

# Amna Refugee Healing Network: An Evaluation and Review to Inform Programming and Strategy Planning

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## Executive Summary

Amna Refugee Healing Network (formerly known as Refugee Trauma Initiative) was founded in 2016 in Greece, in response to the mass displacement of people from conflict in Syria in 2015.

Founded by Zarlisht Halaimzai (herself a refugee from Afghanistan) and David and Jenny Altschuler, Amna has grown over the last six years against a backdrop of a rising number of refugees worldwide, an increasingly hostile environment for refugees in Europe, and a global pandemic.

Amna addresses a significant gap in psychological and trauma care services delivered to and by the refugee community, with programmes tailored to meet the needs of young children and families, youth and adults. Amna works with young children and their families (the *Baytna* programme) in response to evidence pointing to the long-lasting and transformational impacts of such interventions on long-term wellbeing across life stages. Caregivers who attend *Baytna* sessions report feeling a sense of connection, belonging and safety, noting also reduced stress, improved sleep, and improvements in behaviour, self-expression, self-regulation, and sense of connection in their children. Similarly, work with youth (the *Dinami* programme) is prioritised due to the proven link between youth interventions and successful transitions to adulthood. *Dinami* participants from the refugee and host communities report learning new skills leading to changes in their practice, and feeling a sense of respite, safety, connection, support and empowerment, affecting them on a personal and professional level.

The report traces the evolution of Amna's direct service delivery model into becoming primarily a training and capacity building organisation for non-specialists in trauma and identity informed approaches in Greece and beyond. It is now timely to evaluate the development and impacts of the organization's operations in Greece, specifically its core programmes, and to review how lessons learned can inform the Amna expansion strategy to new countries and regions of the world in the short-term (the next three to five years) and in the medium-term (the next six to ten years).



Findings demonstrate that Amna has achieved the intended objectives set out for this review. Amna has responded to the context and needs of the community by identifying gaps in non-clinical mental health support in the community, utilising a strengths-based approach to programme development with the aim of building the capacity of local organisations.

Since 2016, Amna has directly reached around 11,000 people through its programmes, with an indirect reach of more than 1 million individuals through programming, social media and advocacy.

In 2020, Amna was quick to adapt to the sudden emergence of COVID-19, moving its operations online and providing additional bespoke forms of support to help refugee communities and partner organisations navigate emerging challenges. Amna helped *Baytna* partner organisations provide remote service delivery to young children and their caregivers, with the online resources being accessed more than 175,000 times. *Dinami* youth projects similarly moved online and were valued by young people who reported feeling connected with others and experiencing respite and fun.

Amna is now scaling up by providing small grants, training and technical advice to partner organisations in different parts of the world to apply trauma and identity informed theory in practice; build connections with other community-based organisations; share and develop learning; work together to sustain practice and leverage people's voices for advocacy.

Amna has worked towards incorporating lessons learned over the years into ongoing operations across the organisation as a whole. Amna has introduced policies, training, and funds to support the wellbeing of its volunteers, staff, and larger humanitarian responders' community.

Amna has a unique footprint in serving refugee communities in Greece with a deep understanding of community needs. It has been able to successfully create a series of identify-informed and trauma-informed programmes for young children, youth, women, men, and communities. Amna's COVID-19 response is a testament to the team's understanding of the needs of the communities they serve and the trust that has been established over time.

To expand and inform the broader field, the organization must review its growth over the initial six years, identify current challenges, and design concrete strategies with adequate infrastructure and processes in place to support growth. A strategy for 2022-2026 has been drafted (and at the time of writing is being reviewed in the light of the organisational response to the crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine) building on the lessons learned and captured in this report positioning Amna as a leader in championing and serving refugee communities, and advocating with, and for refugee communities.

