenges, including: the changes in the macro management of asylum seekers at a national and European level; the fluctuations of the political and economic contexts in Greece; and the COVID pandemic. Actions and results are also impacted by the fact that Greece is perceived by most asylum seekers as a country of passage, not somewhere to build a future. ESG has been in the avant-garde of music teaching in refugee camps and in online classes during the pandemic.

We hope this report is inclusive, accessible and useful to all social actors interested in comprehensive art education programmes, from policy-makers to teachers and students. Our objective is to present the collected data straightforwardly and effectively, and to ensure that it is approachable to a broad readership. We hope that it elicits curiosity, awareness and critical thinking, and that every reader further develops the ideas presented in thought and action.

In parallel with this information report, the YouSound research team is engaging in a deeper analysis which will be the backbone for future scientific outputs.



Kaloy Fondation

Isthmus of Corinth

Corinth

Refugee Camp of Corinth

Athens

Refugee Camp
of Schisto



Dimitrio KDAP
of Apostoli



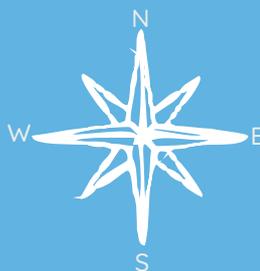
Kypseli



Milliaras
School



*Sardonic
Gulf*



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GENERAL INFORMATION

on El Sistema Greece

El Sistema Greece is a community music project that provides free music education to children and young people in Greece. All students, regardless of nationality, language, and religion, are offered free music education and the possibility to grow in an intercultural and open community, which welcomes diversity and fosters their communication skills, continuously stimulating their independent thinking and agency.

www.elsistema.gr

Date established

October 2016

Location

Athens, Greece

Founders

Anis Barnat and Elisa Sologni

Board members

Anis Barnat and Elisa Sologni

Administration team

- Angeliki Georgokosta
- Lydia Margari
- Sevi Matsakidou
- Fenia Biniari
- Stavroula Matrozou

Pedagogical direction

- Jose Angel Salazar Marin
- Panagiotis Tsirides

Artistic direction

Jose Angel Salazar Marin

Teachers in 2022–2023

- Alexandros Charalampous: Cello teacher
- Bessy Papadopoulou: Cello teacher
- Francis Gagliardi: Beginners orchestra conductor, brass ensemble Leader, music initiation, music theory and French horn teacher.
- Aggeliki Lapaki: Percussion teacher and sectional leader in El Sistema Greece Youth Orchestra
- Eleni Liora: Viola teacher and sectional leader in El Sistema Greece Youth Orchestra
- Giannis Ismirnioglou: Violin teacher and sectional leader in El Sistema Greece Youth Orchestra
- Vaya Papagiannopoulou: Choir master
- Stavros Klavanidis: Brass sectional leader in El Sistema Greece Youth Orchestra
- Konstantina Ventouri-Roussou: Flute and woodwind leader in El Sistema Greece Youth Orchestra
- Tzempen Klapakis: Violins sectional leader in El Sistema Greece Youth Orchestra
- Panagiotis Tsirides: Educational advisor
- Viky Steiri: Violoncello and Double Bass sectional leader in El Sistema Greece Youth Orchestra
- Constantina Angelopoulou: Choir teacher
- Ioannis Panagiotou: Trumpet teacher

Number of students in 2022–2023

328 (December 2022. Note that new figures will be published in July 2023.)

Countries of origin (students)

- Afghanistan
- Albania
- Albania – Greece
- Bulgaria
- Burundi
- China
- Canada
- Cameroon
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Egypt
- Georgia
- Greece
- Greece-Kurdistan
- Greece-Romania
- Greece-Spain
- Greece-Argentina
- Guinea
- Iran
- Iraq
- Kuwait
- Kenya – Mauritania
- Kenya-Lebanon
- Moldavia
- Nigeria
- Palestine
- Philippines
- Poland
- Poland – Syria
- Republic of the Congo
- Romania
- Sierra Leone
- Somalia
- Syria
- Tanzania-Kenya
- Ukraine

Student age range

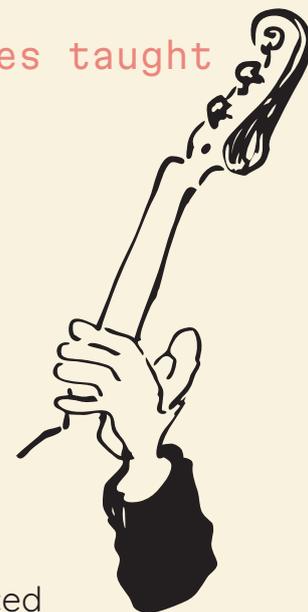
5 to 55+

Location of schools

- Kypseli, Dimitrio KDAP of Apostoli
- Kaloy Fondation, Milliaras School
- Refugee Camp of Schisto
- Refugee Camp of Corinth

Instruments/Classes taught

- Violin
- Viola
- Cello
- Flute
- Trumpet
- Percussion
- French horn
- Choir
- Music Initiation
- Music Theory



Levels taught

From beginners to advanced

Institutional partners

Hilti Foundation, Alta Mane Foundation, Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Carnegie Hall, Kaloy Foundation, Unicef, UNHCR, KDAP Dimitrion of Apostoli, New Milliaras Schools, Athens Culture Net, Serafio of Municipality of Athens, El Sistema

Cost for students and parents

Participation in all of the activities of El Sistema Greece is offered free of charge to the community, including classes, excursions, masterclasses, seminars and workshops. All students are provided with an instrument to be able to practice at home.

Financers

Friends of El Sistema Greece 501c3 Foundation in the USA (www.fesg.us); philanthropic foundations for the whole educational program and extracurricular activities; Global Giving campaigns and crowdfunding; private and corporate funding; private and corporate in-kind support; European Union grants (Erasmus+ and Creative Europe) and sponsorships for specific projects; donations from cultural institutions for specific concerts.

Thank you to all members of El Sistema Greece for their kind welcome and mediation during the field work.

Λοιπόν



Note: Based on the language used by El Sistema Venezuela, the word *núcleo* is used in this report to characterize the places where El Sistema Greece locates its music classes. In line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) regulations, when citing interviewees, we don't specify the age, gender or country of origin; they are referred to as student, teacher, administrator or board member.

A.

Students

The student body at ESG is a diverse and multicultural community comprising individuals from all socio-economic levels. In this context of super-diversity, students are at the centre of all actions.





A.1.

How Students Discover ESG and Why They Choose to Join

Young people usually come into contact with ESG first **through their demonstrations** at primary or secondary schools, at refugee camps, or in a public venue. Youngsters may have seen ESG's teachers presenting instruments or playing concerts as a means to encourage students to join: "Because of the sound I chose the violin (...) the guy that came to my school made me want to be like him." Some students already loved music and ESG offered them the opportunity to learn and play for free.

Making friends is one of the most common reasons that students give for choosing to join ESG. The **multicultural context is a comfort** for many of the migrant students who feel isolated in regular Greek schools. In parallel, there is **the excitement of the classes and concerts**; students enjoy sharing videos and pictures of these online because **they feel valued**. Sharing interests and experiences in the orchestra and choir strengthens friendship bonds.

Watching friends from the same neighbourhood or from their refugee camp playing concerts and **sounding great** proved key for motivating students to join ESG. Other reasons include **the varied repertoire at the concerts** and **having a family member in** one of ESG's orchestras and choirs.

FINO A QUI LE MOTIVAZIONI
PER CUI SI ENTRA IN ESG, POI
SI ALLARGA

Choosing an orchestra instrument to play is a significant decision when joining ESG. Some students have a clear idea of what they'd like to play, which also includes singing in a choir, while others are open to suggestions, which may include an instrument they have never seen before. There is an element of chance, "It happened, and I took it", said a student, adding: "It was awful in the beginning". Students, especially from the refugee camps, have talked about the music instrument becoming a sort of sacred object when first brought 'home'.

SULLO STRUMENTO

Some students admit that they were bored during their first classes, largely because learning how to use the bow and hold the violin for example, is a slow process. As we will see later, this is one of the reasons why some teachers insist on being very pragmatic, active and clear, in order to ensure that there are immediate and achievable goals in every class.

LA NOIA E L'ESSERE PRAGMATICO

Some students joined ESG hoping to play the guitar or the piano or to create rap samples, which are instruments that the organisation doesn't teach because they don't fit with the artistic and pedagogical programme. These students say they joined ESG to learn tools that will help them to do what they "really want in music".

GLI STRUMENTI CHE NON CI SONO

Memories of the first day at ESG are still very vivid for many students, who clearly remember what happened, which teacher welcomed them, and what classes they attended. It remains a good memory, a positive start, motivating them to join ESG.

IL PRIMO GIORNO

A.2. Learning Music and the Repertoire

Most students discover symphonic and choral music for the first time in the context of ESG. In their perception, music classes need to be part of a plan with a clear purpose for them to dedicate the time and effort required. Without this clarity, they leave.

The process of learning music in ESG, in which students move up the levels of choirs, of orchestras and within the orchestral sections (e.g., first and second violins), can be perceived as a challenge, as a series of steps to ascend. Simultaneously, moving from one step to another is also deeply appreciated as a form of recognition, increasing confidence and self-belief.

In terms of pedagogical choices, in particular the importance placed on group work, having more advanced students in the group provides both a source of 'positive pressure' and also represents a tangible goal to attain.

Joining ESG is about being part of a group that moves forward together. Each member of the organisation, and especially the students who are being trained, are aware of the collective. “One must take a breath that matches the piece: if you start a slow piece, you breathe slowly and deeply; while for faster tempi, staccato, the breathing needs to be faster. This is a big part of what it is to be a musician in an orchestra”, explained a cello student.

Some students, including those from the refugee camps, have the opportunity to attend a range of extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, other art forms of expression, etc.), which may compete with each other timewise. A violin student who is learning music and martial arts described the differences this way: “Music is more mental and demands high levels of concentration to treat all the information that one must deal with at once.” All activities are complementary for the psychological and physical development of children and young people.

A.3. Psychological Impact and Bullying

During the semi-structured interviews, many students used words and phrases such as ‘fear’, ‘shyness’, ‘fear of failure’, and ‘feeling inferior’ to describe how they felt when joining ESG. Such emotions originated long before ESG and they are being overcome in part thanks to this program. ESG provides a positive space to experience new emotions in a context of trust and collective complementarity. “ESG gives you the chance not to be shy, not to be afraid”, said a student.

Bullying also forms part of the students’ experience in Greece. Most migrants/refugees have experienced it in their own countries because of their ethnic background or their appearance. War in those countries has only increased physical and symbolic violence. Racism and/or xenophobia were experienced in every country in which they have lived or through which they have transited.

In Greece too, young migrants have suffered bullying in their schools, both from fellow students and teachers in public schools. This was shared by the students interviewed, as well as by teachers who had observed it in schools they had worked in before joining ESG. Bullying has eroded self-confidence during their childhoods. As a consequence, students have erected a protective shield as a coping mechanism, but the shyness and fear are still present. Students explain that joining ESG has given them the power to engage.

Once in ESG, many other factors have a psychological impact on the students. For example, those who have been in ESG for years, having lived through the intense refugee crisis since 2016, with vast numbers of students from refugee camps, are now sad and vocal about the fact that their friends have left ESG and Greece (most have gone to Germany). Social media is the main way to keep in contact with friends who moved away. There is a strong online network, which also includes some ESG teachers. They follow each other's progress, proud to show the positive results achieved over the years spent in many different European countries.

Being obliged to change their instrument-teacher and having to quit ESG because they are going to university or taking a job, are two other sensitive transitions that may evoke sadness, and a feeling of loss and emptiness.

A.4. Effects of the ESG Experience

Students discussed some of the most obvious changes they have experienced since joining ESG: they feel more open; more capable of taking decisions; less afraid to raise their hands to answer questions, even if there is a risk of failure; worrying less about getting something wrong; less prone to taking things too seriously; handling people and crowds better. It is noteworthy that they focus largely on psychological and sociological changes.

“Playing in front of crowds brings confidence”, explained the students. Concerts may be considered stressful but are an encouragement to keep playing. Live performances also bring excitement, the opposite of apathy, which contrasts with the boredom in refugee camps, or the young people who are withdrawn because they feel ostracised in school, in the streets or in social media.

Collective playing and singing at ESG helps the students learn English and Greek. They note that they have developed self-discipline by practising at home, playing in an orchestra and singing in a choir.

Students compare themselves with who they were before joining ESG: “It’s two different people (...) It changed a lot my character, my personality, how I speak, how I act, how I talk to different people. My social skills got better”, said a student. It has helped them to manage stress levels and anxiety which, according to some, is useful when sitting the final exams in high school to get into university.

ESG provides a space for gaining a wide range of experiences that give the student the sense that they have a role which empowers them. “ESG is about people that are glad to see you; you feel like a part that is needed”, explained a student.

“My childhood and teenage years have been spent and ruined by war and by ‘refugeeness’, by refugee camps. ESG is the only good memory I have of the past eight years. (...) Music moments and especially the concerts outside, were a way to get away from the life at the camp, the ‘rabbit hall’”, explained a student.

When describing his five-year experience at ESG, a former Skaramangas Refugee Camp student said: “They were not the music group that I had; they were the second family that I still have.”

A.5. Student Response to Teachers

Overall, the interviewed students revealed a deep respect and appreciation for their teachers at ESG. The way they described particularly important teachers for their personal and musical development illustrated the depth of those relationships. One of the former refugee students from the Skaramangas Refugee Camp described his music teachers as a “bright window in a dark room”.

Students have an appreciation of the teachers’ work: “Teacher are so patient, so calm and in control of the room”. Students are conscious that it’s not easy to teach young people something they have not learned about in their own countries (i.e., European symphonic instruments and music to Middle-Eastern/African/Asian students). They emphasised the patience demonstrated by teachers: “She knows how to talk to us; it’s that feeling, that attitude, that makes the student relax a little, not having to be on guard. She knows how to make us feel safe”, explained a student.

Some students described what they believe makes a good teacher. “A good teacher is somebody that is him/her-self, that doesn’t pretend something, somebody that is honest with us. (...) Here, if you ask something, teachers will answer you. And always you will see a smile on their faces, that will give you more energy to do the class.”

