



# NEXT-GEN LEARNING TRIP

ATHENS  
2026



# Overview

In February 2026, the Pearl Initiative and Shefa Fund, in partnership with IOM, convened next-generation philanthropic leaders in Athens for a field-based learning journey focused on migration systems and institutional responses.

Greece was selected for its direct relevance to regional migration flows and its role as a key entry point to Europe for migrants and refugees. Participants met migrants and refugees, including individuals displaced by crises in Sudan, Syria, Iraq and Palestine, residing in accommodation facilities and dedicated centers for unaccompanied minors, where they receive essential services delivered by IOM in close coordination with national authorities.



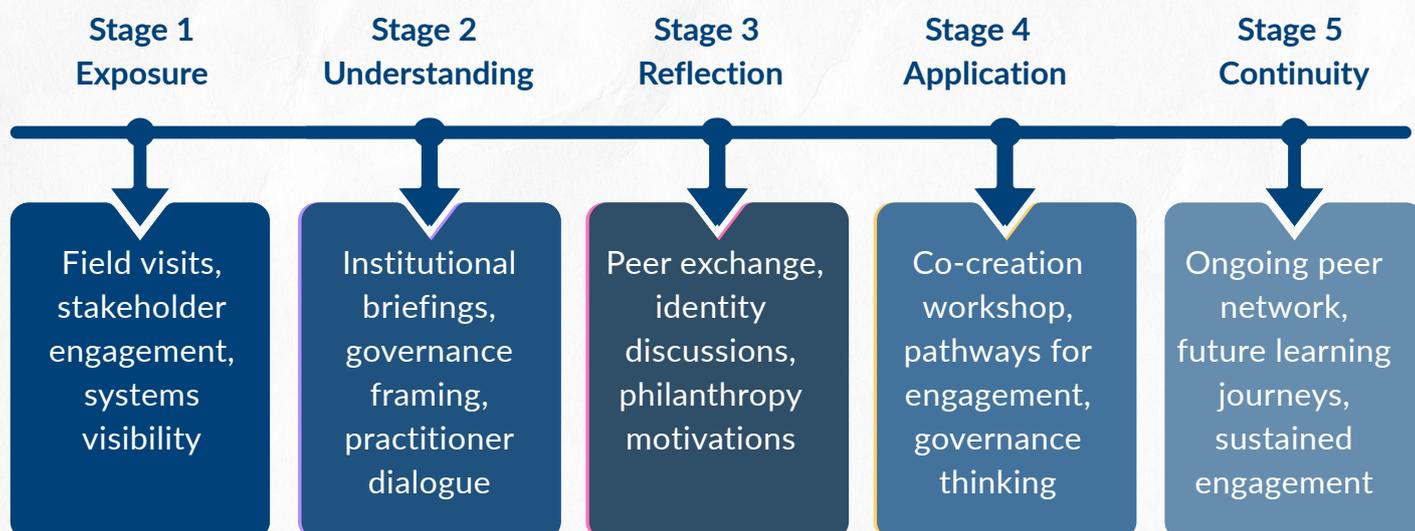
Through site visits, stakeholder engagement, and structured peer exchange, participants gained exposure to how migrants are received, supported, and integrated across systems, while reflecting on their own roles, responsibilities, and approaches to giving.

The trip also created a trusted space for next-generation leaders to connect, exchange perspectives, and learn from one another.

# Programme Snapshot

Element	Description
Format	Field-based learning journey
Duration	4 days
Location	Athens, Greece
Participants	Next-generation Gulf-based philanthropic leaders
Partners	Pearl Initiative, Shefa Fund, IOM Greece
Approach	Exposure, institutional learning, reflection, co-creation
Focus	Migration systems, governance, and strategic philanthropy
Learning Method	Site visits, stakeholder engagement, peer exchange, workshops

## The Learning Journey Model



# Objectives

01

Strengthen understanding of complex social systems and institutional responses

02

Translate field exposure into more strategic, governance-informed philanthropy

03

Encourage reflection on roles, responsibilities, and decision-making in giving

04

Support participants in becoming more informed and intentional donors

05

Create a trusted peer space for next-generation Gulf philanthropists to connect and exchange perspectives

# Impact

1

## INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF MIGRATION REALITIES

Participants reported first-hand insight into the migrant journey, from arrival and registration to accommodation, protection, reintegration, and long-term integration pathways. Exposure to systems in practice shifted perspectives from abstract awareness to applied understanding, linking policy frameworks to lived realities.