A.6. Programs at ESG

ESG offers two main programs that have been demonstrably effective for the personal and social development of students.

In the Young Leaders Program (YLP), a cohort of more advanced students are selected to study ESG's administration, methods and goals. They also do small internships, which comprise closely following the work of a chosen teacher or administrator in a specific area, such as communications or production. At the end of their program, they create projects, benefiting from access to all the resources of ESG's office.

YLP gives students representation and a path to develop ideas that are closer to their reality. Students have spoken about how this program also gives them leverage, a sort of symbolic power, that they like to be 'young leaders' and to feel that they have been selected, but it also gives them a responsibility. The YLP is also an important way for them to gain experience and to build self-confidence, such as "learning to speak in public; how to raise our voice; make other people listen to us", said a student.

Students speak with great pride about their participation in YLP, specifically how it helped them overcome shyness and become more confident: "I learned how to make people believe me. Because I have confidence, the other kids follow me. (...) Not wanting to be a leader but a person one can trust. Learning how to work as a group, be complementary", explained a student.

The Young Mentors Program (YMP) is part of a larger initiative called Music for Active Citizenship which was developed by Erasmus+. It is a collaboration with a similar music education organisation – Sistema Cyprus. The goal is to invite young adult music students who don't necessarily belong to ESG to learn its teaching methods and interact with the diverse groups that it comprises. "It's an opportunity for them to grow as active citizens, to develop as teachers in these particular environments, not being afraid of this kind of interaction," explained the General Manager.

ESG has a variety of other programs such as the Lullaby Project, ESG School of Hip Hop, ESG Summer Camp, MAC, B-me, Advocacy program, and collaborations with the Greek artistic ecosystem. We have not detailed these here, but more information can be found on ESG's official website – www.elsistema.gr.

B.

Teachers

Teachers must continuously develop educational, pedagogical and social skills at ESG. Pragmatism, adaptability and resilience are also essential attributes for the teaching team.





B.1. Background

Some teachers don't just have a background where music was taught or played; they also have migrant or refugee experience, whether personally or through family members (for example, grandparents who fled the Smyrna conflicts in Asia Minor during the 1920s). For others, social issues, particularly those relating to migration and asylum seekers, were already a concern before joining ESG: "Because I am part of this society!", exclaimed a Greek teacher. Therefore, ESG suits their personality and background.

Being knowledgeable about the society they live in, at national and international levels, makes most teachers want to do more in the refugee camps. Conversely, working in the camps inspires them to learn more about society, geopolitics, economy and migrations. Lived experiences and acquired knowledge enhance their capacity for caring.

Many teachers have taught or studied in foreign countries during their education or professional careers. During these experiences, they dedicated much of their time to thinking, experimenting and learning music pedagogy techniques. Some have experienced situations of racism, xenophobia, and ostracism.

Some teachers speak openly about the bullying or psychological pressure they experienced as teenagers. This explains in part their interest in ESG and the special care they exhibit nowadays towards their pupils. It demonstrates that ESG is also an inclusive organisation for a certain type of teacher who doesn't feel comfortable with more conservative teaching methods and principles.

B.2.

Specific Teacher Requirements at ESG

Teaching in specific contexts such as ESG demands very particular attributes. The most fundamental of these is adaptability with regard to the teaching methods, which requires having the pedagogical tools to adapt quickly to each class or even to individual students. In such unstable, multicultural and sensitive contexts, it is particularly difficult to 'keep the flow', to avoid students 'feeling bored'. Due to time pressure and a sense of urgency from students and administrators (related to asylum seeker students having leave the country at any moment), teachers feel compelled to teach the basics hastily, in order to achieve clear, immediate results in every class.

One of the main challenges is how to communicate information when teaching. Teachers often use metaphors to transmit ideas and emotions but, in these multicultural contexts, the non-transversality of metaphors and images can be challenging: "Giving an image to a person is very different from giving an image to a group. Some students get it, others don't." (...) "There are scaffolds that you try to create, to make them feel easy in that.", explained a teacher.

Teachers emphasise the importance of being honest about their feelings, understanding that students are sensitive to this issue. They feel they must stay alert to the unexpected in all their classes, and that there should be an element of fun. New teachers are supervised and supported for the first few weeks by more established teachers in order to help them cultivate this attitude in classes at ESG. Furthermore, there is a monthly meeting with a pedagogical advisor who is a psychologist; every year, a course is held by external partners on safeguarding policy and child protection policy; training is also given by partners from such organisations as Musicians Without Borders, El Sistema Venezuela, Songs for Europe, among others. There is a continuous training process available for teachers.

Flexibility, an ability to adapt quickly, and caring for individuals and/or groups can be difficult aptitudes for teachers to acquire rapidly. Some teachers leave ESG because they find it too challenging.

We have noticed that there is no miserabilism in the discourse of the teachers. They are pragmatic, explaining that they go to classes to teach, to share experiences, to do their job and not to waste time complaining about it or about the students. This also results from the training teachers receive, especially on child protection and safeguarding policy.

Teachers used terms and phrases such as 'passion', 'hunger', 'I like it', 'this is what I want to give to my students' and 'those were the happiest days of my life' when

describing their work and relationships at ESG.

Many teachers started their trade at a very early age, long before joining ESG, revealing a sort of vocation. They share their pleasure in working at ESG in great depth. They have enhanced the organisation's teamwork, its administrative support, and the opportunities for collective discussions on methods, tools, and goals. "I wish I could work for ESG 24/7", said a teacher.

B.3. Education and Pedagogy

Our scientific outputs will provide a deeper analysis of the pedagogical methods at ESG. However, we provide an outline here.

Some teachers say it is challenging to find an inclusive pedagogical tool that will resonate with everybody in these multicultural classes. After establishing the basic methods for making sounds from an instrument or voice correctly, one approach is to be pragmatic and encourage each student to find their own technique with regard to posture, gestures, breathing and so on. This entails trust and empowerment but requires constant vigilance to avoid harmful results for the body, the mind and the sound. Teaching is about how to observe: "Like in physiotherapy, one of the principal things is to observe, to read the body", explains a music teacher who is also a physiotherapist.

It is also challenging for teachers to pay close attention to every student in a group class. Each student should be approached differently, but without losing the cohesion of the collective.

As one of the senior teachers explained, in the context of teaching music generally, but particularly in ESG, among the more effective teaching methods are: "Set a goal, have a clear challenge, make the student go fast, reach a result, capture the student's interest from the first lesson and keep guaranteeing it at every lesson."

An example of a pragmatic approach which considers the age of the students: "How do you ensure you don't harm fingers? The 4th finger when playing a violin, for example!? I don't think you should teach the 4th finger during the first two years of learning the violin. At all. You don't need it. The things you play are in D major, and you have the open string to play. For a child, the 4th finger is very difficult. So, leave it. Fix the 3rd finger and then come to the 4th. You must decide which scale you teach. I only teach D major and G major in the first year.", explained a senior teacher.

B.4. Instruments

As in most projects with symphonic instruments, the violin remains the most popular instrument for several reasons, including: it is the most visible in orchestras and on websites and social media; teachers focus on it because, at first, it is easier to achieve musical results compared to horns, for example; for ESG, it is affordable compared to other string instruments or horns. There is also a matter of numbers since the violins are often the majority in the orchestra. Nevertheless, teachers argue that students often chose the violin because they don't know enough about other string or wind instruments, horns and percussion.

“I am here to teach them how to hold it, to make it work, to make it sound; once you have that you can do anything. Make it sound good and compact, but respect your sound, respect who you are!”, explained a teacher. There is a pragmatic view of the instrument as a tool and a form of respect for each individual's body and personal technique.

For all the students, receiving an instrument for free from ESG to practice at home is a highlight. Even though it is borrowed, it becomes 'theirs'. They protect it, they show it off with pride, and they are protective of it, taking care to make it look and sound as good as possible. For those living in the refugee camps, bringing the instrument back to their 'house-container' for the first time is a precious moment: “I didn't let anybody touch it, even myself, because I was afraid of breaking it”.

As the voice is also a musical instrument, ESG choir teachers critique the fact that choirs are not fully understood and accepted in Greece. Most choirs are based on traditional music or Byzantine music and there is no strong choir tradition in Greek orthodox churches. Nonetheless, ESG singing and choir classes have proven to be very effective for the bodies of the students, giving them more control over movement, relaxation, effort, balance and breath, with results that have a positive impact for the rest of their lives. But choir teachers wish that students would practise singing every day because the body needs constant practice and teachers want to make a real difference.

B.5. Repertoire

The repertoire at ESG finds ways to engage with the students' musical tastes. Their references are very broad and there is space to bring them to ESG.

They listen to all kinds of music, from all over the world. During the interviews, they shared their love for such genres as K-Pop, K-R&B, rebetiko, rap, rock, pop, jazz and classical music.

Teachers make a great effort to be inclusive in terms of the repertoire listened to by the students. They create a bridge between different genres and musical periods. For example, a teacher linked a skiladiko theme (Greek popular music using elements of Arabic music) based on storms with Beethoven's Pastoral (Symphony No.6) which also has a stormy/tempestuous feel.

“Regarding the technical aspects of the violin, you must focus on the right structure. My job is to focus on the structure. Students think they are playing ‘Twinkle Twinkle Little Star’, but they are not. They are playing Mendelssohn, they just don’t know it yet.”, explained a senior teacher.

Teachers say they teach music, using specific symphonic instruments and repertoires (including singing and choir work), but the ultimate objective is for students to acquire the techniques and knowledge to play any instrument and music genre according to their own tastes, cultures and favourite playlists.

Some teachers are somewhat critical of ESG's repertoire for students when it focuses primarily on collaborations with ‘mainstream music’. They argue that this relates to communication, venues, and funding symbolic pressure rather than to quality, forgetting that other repertoires may be more suited to the student's knowledge or voice type (for example, reaching octaves).

The choir repertoire is diverse in terms of languages. Songs are usually in Greek, English or Arabic. Afghan and Kurdish students and families have asked for songs in their languages: Farsi, Dari and Kurdish. This has created some issues within the multicultural student community. For example, Syrians are generally characterised as a ‘proud culture’, and some Syrian students would not sing songs from Afghanistan. It can be challenging to find an inclusive repertoire.

The symphonic repertoire is often perceived as a challenge, pushing students to perform better with the constant support of teachers. Overcoming a challenging repertoire creates a sense of achievement. After a concert, students forget all the difficulties or trouble it took to reach that point. For teachers, there is always a fine line between keeping students on their toes and pushing too much.

A student described her symphonic classics thus: “For every composer, we have different feelings. Tchaikovsky is about feeling power; Mozart and Beethoven are about feeling calmer. It's not just reading music, it's also about getting into the mood of the music.”

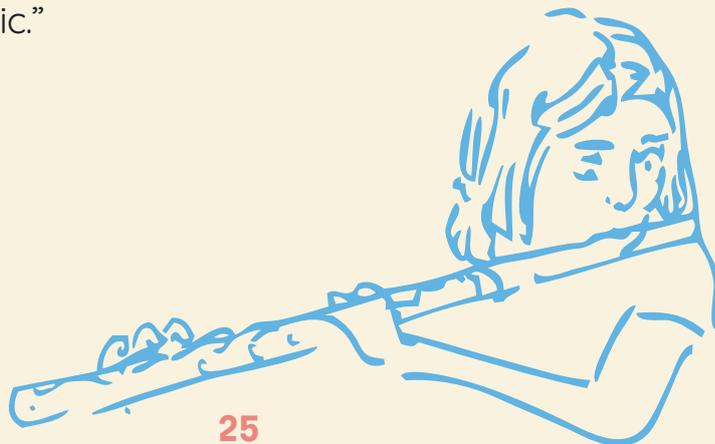
B.6. Teachers on Students

In ESG, the policy, backed by the ethical charter and the data protection office, is not to ask students questions about their pasts. Moreover, teachers may not accept friend requests on social media from students that are under 18. The purpose of this is to respect personal space; create equality between all students from the outset; perceiving these human beings as children and young people rather than as asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, or Greeks. Teachers try to show that they are on the student's side, but not as family members. Nonetheless, many students still call ESG their 'second family'.

Teachers are trained at ESG to avoid learning personal details about the students (for example, migration reasons/path, family, living conditions in Athens, etc.) which may affect them. Nonetheless, if students feel the need to talk about their past or any difficulty they encounter in the present, they may speak to their teachers. It does happen, depending on the openness of the teacher. There is an avoidance of feeling frustrated due to not being able to solve a student's problems. On the other hand, the students' stories have led the teachers to describe them as 'little heroes'. However, teachers have expressed how they can feel the trauma in some teenage students and most young adults. Children may have faced extremely difficult situations as well, but they seem to be able to live 'day by day, forgetting the past, coping with the possible joys of a new day', according to several teachers working in refugee camps.

Personal information is also treated very carefully in order to protect the students from viral information being transmitted via social media, for example. Teachers ask older students to 'keep an eye' on younger and more vulnerable children.

Teachers have expressed how important the educational daily process is when working with children and youngsters, particularly in the unstable context of migration and low social income. "Process more than results. The process is the result already", argued a teacher. This teacher also described the happiness they feel when a result is achieved: "It's like having a plant on your balcony and suddenly you open your window and there is a flower there (...) it's not about the flower in the end but, when I see it, it's fantastic."



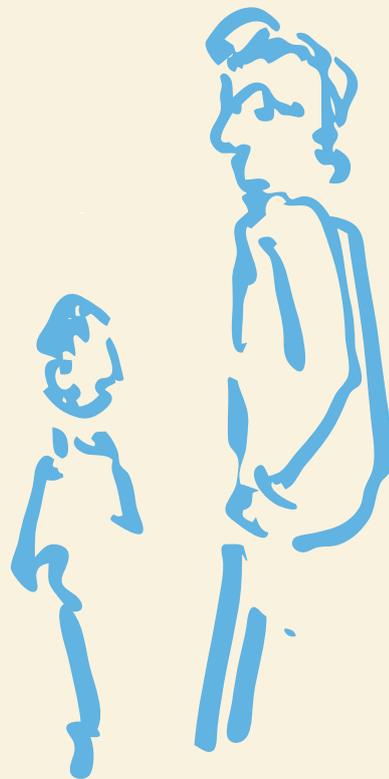
C.

Parents

In ESG, parenthood takes on many forms and is influenced by factors such as ethnic background, culture, legal status in Greece (including official nationality, asylum seeker, refugee or migrant), socio-economic status, and living situation (whether in a refugee camp, suburb of Athens or a comfortable, safe home).



Parents have shared how important ESG is, and how it is a trustworthy complement to education. “Both sides should work together. (...) They assist us, you know, socially, as leaders. (...) They are guiding students to be leaders, it’s a big responsibility. They are helping them to have a good character”, explains a migrant single-parent father with two teenagers in ESG. Enthusing about ESG, he says: “They are not the kind of people that do the job and say bye-bye at the end of the day; they really care about the kids, their personalities, their education, which is not easy for any organisation.”



Some parents view ESG pragmatically as a way to fill their children’s schedules. It is also considered a better way to fill time otherwise spent on technology. This is even more true for single parents who spend many hours working outside the home and have to leave children on their own.

Migrant and refugee parents have expressed the crucial role of ESG’s administration in solving daily issues concerning logistics and bureaucracy. Some examples: dealing with the school registration of children; basic help with the bureaucratic procedures related to their migration/refugee legal status; making phone calls or registrations in Greek as they don’t understand the language yet. There is also the story of a student, the son of a single dad who spent 12 hours a day working two jobs, who called the ESG office asking how to boil pasta for dinner. There is trust and proximity.

Parents get involved with ESG when they have time, mostly during open-air concerts and concerts outside Athens. They make traditional foods for sharing; they assist the production team and support students and teachers. Moreover, ESG also includes parents in adult orchestras and choirs; in writing and sharing stories through the Lullaby Project (an annual concert in which the lyrics of the choir and the music of the orchestra are based upon a personal story told by parents).

For parents, ESG is also a space where they can be proud of their child’s achievements and build self-confidence through it. For example, having a video of their children playing music seems to be important and is easy to share with others locally and abroad. Parents receive free tickets to attend concerts in Greece’s main halls, and these gatherings provide unique occasions to get together, celebrate and be emotional.

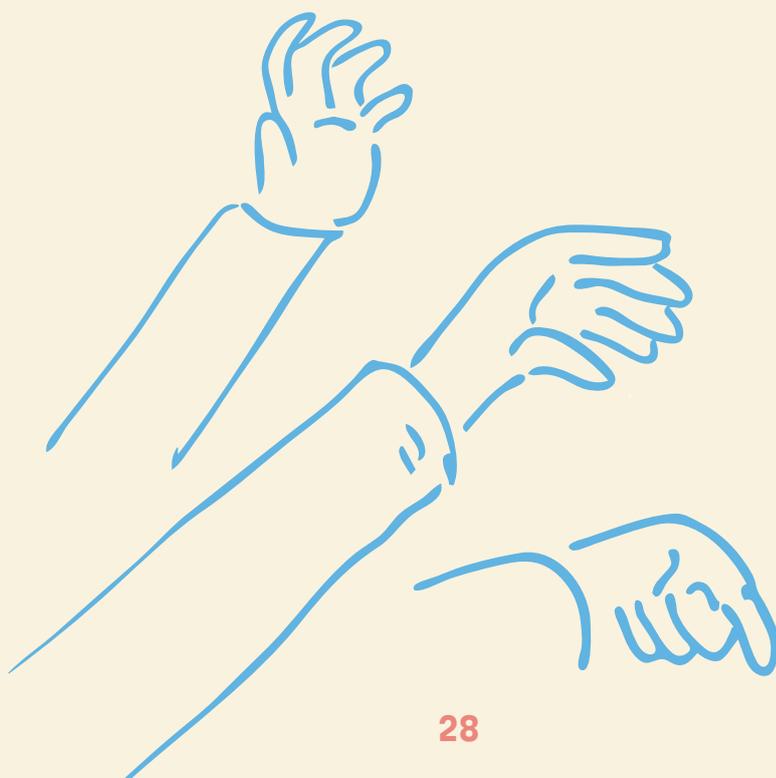
After a particular concert, the parents shared food from many different countries and used the sound system to listen and dance to music from each of their regions across the world.

Another way in which parents can feel proud and build their confidence is when their child is ‘validated’ in ESG; for example, by receiving an instrument to take home, or when they move up from one level or orchestra to another. Parents receive this validation by extension, which gains resonance when taking into account that they might be in a very vulnerable situation emotionally, physically and financially. There is social validation and emancipation through their children learning at ESG.

Parents talk about how they have seen their children grow in confidence and maturity thanks to the many experiences lived at ESG. Their children’s passion for ESG classes can be so strong that parents use it as a trade-off if they want things done. For example, “You better do this otherwise you won’t go to the orchestra this weekend!”, laughed a mother. Parents provide positive feedback about ESG to their neighbours and friends, some of whom are motivated to sign up their own children.

The multicultural context at ESG, which includes migrants and refugees, seems to be accepted by parents. For them, just as for students, there is a sense of comfort in the multicultural daily reality at ESG. Some parents, though, admit being alert, worried that the traumatic background of some of the students may cause them to exhibit bad behaviour near their children.

Teachers have spoken about the role and the importance of parents for ESG: parents are essential, and teachers want to act in tandem with them. However, there are some factors that may contribute to reduced parental commitment, such as: the fact that lessons and music instruments are free in ESG (financial costs can reinforce the parents’ commitment); the lack of work opportunities in music in Greece; and a general negative perception of the lifestyle of musicians.

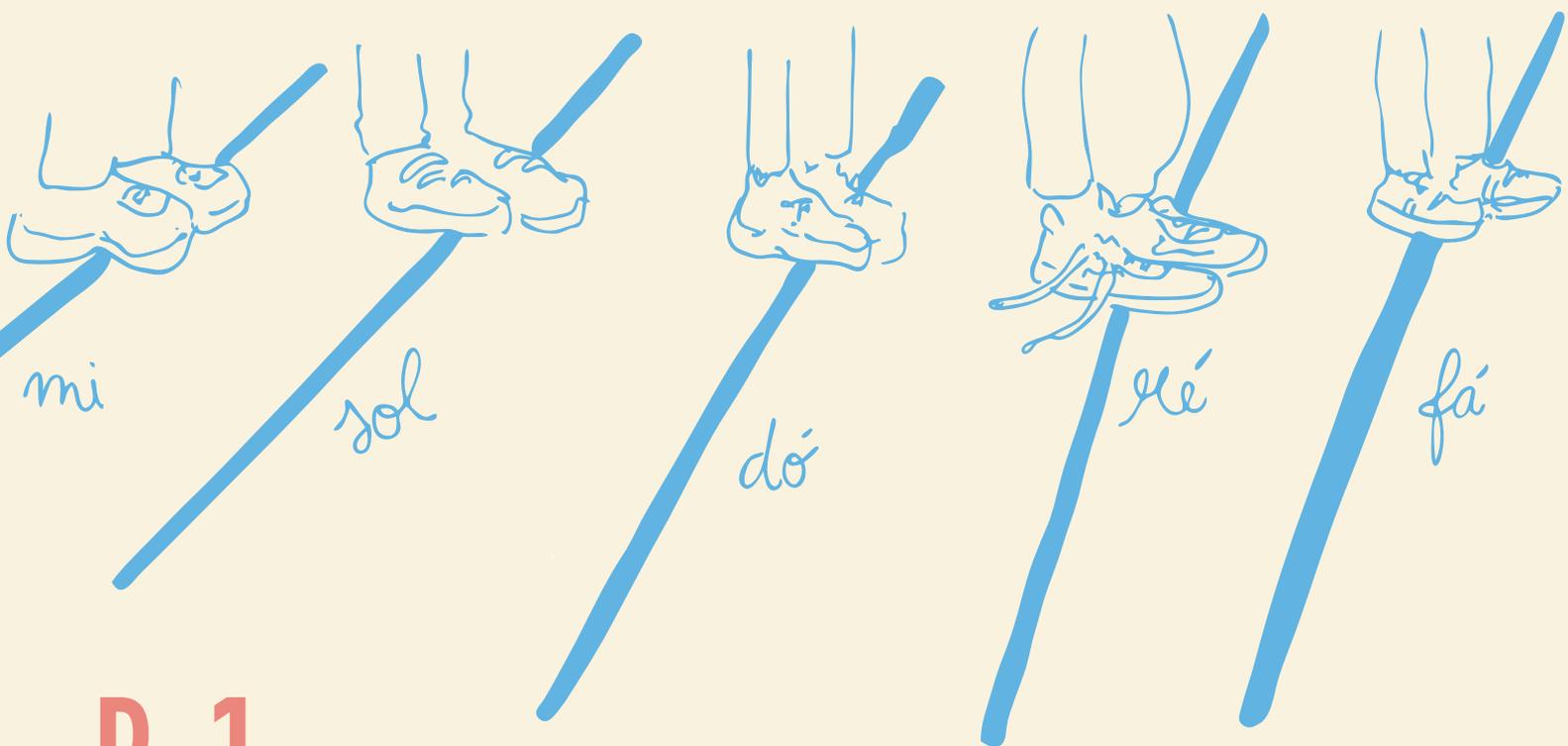


D.

Board and Administration

The board members are also the founders of ESG. Along with the experienced administration team, they make all decisions to ensure ESG continues to develop in a sustainable manner at all levels.





D.1. Board

ESG was founded by its board members. It was the result of an initial reaction to the 2015 refugee crisis. At that time, one of the board members had been to Lesbos, contributing to different organisations and experiencing the complexities of the major flow of migrants through the island by spending time there and contributing to several organisations. Between the EU-Turkey agreements (2016) and the closing of the Moria camp (2020), which have also resulted in a concentration of migrants in Athens, the founders have built a network, raised funds, and activated connections to make a change through music education in Athens. They created ESG at the end of 2016.

Two of the founders, inspired by the philosophy of El Sistema Venezuela, wanted to develop a similar program adapted to the realities of Greece. Three major figures of El Sistema in Venezuela provided substantial support regarding methods and philosophy: Lourdes Sánchez (Choir Master), Ronnie Morales (violinist, Director of International Affairs) and Angel Linares (tubist, Director of Events). The pedagogical programme was also reviewed by other major figures such as Gretchen Amussen from the CNSMDP in Paris, Sofi Jeannin from the Maîtrise de Radio France and the BBC Singers, amongst many others.

In order to guarantee total transparency when dealing with institutional and financial support, one of the first decisions was to work with lawyers and appoint an accountant. Based on Europe's new GDPR regulations in 2018, ESG created a Data Protection Office and a Child Policy and Safeguarding structure.

Due to the sensitive issues that ESG must manage, it was essential to build the organisation on a solid legal, financial and safeguarding basis.

It was important to find a niche within the Greek/Athenian context, which already had music education organisations. ESG built connections with some of the tutelar figures, particularly from the main conservatories, trying to find ways to be included without being perceived as an institutional threat. One of the arguments was that ESG would be able to provide more students, from a greater diversity of backgrounds, to the major private and public music education organisations. Moreover, Greece has issues with the integration of young students in orchestras: there is a lack of more inclusive junior orchestras and few options for musicians to join professional orchestras.

ESG establishes more accessible youth orchestras, for all musical levels and supporting transportations to rehearsals by providing a bus.

When selecting teachers for ESG, the board wanted to avoid profiles that are “too academic, too assured of their capacities, not willing to question themselves (...) It is fundamental in ESG to be able to evolve, to learn, to experiment, to do some action research”. ESG seeks educators rather than teachers.

After its creation in 2016, the board members spent two years working intensively to build the ESG concept and project, before stepping back from the day-to-day groundwork, leaving it to be handled by the administration team. They still have a daily presence and follow up, but communication is largely online.

From 2018 onwards, after the influx caused by the 2015 refugee crisis, the board decided to focus more on núcleos outside refugee camps, particularly when some camps were closed to outsiders or dismantled during the COVID pandemic. At such decision-making levels, there is a constant need for adaptation, according to the broader macro decisions and their daily impact on asylum seekers, migrants and Greeks.

D.2. Administration

ESG has one of the largest administration teams when compared with similar organisations with the same number of students and núcleos. The administration team of ESG is based at the Kypseli núcleo and comprised five women (General Manager; Music Ensembles and Production Manager; Educational Program Manager; Communications Manager; Educational Coordinator) and two men (Artistic Director and Principal Conductor; Educational Advisor).

It is a young team with vast experience in similar organisations, specifically in foreign countries. Three are second-generation Greeks and one is Venezuelan. Only the management team and the educational coordinator work full-time.

The current General Manager has held many other positions over the past five years in ESG. She knows the challenges of each position and each program within the organization, which facilitate her understanding of the demands made by colleagues.

The administration team is very close to the students and parents at the Kypseli núcleo (their office is located on the 4th same floor).

The door is always open, and they also leave their room to sit in on classes or talk to parents. This is very important for the flow of ESG. The administration team understands the frantic choreography of students, parents, caretakers, and teachers during the rush hours of classes during the week.

With regard to teacher salaries (most of them employed part-time), the administrators are aware that ESG pays little compared to what colleagues earn in other similar organisations in Europe, such as Dream Orchestra Sweden.

It is a demanding job, both physically and psychologically: “They come driven by passion”, said one of the administrators. Nonetheless, all ESG employees benefit from a 14-month salary scheme, national health insurance, and the right to unemployment subsidies.

The organisation is growing daily. Each member of the administration works very hard to keep up with the intensity of ESG’s momentum. The team must be fast and flexible to adapt to all the demands. Comparatively, ESG is a highly structured organisation, making it strong but probably less agile.

Some members of the administration team who have worked in other organisations use comparisons with their previous jobs to explain why they want to stay at ESG: “Now I am doing cultural events with a purpose; it’s much more important for me to prepare a concert for our kids than for a big artist.” (...) “In terms of production, and compared with professional musicians, children are much more helpful and collaborative.”, said a member of the administration team.

In addition, they describe the potential for them to learn and enjoy the fact that many new things are happening constantly. “We are all one thing with the kids (...) ESG is teamwork, you are not a soloist, we are all part of the team”, explained a member of the administration team.