2

## GREATER AWARENESS OF INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION & GOVERNANCE

Participants developed a stronger understanding of how government entities, multilateral organisations, and NGOs coordinate roles and responsibilities in delivering services. Exposure to registration procedures, safeguarding mechanisms, healthcare systems, and reintegration processes highlighted the structured nature of migration response systems and the importance of accountability and coordination.

3

## STRONGER CONNECTION TO THE HUMAN DIMENSION

Direct interaction with migrants and unaccompanied minors provided personal context and deepened understanding of the lived experiences behind migration systems and policies. Participants observed how individual journeys intersect with institutional responses, reinforcing the importance of dignity, empathy, and informed engagement.



Collectively, these shifts reflect a movement from awareness to institutional understanding and strategic reflection.

# Participant Reflections



Participants highlighted several key shifts:

## Institutional Understanding

- Stronger understanding of migration systems and institutional roles
- Greater appreciation for coordination required across organisations

## Philanthropic Perspective

- Links between philanthropic interests and family legacies
- Curiosity about where philanthropic support can be most effective

## Leadership and Identity

- Reflection on personal motivations and values shaping engagement
- Links between philanthropic interests and family legacies
- Importance of empathetic and informed leadership

## Peer Learning

- Value in learning directly from practitioners and migrants
- Desire to remain connected and continue peer exchange beyond the trip

# Participant Learnings

## Personal Responsibility and Legacy

Participants spoke about wanting to play a meaningful role in shaping better outcomes for future generations. Many connected this to family values, faith, and legacy.

For several, the visit reframed philanthropy not just as charity, but as stewardship. A long-term responsibility to invest in dignity, opportunity, and resilient systems.

## Empathetic Leadership and Proximity

Hearing directly from frontline practitioners and meeting migrants and refugees had a strong impact. Conversations moved beyond policy into lived experience.

Participants reflected that effective leadership requires proximity and staying close to the realities decisions are meant to address.

## Beyond Funding: Systems and Partnerships

A consistent theme was that funding alone is not enough. Migration challenges are complex and require coordination.

Participants emphasised the importance of working alongside existing systems and credible partners, including governments, NGOs, and private sector actors, rather than duplicating efforts.

## Public-Private Collaboration and Policy Engagement

Discussions highlighted the need for stronger public and private collaboration, particularly around labour mobility, integration, and economic inclusion.

There was recognition that philanthropy can contribute not only through funding, but also through constructive engagement at the policy level.

## Moving Toward Long-Term Giving

Many participants expressed interest in more strategic and long-term approaches rather than reactive support.

Durable impact requires patient capital, sustained learning, and alignment with trusted implementing partners.

## Learning from Practitioners and Communities

Direct engagement with practitioners and affected communities was widely described as the most valuable part of the visit.

Understanding operational realities and constraints clarified where philanthropy can add meaningful value.

## Continued Engagement and Peer Exchange

Participants expressed interest in staying connected beyond the trip.

There was openness to continued dialogue and collaboration, with recognition that the cohort itself represents a valuable network for shared learning and coordinated action.

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# Governance Learnings for Participants

## Institutional Structures

- Participants gained a technical understanding of how migration governance is structured across public institutions, multilateral agencies, and civil society actors, including delineation of mandates, roles, and decision-making authority.
- Participants developed greater awareness of institutional funding architectures, including how resources are allocated, prioritised, and monitored across programmes.
- Participants gained exposure to monitoring and reporting mechanisms used to track programme outcomes and ensure accountability to funders, governments, and beneficiaries.
- Engagement with practitioners highlighted the relationship between policy frameworks, operational implementation, and long-term sustainability.