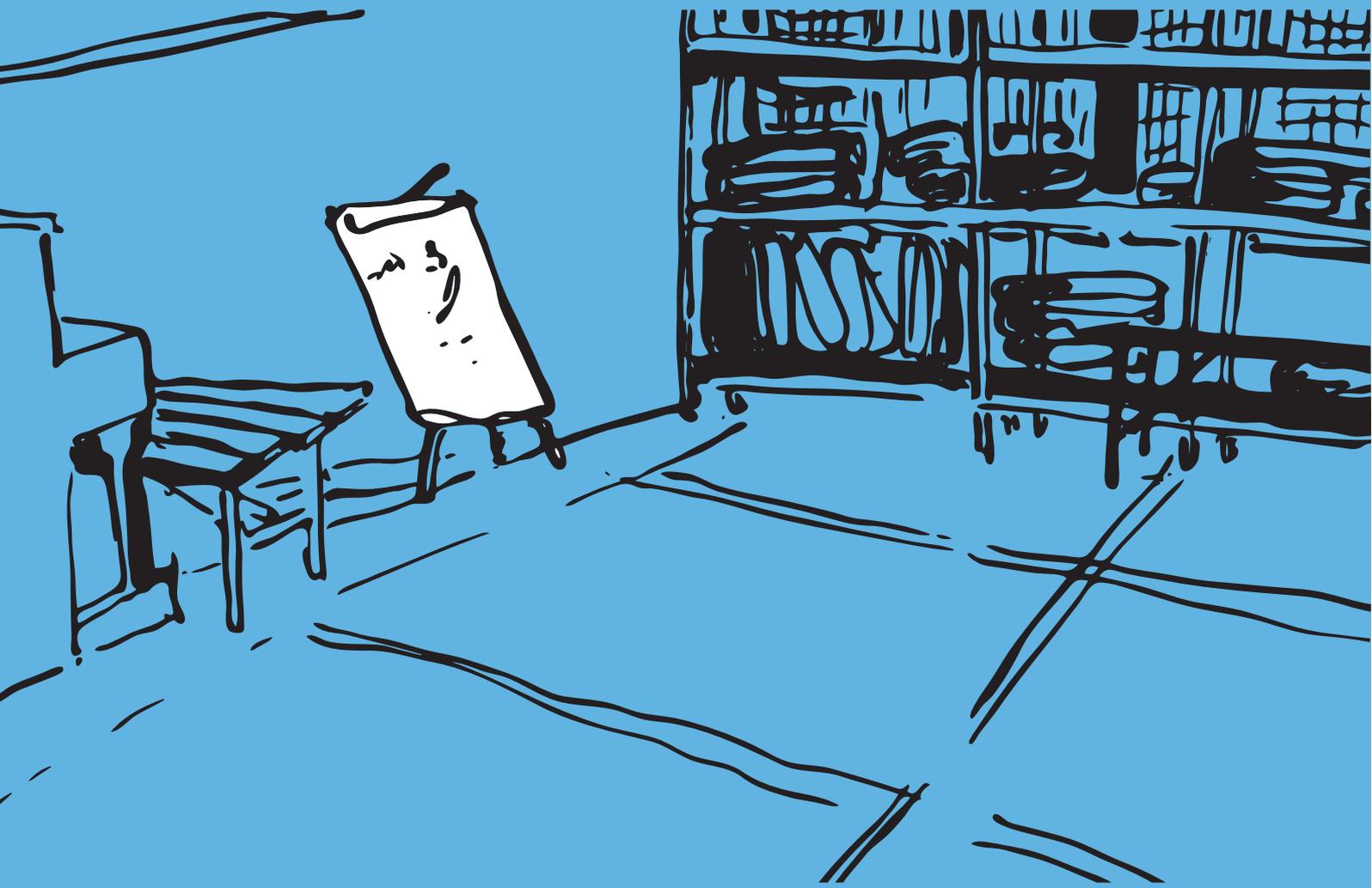
For the administration team, ESG is not a 'regular office job', which they view positively. They also work away from the office: for example, they do mediation in refugee camps; they are always meeting new students, parents and partners; they travel to concerts; and they experience city life in Athens intensely.

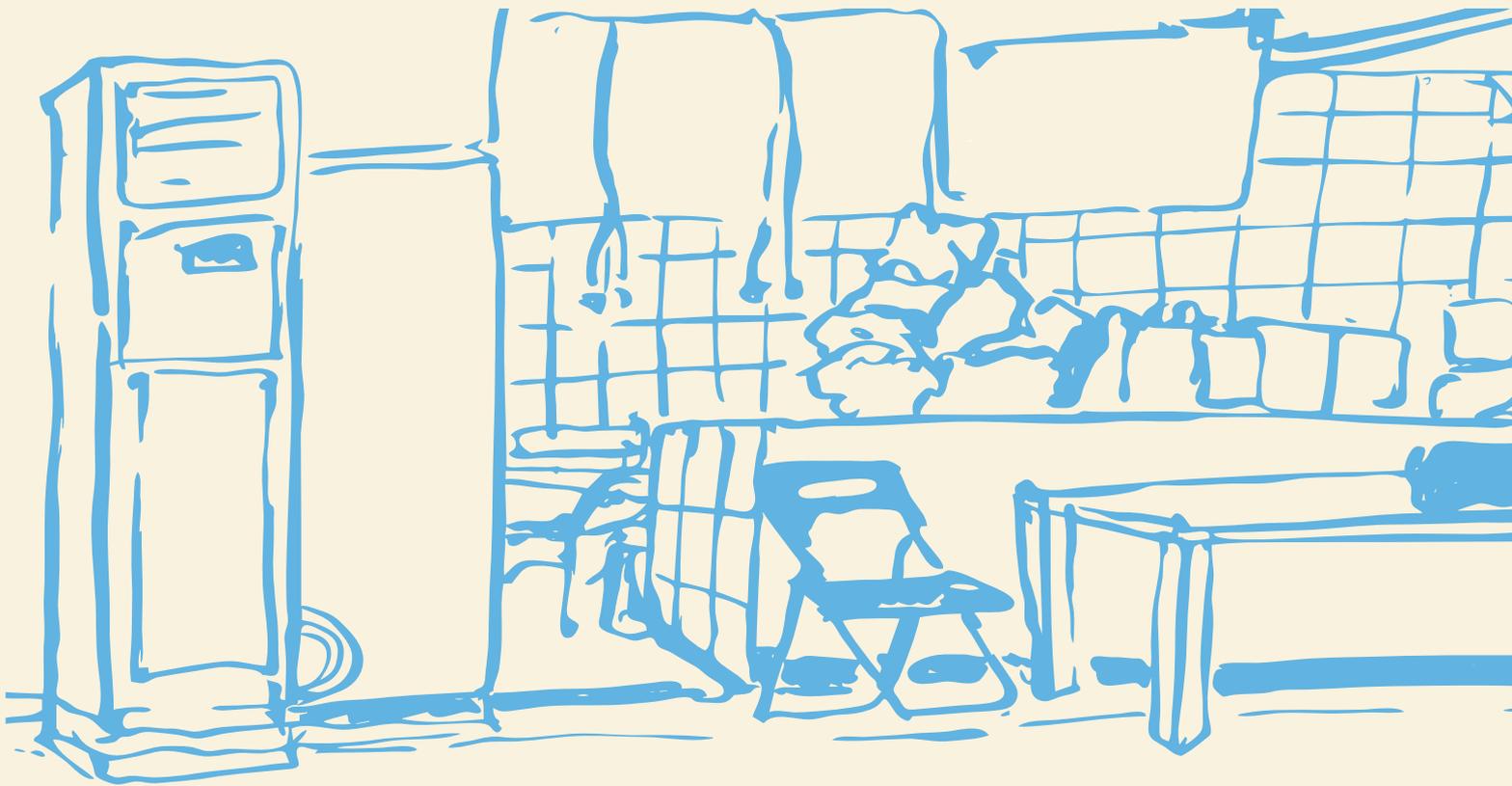


E.O.

The Refugee Camp Experience

ESG has developed extensive experience in teaching music in refugee camps. Its administrators and teachers have been present in all the refugee camps in Athens, finding the right methods and tools for each context.





E.1. General Overview

Refugee camps shelter asylum seeker families. ESG refugee camp students perceive the camps as ‘prisons’ in which the teachers come to bring some happiness. Teachers don’t have a miserabilist approach when describing their students at the camps. They are pragmatic: “We go there to teach, share experiences, do our job and don’t waste time complaining”.

Teachers argue that they come to the refugee camps not simply to teach. Their presence helps the children to expend energy; to feel some comfort in the strange space that is a camp; to give them more experiences and skills to help them settle; to share artistic tools that will facilitate intercultural exchange. Music lessons serve as ‘occasions’, as tools for inclusion firstly between multicultural students in the camp, and then with Greek/European communities.

Teachers emphasised the high quality of the work done by ESG’s program coordinators, who are responsible for mediation with the authorities, community leaders and families at the camps, in order to achieve the best social and physical conditions for teaching. They highlighted that the program coordinators knew each refugee camp intimately, were relentless problem-solvers, resilient toward bureaucracy and understood ‘how things must be done’ in the Greek context.

E.2. Working in a Refugee Camp

Administrators and teachers were surprised by how welcoming the people were in the refugee camps. They spoke about the journey from being an outsider in the camp to slowly becoming more accepted and included. Nonetheless, they described incidents of violence between camp residents, prostitution, drug dealing, fires and police violence. For some, facing such a reality was psychologically difficult.

Given the specific challenges, some new ESG teachers at refugee camps didn't last long and left. Teachers have occasionally experienced youngsters throwing rocks at the container where the music class took place. Some mothers had less control over their male children, as they were seen as the 'man of the house', they said.

For ESG, it took a while to find the right team to work in each camp. "It was a tough experience, but not a bad experience (...) The happiest years of my life are the ones when I worked with the refugees. Even if I was exhausted going there, the children gave me so much energy", said a teacher who spent three years in Athens' refugee camps.

After a while, and thanks to the mediators, some teachers felt so 'at ease' in the camps that they would go to the house-containers of students who didn't attend the classes to invite them to join in.

The relationships between teachers and students at the refugee camps are very codified and strict in terms of ethics and data protection: there can be no physical contact, no friendship on social media, no pictures and no filming. This is difficult because teachers work with children and teenagers in need of affection and support, for whom physical contact or acceptance of friend requests on social media may be ways to communicate that support.

E.3. Teaching Music in a Refugee Camp

During the first few years of providing music lessons in refugee camps, there were two or three teachers per class. The advantages are clear, but teachers also spoke about the disadvantages, such as 'wanting to do things' in competing ways. Dealing with different methods and finding one's own space as a teacher was difficult. This contributed to some teachers leaving ESG at the time.

Particularly in the context of the refugee camps, teachers emphasised the need to keep the classes attractive: be flexible; always be aware of what's happening in front of you; have a big backpack with music pedagogy tools. ESG organised workshops with teachers and pedagogues from El Sistema Venezuela and similar organisations. These have proven to be a great support.

One of the main difficulties in teaching in refugee camps is that teachers can't plan lessons, because they never know for certain which students will attend the next lesson. The lack of continuity is a huge challenge.

“For me, in the refugee camps, the only difficult part is to bring students into the room. If the kids come to the room, then it's easy. ESG did a very good job at that, they insisted, they phoned them, and they brought them in. If the kid comes three or four times by insistence, after he will come by himself.”, explained a senior teacher.

Time is an issue in the camps: on one hand, the students have a lot of free time because they can't leave the camp; on the other hand, there may be little time, as they might leave for another country at any moment. As a result, teachers feel pressured to give as much as they can, as fast as possible, to the students.

Children behave better outside the refugee camp because they are not on their 'home turf'. Moving outside of their 'controlled space' elicits a calmer approach.

In the very multicultural refugee camp reality, with classes that include students of all ages, teachers encourage speaking less and using the body to communicate. This protects the voice, allows them to teach by imitation, and permits students to do it by themselves.

In the potentially tense and confrontational environment of the camps, namely between refugees, one of the main achievements is to make the multicultural students play as a team.

E.4. Emotions in Refugee Camps

With regard to trauma and somatisation, teachers shared that the very youngest children are a sort of *tabula rasa*, “It's like they are living for the present”, said a choir teacher. Teenagers, however, have stronger memories of their own country and of the migration travel/process. For the teenagers and young adults, the trauma may be more marked and/or evident.

The students are reluctant at first to dedicate their time to ESG's music classes. "Why should you be part of a music class if you might be leaving tomorrow for Germany?", asked a teacher rhetorically. The perception of Greece as a country of transition or passage creates a sense of instability in the minds and the bodies of all the social actors involved in refugee camps, including students and teachers.

Having many things to do in the camps helped the teenagers suffering from despair and trauma. "I think trauma was healed through action; it could be music, sports, any activity, they had to do something. The most depressing thing is having nothing to do. Our students interacted, they had people to talk to, they had a normal life, a very strange one, but it was a normal life with a container as a house, but it was their house.", said a teacher.

For the parents in the refugee camps, ESG became gradually more important to them, as they saw their kids smiling again, participating and learning something. In the refugee camps, the trust and care from the parents take considerable time to earn, mostly because they have other concerns to resolve. Outside the refugee camps, ESG brings the parents and families to concerts in which the children are participating.

The specific context of a refugee camp intensifies the emotions of teachers and program coordinators from ESG. Teachers who shared the psychological or emotional effects they felt in the refugee camps expressed that they counted on the valuable support of ESG's Educational Advisor.

Dedication to students in refugee camps creates strong bonds, even after they leave for another country: "I care even now for these kids, so, when they contact ESG and we learn something about them, it's pure joy", said a teacher.



F.O.

Inclusion

There are many kinds of inclusion happening daily in projects such as ESG, which works in núcleos all over Athens, Corinth and refugee camps. There is a clearly open attitude and considerable efforts are made to foster inclusion for all cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, sexual and linguistic identities.

Moreover, although there are no specialists in the ESG teacher team, attentive care is given to students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). There are no admission requirements to join ESG.





F.1.

How Students Experience Inclusion

Students expressed feeling welcomed by other students from the very first day, and say they felt part of the collective very quickly: “I am not a very social person, but from the first day here, the first moment in the orchestra, I felt free to express myself. I felt welcomed and that was important.”

Students rarely refer to other students by their names or origin. They tend to indicate their fellow musicians by naming the instrument they play: the strings, the horns, the wind instruments, the violins, the cellos, the violas, etc. This may contribute symbolically for inclusion, a collective one.

A moment of inclusion/equality occurs regularly when the orchestra is tuned to the note A, and the students are all looking at each other and listening carefully.

The music classes and the collective work in choirs or orchestras can be challenging at first for students who don't speak Greek or English, which may induce a sense of separation or isolation. Students appreciate the efforts made by the teachers when they don't know either of these languages well: “The teachers supported me, they knew I had a background coming from an Arabic country and language. But the teachers fought for us, they never gave up, they tried things.”

Choir classes are important for improving language skills because students must learn how to read the lyrics and repeat them often.

The travelling opportunities are very important moments for team-building and social inclusion. Travelling together by bus, chatting, sharing data on mobile phones, planning hotel stays, sharing rooms and being without their parents provided team-building opportunities that the students appreciated deeply.

Students also enjoy playing alongside musicians from different orchestras at a national or international level. It allows for intercultural exchanges in terms of ethnicity, language, gender, age and levels of music knowledge.

Some of the Greek students come from a higher socio-economic class and have families to look after them. Mixing cultural and socio-economic backgrounds increases inclusion. There is an openness to the intercultural possibilities of ESG.

Inclusion also means feeling free to express emotions. Students have referred to the Lullaby Project: parents tell a story or write lyrics; composers make music inspired by the lyrics; and the orchestra and choir interpret the new creation. It is a very personal and moving repertoire, full of emotions that have been tamped down as a coping mechanism in order to limit suffering and survive. Students feel included in this project because it is their story, the story of their parents or their friends at ESG. Such inclusion makes them feel safe enough to express emotion, not only at a personal level but also with the parents, teachers and administrators of ESG. Being able to express emotions is also a positive sign of comfort and integration.

Language is one of the principal tools for deeper social and institutional inclusion/integration. The trauma of exclusion may be experienced daily if one doesn't speak a language; one can feel out of their element. Not knowing a language separates people, it fosters shyness, it can contribute to a lack of trust and initiative. Students appreciate the efforts of the teachers to support those who are struggling with Greek and English. Their caring attitude helps them to feel included.

F.2. **Inclusion According to Teachers**

Teachers don't try to 'change' anybody. "It's a big word", they say. They hope to bring some comfort and share tools to express this comfort. Teachers establish a human, cultural and musical framework for coexistence in the class.

Greece is perceived as a country of passage, particularly when compared to Sweden or Germany, for example. As a result, migrants/refugees may find it more challenging to direct their efforts towards improving inclusion and integration. “Most migrants/refugees don’t want to be integrated into this [Greece], (...) here they don’t make a difference between migrants and refugees, it’s the same, you are an outsider. The difference is, are you going to leave soon or are you going to stay for a while?!”, explained one of the teachers.

Inclusion through music can also prove tricky because different cultures hear sounds differently. For example, the minor chord evokes different feelings from students, as a teacher explained: “I said ‘this is happy’ (referring to a major chord) and ‘what is this?’ (referring to a minor chord) And they said: ‘It’s like, I am thinking’. So, I had to change my plan: the minor chord became ‘I am thinking’, and the major chord became ‘Oh, I got the idea!’ It’s also the case in Greece because of traditional music. They have Christmas songs based on minor chords. For us, it sounds sad and weird.”

Inclusion is multi-directional, as the teachers must be included by the students who live in refugee camps: they are in the ‘students’ territory’, in ‘their containers’. Teachers feel they must first be accepted before they can achieve any results in music classes. Inclusion also comes into play when Greek youth orchestras are invited to play alongside ESG’s musicians. They must be included in a new reality, which is very multicultural and has its own types of social interaction. Music serves a common purpose as a mediation tool.

In ESG, they encourage sports as a means for promoting inclusion, which has proved effective. During the breaks between classes and the El Sistema Greece Youth Orchestra (ESGYO) rehearsals, teachers distribute basketballs, volleyballs and footballs for students to play with. “But in music, there is no sense of competition and winning as in sports”, argues a teacher.

With regard to the inclusion of foreign teachers, they have spoken about the difficulty of finding the correct way of expressing themselves and doing things according to their interlocutors in ESG’s music classes. It is about having a sense of humour, being able to react quickly, applying tools at the right place and time. It is difficult to acquire the right language and musical tools that resonate best in such multicultural contexts.

Foreign teachers explain that not knowing Greek can create barriers for the students’ integration. All bureaucracy is in Greek, which makes it difficult for foreign teachers and even more so for migrants/refugees. “Everything is very tribal sometimes, it’s like ‘it’s our culture, it’s our thing’, as if there was no room for improvement. They think, ‘Why improve something that is working fairly well?’”, said a teacher. They have also said it is difficult to make Greek friends.

ESG foreign teachers and those with multicultural family backgrounds feel a strong connection with migrant and refugee students/parents, with whom they identify, even though their migrant experiences may be very different.

Some teachers have referred to the consequences of a Greek ethos based on *oxi*, meaning 'no' in Greek (there is an *Oxi* National Day on October 28th, referring to the 'No' to Mussolini's requests during the Second World War, which must relate to the contemporary use of the word). There is a general tendency to immediately reply 'No!' to any new idea or proposition, one that could also be perceived as gaining time for a more definite answer later. During our field work in Greece, we also noticed this cultural trait, along with some counter examples in ESG. The tendency to reply 'No!', linked to the massive bureaucracy system in Greece, may be felt as pushback or a non-inclusive reaction by foreigners. It is interesting to confront this possible national trait with its opposite coming from *El Sistema* in Venezuela and Venezuelan culture, where 'Yes!' is usually the first answer, without deeply thinking about feasibility. Both traits have advantages and disadvantages to be further analysed.

F.3. Inclusion in Refugee Camps

In the refugee camps, social inclusion occurs primarily between asylum seekers because they are enclosed, and there is little opportunity for interactions with Greek society outside the camps. Inclusion is firstly about socialisation and learning the basic rules of living alongside each other. Social skills are key assets in every situation.

The repertoire of ESG's music classes in the refugee camps is a very important tool. "In the camps, the repertoire was Arabic to remind them of tradition; Greek, to help them be included in this culture; European and Western because they had to move to Europe", explained a teacher.

In most camps, teachers observed divisions between Syrians, Afghans and Iranians, which sometimes became confrontational. After a few months of music classes, however, it was possible for them to share the same space, the same repertoire, and become united. Bringing multicultural students together through music improves acceptance of other nationalities. But, for this to happen, classes should take place several times a week and should last for a minimum of two hours. Short, sporadic classes are not effective for promoting mutual acceptance between different cultures.

The majority of students in the camps are predominantly Afghan, Syrian, Iranian or Kurdish. However, there are also young refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa, who required special attention to ensure inclusion, as many of the students had not previously had the opportunity to interact with individuals with black skin.

According to teachers, different cultures in the camps displays different approaches or levels of interest: in general, the Syrians were considered the most focused and best able to follow the classes, usually because they had been to school in Syria and came from more 'structured families'. Some were from a higher socio-economic class (e.g., doctors or lawyers). They were the first to leave the refugee camps as their refugee status was given official status because of the war, and they were better educated than most other migrants.

Most Afghans and Kurds stayed in the camps, as they were unable to obtain asylum in other EU countries. Inclusion and social integration in EU countries vary according to nationality and the network of international agreements.

During the first months of classes in the refugee camps, teachers observed that Afghan students tended to pay more attention to male teachers, reproducing the culture in their home country. This often meant that women teachers felt excluded at first.

Some students became demanding, focusing on excellence and 'expelling' other students they considered not as good. Although they experienced inclusion when they joined, they started to exclude those that they felt were not up to their standards.

Several examples were shared of child and teenage 'gang leaders' in the camps who were included in the music classes and given responsibilities (i.e., empowered) and went on to become good section leaders. They transposed their leadership skills, convincing other students to focus on music and achieve good results at concerts.

In the refugee camps, there are several forms of exclusion that might occur daily: excluding female teachers; excluding female students if their brother doesn't attend class; and no singing during Ramadan, among others. The Afghans were perceived as heavily influenced by their religious beliefs. Concerning the Yezidi refugees, they have a matriarchal social structure, less coercive religious beliefs and are very connected to the arts.

In terms of gender, girls are more focused on their studies, but some leave music classes during their teenage years to care for the family, particularly older brothers, reproducing the cultural traits of their ethnic and religious backgrounds. There is a discontinuity in the music-learning path of teenage female students, mostly those from Afghanistan.

With regard to sexual identity, specifically homosexual students in refugee camps, teachers have reported that there are some particular cultural traits among the Afghan and Kurdish cultures that require careful handling. Boys can be very 'feminine' and very physical with each other. They are not allowed to have friendships with girls during their teenage years, and so they form close bonds with other boys. This also means that they want to be close to male teachers which can create challenges for teachers, who must maintain distance without making the boys feel rejected.

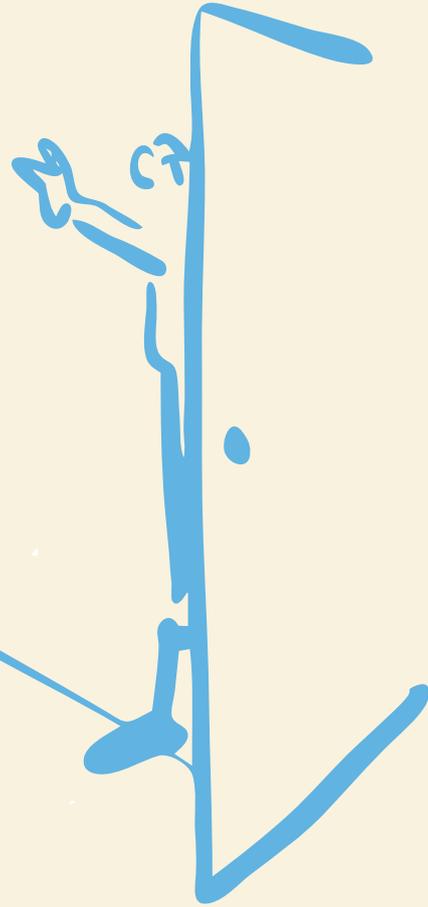


G.

Mediation

All actions at ESG involve mediation and everyone is a facilitator of some kind. They must create connections, encourage bonding and develop trust. It is important to find the correct mediation to foster a sense of belonging and reinforce the sense of a 'safe space' at the núcleo.





G.1. Mediation by the Education Coordinator

At the Kypseli núcleo, the headquarters of ESG where they attend to most students, there is a specific Education Coordinator (EC) who is responsible for mediation with the parents and students. The EC facilitates all the contacts for parents and students, and takes care of the mediation between parents, students and teachers. The EC welcomes everybody and is one of the last to leave the núcleo. EC's desk is in the main hall, next to the waiting room for students and in front of the classrooms.

The position of the EC is a sensitive role because it is the first image of ESG. The EC deals very closely with multicultural families and must find the correct language and attitude for each case. The EC is available to prepare students for what to expect in class and provides for any support that may be required after class.

As a result of this close daily contact, the EC becomes more familiar with the social and family contexts of the students than the teachers. Parents and students may share some of their backgrounds or specific issues that they are concerned about. Due to personal or family difficulties, some students may arrive late or not be in the mood for class or may not have studied enough at home, for example.

This can create tensions with some teachers who may be more demanding with their students on a particular day. The EC is often tasked with finding a compromise between the demands of teachers and the reality of the students' lives.

“I love being around kids, I felt they have embraced me. (...) It's nice to feel they trust you”, says the EC. The EC gained trust thanks to its daily commitment to the mission and positive attitude, but also because the EC joined the ESG choir as a voluntary apprentice, sharing the learning process with students. The EC is also mentoring two students in the Music for Active Citizenship program (part of the Erasmus+ project), helping them manage anxiety and improve their concentration and organisational skills as well as sound and body control.

EC might be perceived as a 'junior role' when looking at the human resources organigram: nonetheless, it is key. EC's mediation can reinforce ESG or it can weaken the trust and commitment from students, parents and teachers.

The EC also deals directly with the students that are unaccompanied refugees. These students are housed in specific shelters and always come accompanied by an official caretaker. Such teenagers rarely understand Greek or English, so a way must be found to mediate correctly and make them feel included in ESG. A recurrent smile makes a major difference.

The EC's mediation with teachers is not always effective because some tend to 'put all the students in the same basket'. This is because there is a standard rule that all students must be treated equally, but it can also create obstacles when specific cases must be addressed with individual care. The voice of the EC is important when this occurs, as they must be able to understand and communicate the particularities of students and teachers. “Here, a kid is not seen as a foreigner but as a person”, says the EC.

When the EC has doubts about her actions or about how to deal with a specific emotion, she refers to ESG's Education Advisor.

G.2. Mediators in Refugee Camps

Teachers have expressed the importance of the mediation support from the Program Coordinators in the Skaramangas, Eleonas and Schisto Refugee Camps. There is another mediation role that is crucial for the effective functioning of the classes in the refugee camp: that of the 'Local Mediator', an adult refugee who is employed by ESG to support the coordinators, teachers and students in order to ensure the smooth operation of the music classes.

One local mediator was given particular praise: a Syrian man from the Skaramangas Refugee Camp, who was a sort of ‘father figure’ to the camp’s youth. “They would listen to him”, said a teacher. This Syrian mediator was also important for translating the English/Greek classes into Arabic. He would participate in all the classes, maintain close contact with students, speak with parents, persuade everybody to join the music classes and encourage them to continue attending.