## Operational Governance

- Exposure to registration systems, safeguarding protocols, and service delivery frameworks illustrated the operationalisation of governance through processes, accountability mechanisms, and compliance requirements.
- Participants observed how risk management, safeguarding standards, and compliance requirements are embedded within service delivery frameworks to protect vulnerable populations and ensure institutional integrity.
- Engagement with practitioners highlighted how institutions prioritise under resource constraints, reinforcing the importance of transparency and strategic allocation of funds.
- Discussions emphasised collaboration models, cross-sector coordination, and partnership structures as critical components of effective and scalable responses.

## Philanthropic Implications

- Participants reflected on governance responsibilities associated with deploying philanthropic capital, including stewardship, oversight, and alignment with institutional priorities.
- Discussions surfaced the importance of alignment between philanthropic objectives and existing institutional mandates to avoid duplication and fragmentation of efforts.
- There was increased recognition that strategic philanthropic engagement requires institutional literacy and alignment with existing systems rather than standalone or parallel interventions.

# Key Activities

## Welcome and stakeholder engagement



The trip began with a welcome convening bringing together IOM leadership, the Pearl Initiative and Shefa Fund teams, next-generation participants, and H.E. Abdullah Al Othinah, Acting Ambassador of Kuwait to Greece.

Participants were able to engage directly with practitioners and institutional representatives, helping establish early context, build trust, and frame the trip as a structured learning experience rather than a site visit programme. The evening set expectations, introduced key themes, and aligned the group around proximity, community engagement, and responsible philanthropy.

The session positioned the learning journey within a broader policy and institutional context, introducing migration as a cross-border, multi-stakeholder issue involving governments, multilateral organisations, civil society actors, and philanthropic stakeholders.

## Institutional briefing



Participants attended an introductory session at IOM headquarters providing an overview of migration trends, arrival routes, demographics, and operational priorities in the Greek context. Since 2015, more than 1.5 million people have entered Greece irregularly, making it one of the most operationally complex migration contexts in the region.

The briefing outlined institutional mandates, coordination mechanisms, and the range of services delivered across the migrant journey, including education, skills development, healthcare, mental health support, food assistance, and specialised services for vulnerable groups. Participants also learned about evolving trends, including the stabilisation of arrivals in the Aegean, a recent increase in movements toward Crete driven largely by Sudanese nationals, and shifting demographic profiles shaping operational needs.

The session enabled participants to understand how migration responses are designed, funded, and implemented across institutions, and how governance, coordination, and operational realities intersect in practice.

## Site visits



Participants visited multiple facilities to understand migration systems in practice. These visits provided visibility into registration procedures, safeguarding standards, health and psychosocial services, housing systems, voluntary return processes, and long-term integration pathways.

These Sites included:

### **Malakasa Reception and Identification Centre**

Participants visited the Malakasa Reception and Identification Centre to understand how migrants are received, registered, and referred within Greece's reception system. The visit provided a clear view of how registration, vulnerability assessments, and referral pathways operate in practice.

Officials from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and operational partners explained how identity information and initial needs assessments inform referrals to protection services, healthcare, and accommodation.

The group also learned about on-site health and psychosocial services under the Ippokratis project, including medical care, mental health support, vaccinations, and public health monitoring. Conversations focused on coordination challenges, capacity pressures, and the realities of implementation.

## Site visits



### **Safe Zones for Unaccompanied Children (managed by Vela Foundation)**

Participants visited Safe Zones for unaccompanied children, run in partnership with Vela Foundation. These secure spaces within larger reception facilities provide enhanced protection, supervision, and structured support for children arriving without family.

Briefings outlined the risks facing unaccompanied minors and the safeguarding mechanisms in place. Multidisciplinary teams assess each child's needs and coordinate referrals to longer-term accommodation and protection pathways.

The group toured a newly developed Safe Zone to see how infrastructure and service design support child well-being. Facilitated interactions with children and Palestinian evacuee families offered a direct human perspective on protection needs. Participants also visited family accommodation areas, highlighting the operational complexity of supporting mixed populations within one facility.