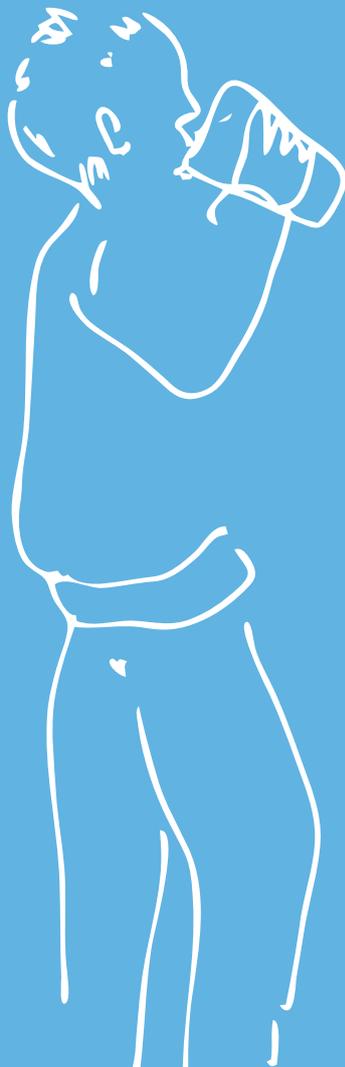
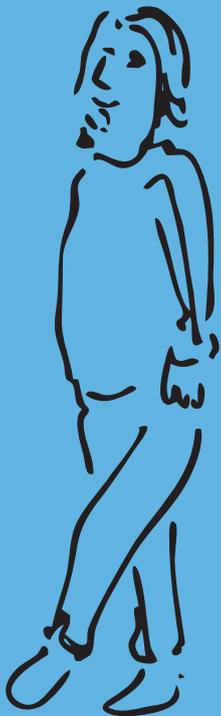
The local mediator formed a kind of team with the Program Coordinator and the teachers. After the program is established, the students, the parents, members of other NGOs and even the security guards can also be positive mediators for ESG’s music classes in the refugee camps.

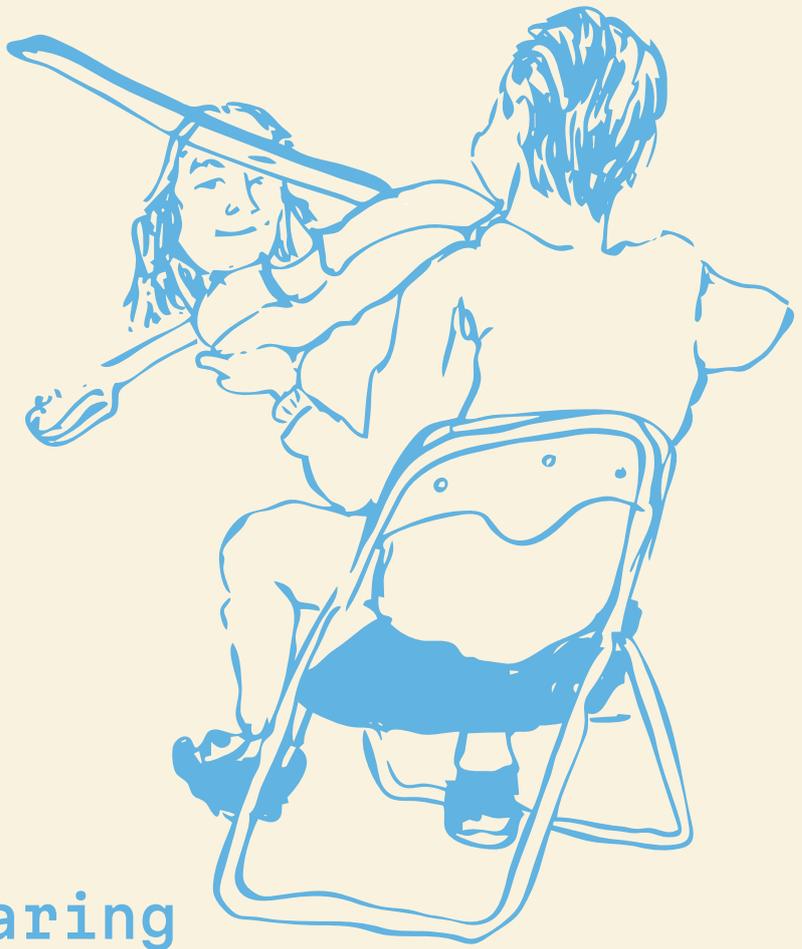


How

Comparisons

All those interviewed offered comparisons during our discussions. Commonly used in conversations, comparisons provide a contrast between ideas or impressions, clarifying what is being communicated.





H.1. Students Comparing Learning Experiences

Student enthusiasm for ESG is often enhanced when compared to other educational experiences. For example, Afghans, Syrians, Kurds and Congolese students remarked on the lack of opportunities for studying music in their own countries.

Students describe the teachers in ESG and at their regular schools as: “Two opposites. I think the teachers here enjoy more what they are doing, more than the teachers in school. There they see it just as a job.”

Students appreciate the extensive preparation for classes by ESG teachers, and the wealth of pedagogical options and solutions that they provide. ESG students tend to compare their experience with regular school: “Here, what unites us is music; in school, we have nothing to connect us”, explained a student. “There was a kind of love, of energy, that I got there”, said another student.

With regard to the optimal age for starting to learn music, some students feel ‘a bit behind’ those who initiated much earlier, as it usually takes years to develop the technique for an instrument. The more they advance in their music development, the more they understand that it is about technical details. For teenagers, there is a risk of going too fast and being too superficial about the learning process. This greatly depends on the teaching process and on the realistic goals for each case.

Students compare the orchestra classes with other music organisations where they may have had similar experiences: “The rehearsals in ESG take longer; bigger orchestra; it is more fun; the level of the music played is higher, which motivates me.”

One of the interviewed students thinks they don't play as well as other youth orchestras but that she learns more in ESG. She argues that, in other organisations, teachers are very strict, and they don't take the students' feelings into consideration.

Some Greek primary schools have music classes. Children studying at ESG become the best in the class at their school, able to demonstrate more knowledge, which gives them confidence (particularly for the young migrants).

The multicultural environment at ESG is a comfort for many migrant students who feel more isolated in regular schools.

There are comparisons with the other extracurricular activities that the students might do: “Sometimes she asks to skip taekwondo because she is tired, but with ESG it has never happened”, said the mother of a student.

For some, their difficult past makes them appreciate what they have in the present. By constantly comparing such experiences and memories, students and parents develop the strength and resilience to make the music-learning journey.

H.2. Comparing Teaching Experiences

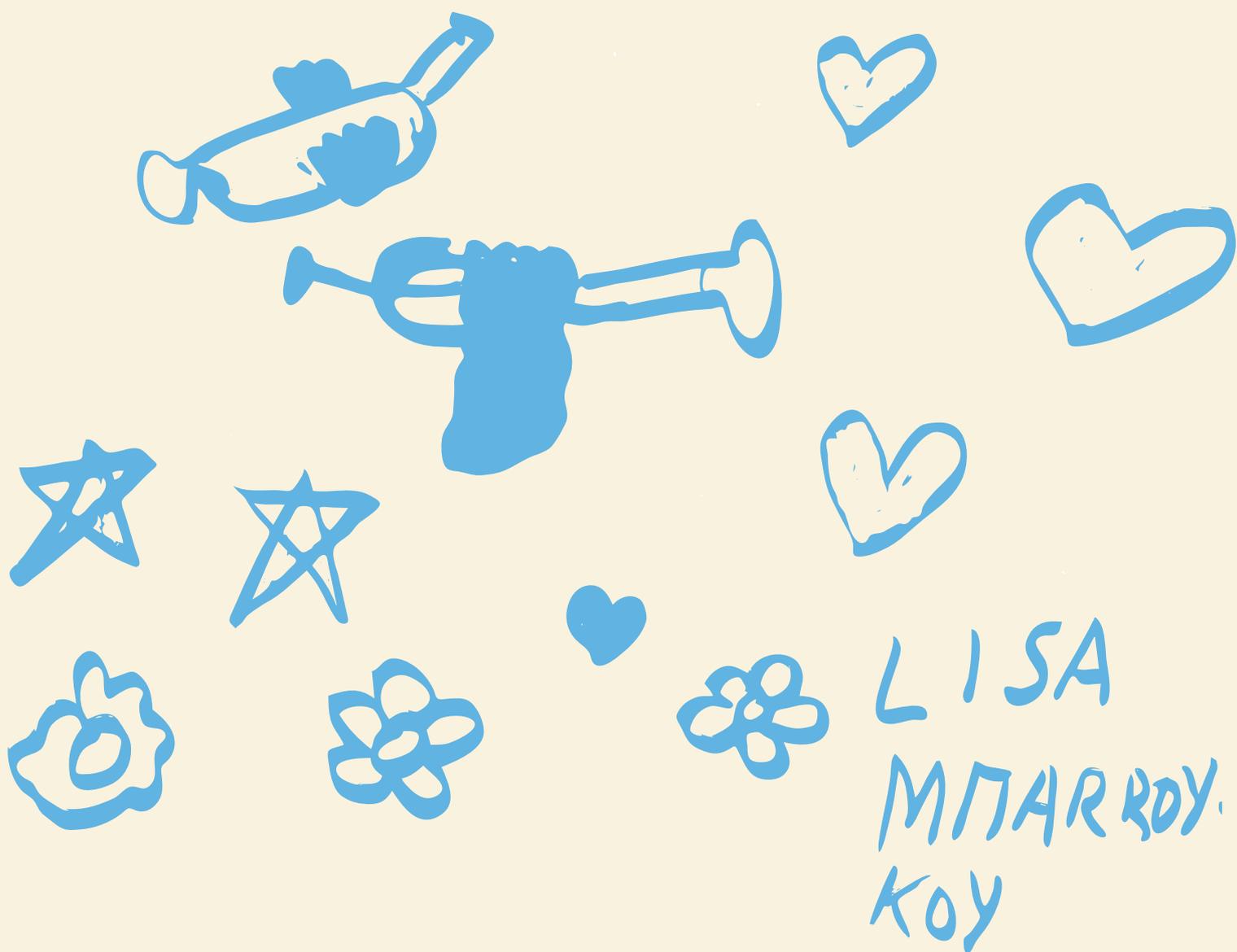
Teachers compare ESG with other organisations where they have taught, describing it as a way of being and communicating rather than emphasising competition or technical accomplishment. They found in ESG what they always wanted to do, a space where they can apply different teaching methods from those they experienced when learning music themselves. “In ESG, every lesson is perceived as an occasion to build a little society”, said a teacher.

Some teachers and members of the administration team experienced bullying in other schools and compared it with ESG: “I quit a music school in Athens because the bullying was profound and present, amongst students, teachers and administrators”, explained a teacher.

Teachers look for an administration and a team that respects them. They make positive comparisons with previous experiences and value ESG's administration and teaching teams. However, they do note specific points that they feel should be improved (mentioned in this report).

Teachers also compare teaching in refugee camps and in the ESG's regular núcleos. They say it is much more difficult to teach in refugee camps because students have fewer social skills and find the basic principles for classroom learning more difficult (i.e., sitting still, keeping quiet, listening, concentration and teamwork). Often, these principles have not formed part of the students' chaotic refugee paths, marked by war, migration and family instability.

LONE YOU

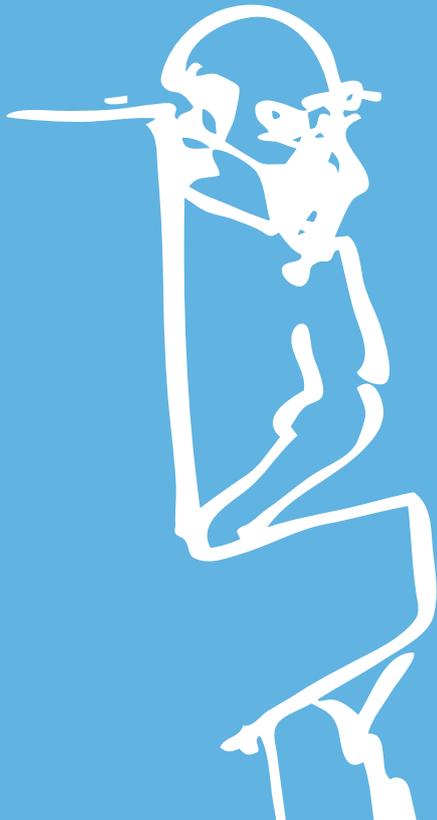


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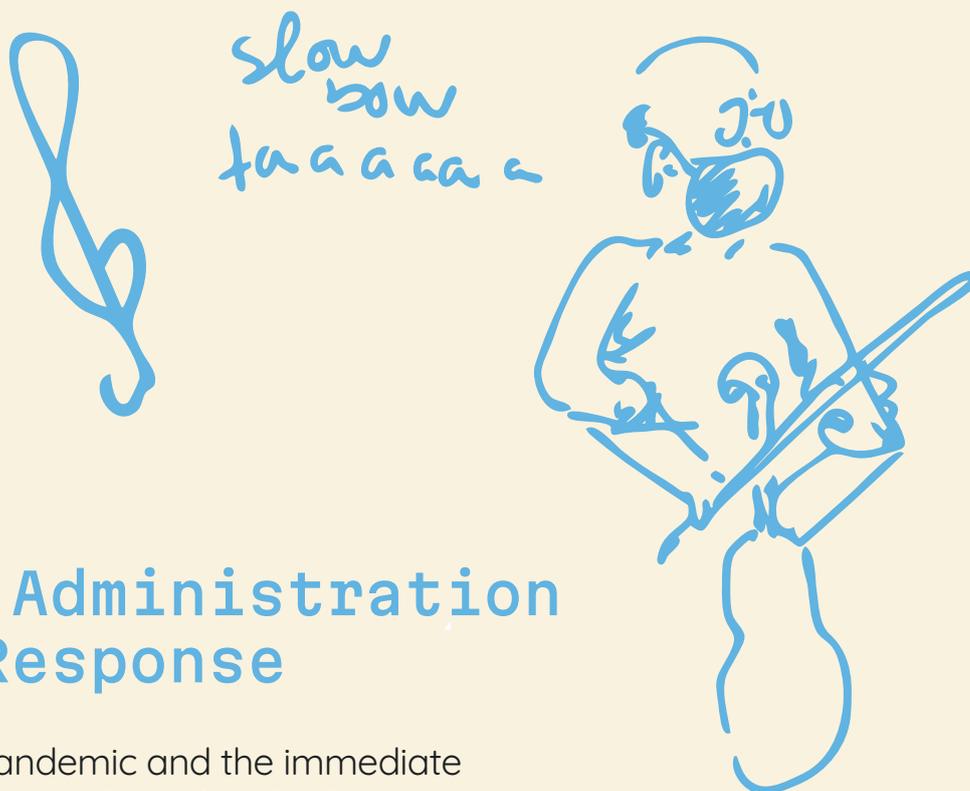
Impact of the COVID Pandemic



Greece, which had four lockdowns between 2020 and 2021, was impacted considerably by the socio-economic consequences of COVID. For ESG, which works with some of the most disadvantaged populations, including in refugee camps, the main focus was to continue online music classes during the lockdowns. In general, the online classes were held in groups, just as with the regular live classes.



The students were asked to keep their video on and their sound off. The teacher's microphone was the only one that was turned on. For example, in a choir class, this meant that the teacher couldn't hear the voice of her students; they could only hear their own voice and that of their teacher.



I.1. Board and Administration Pandemic Response

When faced with the pandemic and the immediate restrictions it triggered, ESG's board and administration team had to make decisions on students and classes quickly.

They decided their approach would be to find solutions and move forward: "Well, there was nothing we could do about that. So, you keep complaining or you invent new ways and understand that there is an opportunity to do things. We were the first to create an online platform of ESG, with videos created by our teachers (...) This is also the beauty of El Sistema Greece, its capacity for adaptation and flexibility. We don't know what's going to happen, but we will adapt", explained a board member.

Like many young organisations, ESG was growing quickly and making positive headway, but the COVID pandemic put an abrupt end to all the activities that they had planned. A number of events had been arranged for the summer of 2020, which should have been a very good one for all the members of ESG. The enforced cancellation of these concerts and other activities, along with the substitution of live lessons for online classes, could have been fatal for such a young organisation.

The administration describes the loss of students during the pandemic lockdowns but emphasises that those who continued to follow the classes were very appreciative of the efforts made, particularly by teachers.

"It was a huge effort for the teachers to teach online. Wow, the games that they were inventing, to keep the kids entertained for 45 minutes, it was insane! They had to, even though it's not in their nature to do that. But they did it!", explained the general manager.

Nonetheless, the two pandemic years meant lost time and momentum for the students' music education, the integration of parents and the organisational development of ESG.

I.2.

Lockdowns and Online Classes for Students

The quality of the internet connection and access to equipment with which to join online classes were serious issues for many students, revealing the socio-economic disparities among those in the classes. These issues demotivated some and led to a feeling that they would be “more productive doing something else”, as a student put it.

For students in general, the COVID-related restrictions and the online ESG classes were a source of despair, particularly in the refugee camps. “It was two very difficult years. Zoom was terrible. Connection was bad. We couldn’t listen to each other. The video calls with the orchestra went very bad. (...) I didn’t quit because when COVID started I was already too connected with this place”, said one of the students.

Many students quit ESG due to the many social and logistical problems that occurred during the COVID pandemic. This meant that friendships were paused and the very important daily live connection between all members of ESG disappeared abruptly.

“I was in every lesson online, but it was not the same, no interaction”, said a student. “The laptop can never give you the sense of feeling the other person”, argued another student. Live interactions are fundamental to ESG’s education and pedagogy methods.

Students had to become more organised and self-sufficient for the online classes during the pandemic, continuing with their music studies alone, with no live teachers or orchestras. Some students thought this improved their independence and organisational capacities.

Often, after the first challenging minutes of Zoom music classes, everybody would put their instruments down and spend the rest of the time chatting in groups. Human connection took precedence.

For teachers, busy professionals who were teaching and playing in different places across Athens and Corinth every week, the pandemic lockdowns provided an opportunity to take time out, reflect on education and pedagogy, and quickly find new ways to teach online. Their main goal was to keep in contact with all members of ESG, especially the students.

I.3.

Returning to Class After Lockdowns

After the COVID-related lockdowns, students felt that people became more closed and inward-looking, “looking at each other as if we were all threats”, said a student. At the same time, for some students and parents, coming back was joyful: “I wanted to hug everybody, but I couldn’t”, said the mother of a student.

Coming back from the pandemic confinement was perceived as ‘very hard’ for the wind instruments students, because they had to keep their masks on and couldn’t play. These students were present in class, in the orchestra, but they couldn’t join in with the others on their instruments. It took weeks before they were finally allowed to play.

Many students left ESG during the two years of the COVID pandemic but, for those who stayed and returned once the doors reopened, their relationships were strengthened. This was true of students but also of teachers and the administration team. “We were asking more personal questions, not just work”, said one of them.

I.4.

Pandemic in Refugee Camps

Most refugee camps closed their doors to the organisations that were working there. ESG did everything possible to maintain contact with its students, but the pandemic caused the loss of the ‘magic’ that had been created over the precious years of daily live interaction in the camps.

Online classes, established as a rapid response, started shortly after the first lockdown. It was very difficult for the students from Skaramangas Refugee Camp to follow the virtual classes because they had other more urgent worries, such as the lack of devices to be able to participate in the classes, unstable internet connection and demotivation caused by border closures in Europe. No one was able to attend online classes from the Eleonas Refugee Camp.

“We tried different ways to help them: we were buying data for them; printing leaflets with the links to remind them because they were not looking at emails and they were changing WhatsApp numbers constantly.

At the time we were also working with a choir of people living on the streets or in poverty; for them, the online classes weren't working. So, we mailed them some books with songs to listen to and they were having phone calls with their choir masters. We were trying to keep the connection with all these people", explained the general manager.

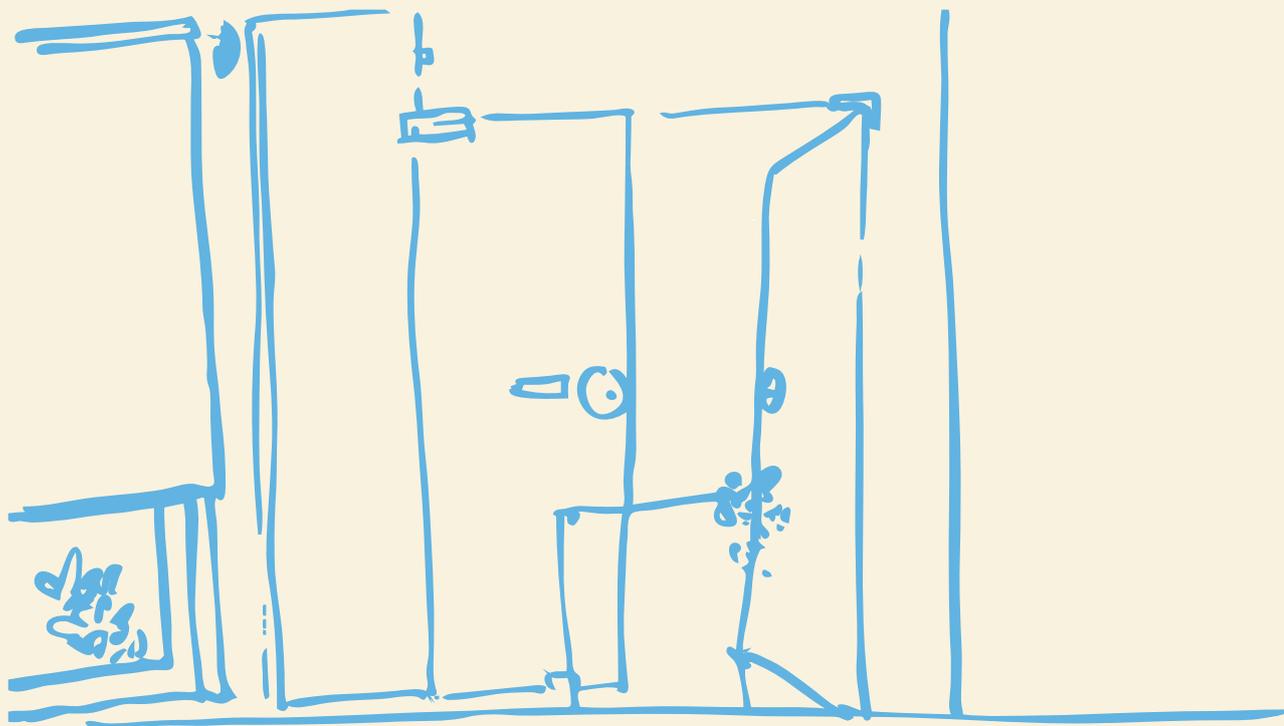


J.

Suggestions for Improvements

These suggestions and improvements are drawn from the in-situ observations and interviews with members of ESG. They are also personal and subjective, based on our extensive experience analysing similar projects in Europe and Latin America.





J.1. Institutional Improvements

ESG would gain having the board members more physically present, cultivating a closer relationship with the administration team, the teachers and the students. There can be a gap between the positive idealism and vision of the board members and the actual day-to-day work carried out by the ESG team.

Due to their privileged positions and their work around the world, the board members have a more 'open view', particularly with regard to the European realities of music education and similar organisations. This knowledge could greatly benefit ESG if there is more daily exchange between the different levels of the organigram, not just at the board-administration level.

Apparently, it is fundamental for the board to have a Greek team at the offices of the administration, the lawyers and accountants, because they grasp the particular ways of achieving a positive outcome in an idiosyncratic bureaucratic system. It is important to keep these teams in place.

The board and administration team at ESG is led mostly by women, but the organisation exists in a very patriarchal society, based heavily on power relationships, and on the position held within an organisation. Some staff feel that their voice is not heard because they are not in a position that confers power. It would be beneficial to establish opportunities for more dialogue, ensuring that everyone's concerns, no matter their position, are heard. Although many counter examples exist, but communication is an ongoing issue to improve through bottom-up and creative methods.

According to our observations and given that so many things are happening concurrently in the vibrant environment of the ESG organisation, better communication between different sectors should be established. This communication should be made in advance for better preparation and the coordination of agendas. This also affects leadership and authority issues: clear directions must be defined and understood by all.

From a managerial perspective, the lack of defined roles can be problematic. Although it can be an asset to have an administration team in which everybody is capable of doing many different things, it may also create issues in terms of accountability. At this level of the organisation, accountability is fundamental. Everyone should take responsibility for their own actions, rewarding the positives and learning from the negatives.

ESG should maintain its efforts to collaborate with other social institutions around Greece, including shelters for minor and unaccompanied refugees, private and public organisations supporting migrants and refugees, private and public schools and universities, etc. These efforts should be carried out methodically in order to reduce the risk of being over-extended and therefore losing control over its philosophy and aims.

Teachers and members of the administration team spoke about how they felt included from the beginning. Nonetheless, this inclusion should be enhanced for new teachers, particularly for those from other countries possibly having different visions regarding pedagogy, inclusion, or management. Their voices must keep being heard and their ideas for possible improvement could be given greater consideration.

J.2. The ESG Mission

The program to build stronger partnerships with institutions caring for unaccompanied minors could be improved. ESG may find effective solutions for unaccompanied minors who often change shelters and whom, in a further complication, hope to obtain asylum papers in another European country. They don't want to stay in Greece, and this is not what their families ask of them.

Nonetheless, ESG could keep reinforcing partnerships with shelters to allow teachers to work in them rather than making students come to the núcleos with their tutors. There are still few youth orchestras in Greece, and many senior ones are closing. According to some of the Greek music teachers, this issue is also related to educational and pedagogical methods that don't suit the realities of contemporary Greek youth, its specific cultures, its disposition, and its intricacies.

J.3. On Teaching

In ESG, the teachers face the challenge of teaching instruments that need 10 or 12 years to master. Very few have that time, and many students start 'late' – particularly if they are asylum seekers, who experience considerable instability, moving from one territory to another. In addition to helping students acquire social skills, build their confidence and improve communication, the goal of earning some money with music must be set and accomplished as soon as possible. These all serve as personal and collective tools for better social inclusion and integration. Being very pragmatic, music needs to become educational, a source of social support, and a means of providing regular income for those who reach the age of 18.

Concerning teachers, teaching at ESG is not enough to achieve financial independence (this is also true of similar programs around Europe). The salaries may be higher, but ESG could also develop more full-time teachers, specifically by varying their activities. As an example, a percussion teacher could work in several núcleos and also be responsible for sectional rehearsals, directing small orchestras, supporting all logistics and developing relationships with a lutherie team that is yet to be created. On the other hand, some teachers also appreciate the part-time schedule at ESG because it leaves space for other professional commitments.

The notion of adaptability could be applied by and towards foreign teachers joining ESG. Each country has its own culture and intricacies, so there must be a more open dialogue to listen to, and properly debate, ideas and methods proposed from abroad. In parallel, such dialogue could be helpful to better integrate foreign teachers and administrators into the very specific Greek cultural ethos.

J.4. On Music Education

In general, and according to some teachers, parents in Greece do not support learning or playing music because of a lack of work in that field and assumptions regarding the lifestyle of musicians. This also means that there is a gap, an opportunity to develop music education. There are too few junior orchestras in Greece, even fewer for children aged between 10 and 16. Some music schools have their own junior orchestras, demanding high levels of musicianship and with a reduced number of musicians. ESG could adapt and find the right means to

create more junior orchestras, convincing and motivating public/private financiers, institutions, parents and students of all origins and social classes.

Regarding the repertoire, although it is varied and inclusive, there can be a symbolic pressure to please financiers and venues by making ‘grand concerts’ featuring specific repertoires that might be good for communication/outreach but may be less suited to the physical capabilities or music knowledge of the students. As a result, what’s good for ESG’s development may not be as good for the students’ musical and personal development.

The opposite may also be true: the best option for the students may not allow ESG to achieve the level required for recognition by its institutional peers and financiers quickly enough. In addition, ESG is also subject to the pressures of having to compete in the rapid communication world by publishing photos, videos and posts that capture interest and promote its achievements.

In terms of musicality, teachers could dedicate more time to improvisation and experimentation. Although it is challenging to make the most efficient use of the time available, teachers and students should be able to experiment, finding solutions for technical, postural, emotional and musical problems.

More support and praise could keep being given to the singing lessons and the choir classes in particular. They have proved key for the development of music knowledge, for body consciousness and control, for communication skills, and for learning Greek and English.