### **Emergency Accommodation Facility for Unaccompanied Minors: Aspropyrgos**

Participants visited an emergency accommodation facility for unaccompanied minors in Aspropyrgos, which provides short-term shelter and care beyond first reception. The visit focused on the role of stable accommodation, psychosocial support, and case management in improving longer-term outcomes.

Staff outlined how the facility connects to Greece's broader child protection system, including referral pathways from reception centres and urban outreach. Medical screening, best-interest assessments, and case management guide referrals to more durable solutions. A facilitated exchange with educators and young residents provided further insight into the lived realities of displaced children.

## Site visits



### **Open Centre for Applicants of Voluntary Return (OCAVRR)**

Participants visited the OCAVRR facility, which supports migrants who have applied for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration. The briefing explained how voluntary return can serve as a pathway for those unable to remain in Greece, facing barriers to integration, or seeking to reunite with family and rebuild their lives in their countries of origin.

The centre provides temporary accommodation, healthcare, psychosocial support, counselling, and case management while individuals prepare for return. Staff emphasised the importance of informed decision-making, ensuring that return is voluntary and based on individual circumstances and future prospects. Participants also engaged with Palestinian families accommodated at the centre, gaining direct insight into evacuation experiences, displacement challenges, and the support provided prior to onward planning or return.

### **HELIOS+ Integration Centre**

At the HELIOS+ Integration Centre, participants learned about Greece's national integration programme supporting refugees and migrants through employment services, vocational training, Greek language courses, housing assistance, and community engagement.

The session highlighted how labour market access and social inclusion are addressed together. A structured dialogue with programme participants offered first-hand insight into integration challenges, including employment, housing, and language barriers, and the importance of sustained support in achieving self-reliance.

## Reflection, peer exchange, and co-creation



Structured reflection sessions were embedded throughout the trip to enable participants to process learning and contextualise their observations.

Discussions explored personal motivations, philanthropic identities, and decision-making approaches, while peer exchange enabled participants to learn from one another's experiences, perspectives, and family legacies.

The programme concluded with a collaborative workshop bringing together participants, NGOs, and frontline practitioners to reflect on observed challenges and identify practical opportunities for engagement.

The session encouraged participants to consider how philanthropy can complement institutional efforts through partnership, influence, governance, and long-term engagement, not only through financial contributions.

### **Governance Observations**

From a governance perspective, participants observed how roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes are structured across institutions and service providers. The visits underscored the importance of accountability, safeguarding standards, inter-agency coordination, and structured collaboration in delivering coherent and effective responses.

# Conclusion

## Strategic Value and Future Engagement Opportunities

The learning trip provided participants with direct exposure to the operational realities of migration management and created space for dialogue and reflection. Several participants expressed interest in remaining engaged and exploring how future philanthropic efforts could align with identified needs. Based on the discussions held during and after the visit, a number of potential areas for follow-up were outlined:

### Improving Conditions for Children and Vulnerable Groups

Participants observed the importance of safe and supportive environments for children and families. Potential areas of engagement may include:

- Rehabilitation or upgrading of child-friendly spaces within reception centres and safe zones
- Provision of recreational materials, educational supplies, hygiene items, and other essential in-kind support

These interventions reflect needs directly observed during the visit.

### Strengthening Health and Service Delivery Systems

The visits also highlighted operational pressures faced by medical and psychosocial teams. Possible areas of support could include:

- Providing basic digital equipment for health professionals
- Strengthening data registration and case-tracking systems

Such contributions may help improve efficiency and continuity in service delivery.

### Supporting Innovation Through Regular Labour Pathways

Some participants showed interest in more systemic approaches, including the development of regular labour and migration pathways aligned with national labour market needs. Potential areas of engagement could involve:

- Research and feasibility assessments
- Expert consultation and modelling
- Design and pilot testing of proposed approaches

The visit itself was designed to foster understanding and informed perspective, rather than to seek commitments. The areas outlined above may serve as a starting point for continued dialogue and shared learning.

This learning journey offered meaningful field exposure for participants, enabling them to engage directly with frontline practitioners and affected communities. The experience strengthened their understanding of how governance and service delivery function in practice, promoting more responsible and informed philanthropic engagement.