J.5. On Students

Proximity is essential for teaching migrant and refugee youth, particularly when we consider Athens’s issues with public transport and traffic. There are many people in need and ESG is already doing intensive groundwork. In the future, and with the right financial support, more núcleos could be created across the capital and all over Greece. ESG have expressed how much they would like to extend this program throughout the country. It could also develop its reach to higher socio-economic classes, given the very specific issues of some of its youngsters.

The demonstrations performed by ESG teachers and students in Athens’s public schools have proven to be very successful for convincing new students to join the program. These could be more regular.

ESG is inclusive, but it could train its staff and provide tools for better support of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

ESG is inclusive of all gender and sexual identities. Nonetheless, due to the complexity of these matters, the patriarchal and conservative nature of Greek society, and the specific perceptions of the cultures from which migrants/refugees come, there is a need for more specialization and continuous sensitive dialogue.

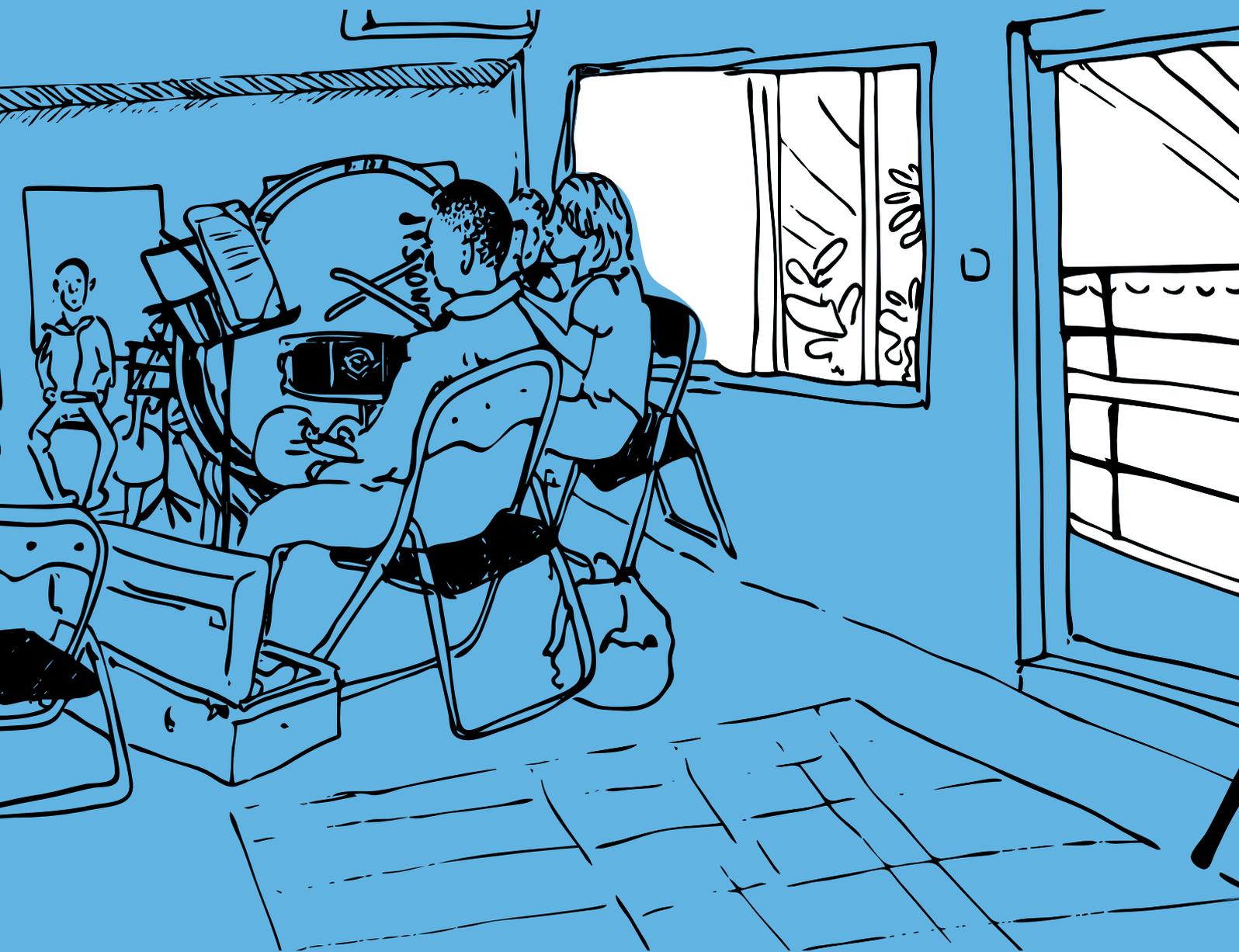
Students who have had music classes at ESG but then go to university or start a job may find themselves obliged to leave the organisation, even though they would rather continue. As a potential solution to this challenge, could there be a way to provide some recognition of the music studies at ESG? This would confer a certain status on students, so that they could continue with their studies or jobs and their music education, ideally without a negative impact on either. Or could ESG create specific schedules for those students who want to continue playing?



IDEAS

FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

To conclude this report, we suggest some ideas that might be adapted and adopted by ESG and by similar music education organisations.



ESG has built a strong reputation through their music education work in refugee camps. They have accumulated know-how and shared it with similar organisations.

Refugee camps exist all over the world, always with large numbers of youths in need of artistic tools to occupy their time, learn music, develop social skills and achieve collective results. ESG could build a team to carry out consulting in refugee camps globally (such as the partnership it has already embarked on with the Community Arts Network). A partnership with UNHCR could also be envisaged.

ESG has become known as an organisation that works on the inclusion of migrants and refugee youth through music education, which has been the main focus of the program until now. ESG could keep broadening its communication to emphasise that it welcomes all students, not solely the most disadvantaged. Students from all social classes, all backgrounds, cultures, ethnic backgrounds, genders and sexual identities are welcome to join ESG. The resulting diversity would improve the opportunities for social inclusion for all students.

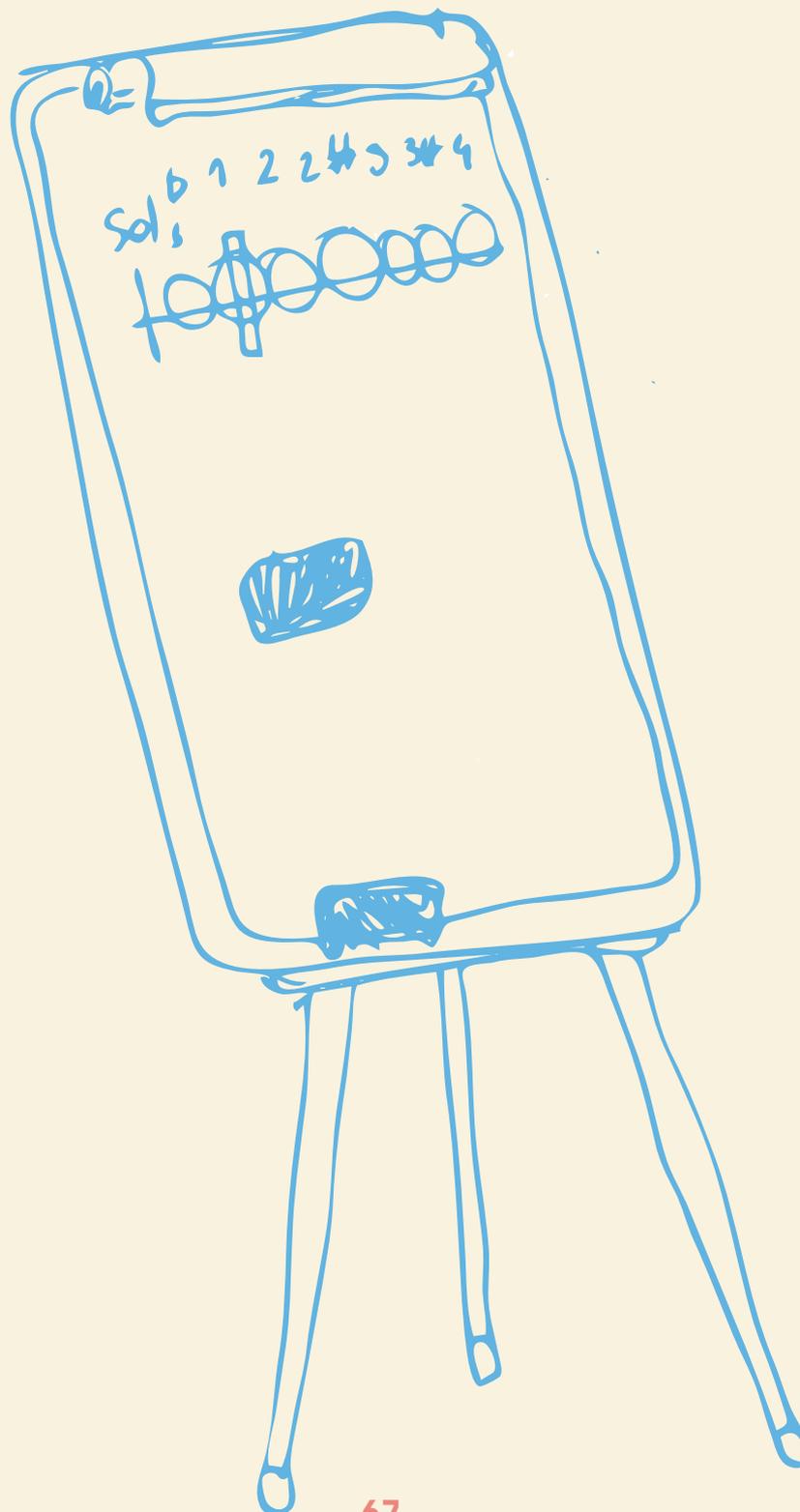


ESG could develop a specific program for young migrants and refugees that arrive in Greece when they are just over 18 years old. There is no art-based support or mediation to improve social inclusion for these young people. This group suffers most in the long-term owing to the trauma experienced in their home country, during the migration journey and, ultimately, on the streets of Athens.

Future collaborations could involve more urban cultures and music genres. Hip hop culture is much appreciated by many ESG students, and the week-long workshop organised in 2022 was very successful, motivating a lot of students. This should be continued, and the efforts expanded to occasionally include rock, funk, punk, jazz, reggae and pop, as well as all the wonderful traditional music genres from across Greece. These experiences would also develop other elements of music making, including writing lyrics, making electronic beats, arranging, playing, recording and mixing.

This could mean more financing and greater reach for establishing classes all over the country, but it might also entail accepting forms of ‘control’. Given that the public sector in Greece is highly bureaucratic, inflexible and slow, and that the private sector is well developed, a great deal of thought and consideration should be given to such an agreement if ESG wants to keep its capacity to react and adapt quickly.

A better equilibrium could be found between foreign and local financiers with regard to the goals that ESG wants to achieve. For now, although most financiers are foreign (i.e., foundations from Europe and USA), the needs are local. This can cause two issues: first, a local organisation such as ESG that is financed by global entities could lose its identity if the mission and objectives are not focused on the specific region where its actions take place; and second, the socio-cultural mission of ESG, based on long-term human relationships, needs long-term financiers that can provide guaranteed support for years to come, while the private sector is subject to market fluctuation. It should be noted, however, that the Greek state has not been economically stable enough since the 2007-2008 financial crisis.



GENERAL INFORMATION

About YouSound Research Project

Research project

'YouSound – Music education as an inclusive tool for underage refugees in Europe (2022-2023)

Research Centre

Institute of Ethnomusicology – Music & Dance, Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology, New University of Lisbon, Portugal

Financed by

The Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology. Grant agreement - EXPL/SOC-SOC/0504/2021.

Report written by

Alix Didier Sarrouy. Following the collaborative approach of the YouSound research project, the first draft was discussed and refined with the leaders of El Sistema Greece. Nonetheless, the author has the final say.

Fieldwork at El Sistema Greece by

Alix Didier Sarrouy (ethnography) and Beatriz Machado (ethnographic drawing), between October 15th 2022 and December 1st, 2022.

Research methods

- Daily ethnographic observations of music classes and ESG's administration.
- Semi-structured interviews with students (10), teachers (9), parents (4), board and administrators (7).
- GDPR and ethics consent forms signed by all the interviewees or by their legal tutors. Research methods approved by the Data Protection Office of NOVA.FCSH.

Graphic design and illustration by

Beatriz Machado

Proofread by

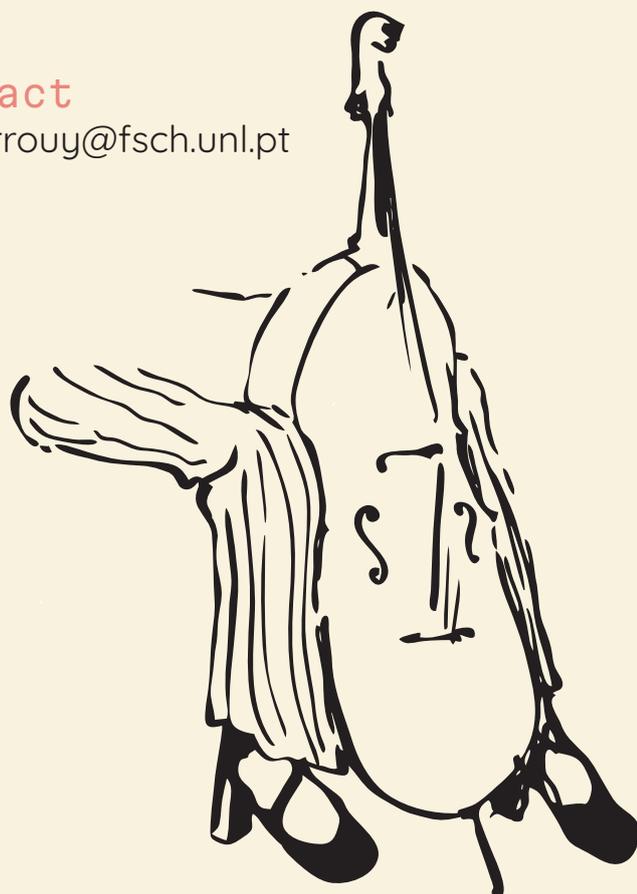
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