# **2. General situation of unaccompanied minors in Greece**

**Accommodation**

Regarding the residence of unaccompanied refugee children in Greece, there is a big difference between unaccompanied minors living on the mainland and unaccompanied minors living on the islands. While on the mainland, there are accommodation structures in which unaccompanied minors can find decent housing and support, on the islands the situation is very difficult as they usually live in camps, together with adults or in "safe zones" in very precarious conditions. Many of them have the right, due to their young age, to be transferred to the mainland, but many times this process is delayed. It is common for unaccompanied minors living outside shelters, camps and other facilities of the "protection" system to live with many people in the same apartment, usually with adults of their own nationality. This causes many dangers for them and they are often victims of abuse.

The accommodation facilities where unaccompanied minors live are rarely funded by the state and more often by international organizations such as the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration. Management is done by NGOs specializing in this field. These shelters exist all over the country, but especially in Athens they are disproportionately located in the city center. The NGO that manages most of these shelters is “Metadrasi”, but the shelters are also run by organizations such as “Arsis”, “Solidarity Now” and others.

**Education**

Regarding the inclusion of unaccompanied refugee children in education, it should be noted that unaccompanied minors have the right to enroll in Greek schools. There are reception courses for refugees to support their integration. There are, however, cases where unaccompanied minors, due to lack of knowledge of the Greek language, are in a lower grade than they should have been in based on their age. Also, in many cases, unaccompanied minors enrolled in schools do not attend regularly due to the language barrier and due to the reduced desire to integrate into Greek society.

In general, Greek teachers are willing to be trained in new practices and methods of teaching and managing unaccompanied refugee children in non-formal and informal settings, as studies demonstrate the need for the teachers to enhance intercultural and multicultural education skills as there is a lack of skills and abilities of teachers as far as the management of classes with students from many different backgrounds is concerned.

**Rights Report**

Greece is considered a transit country by both immigrants and the government. As a result, the effort to promote social inclusion in Greek society is not enough.

The latest report of the “Network for the Rights of the Child”, regarding the rights of unaccompanied minor refugees and immigrants and the situation prevailing in Greece, states the following:

• any discrimination based on origin, gender, religion, political beliefs by the official state is strictly prohibited (Article 2 of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child)

 • In Greece, incidents where unaccompanied minors are not only in a state of protective custody, but end up being held in police stations and even in detention centers with other detainees have been reported

* there is a lack of interpreters and as a result unaccompanied minors are not able to communicate satisfactorily with the authorities and are led to isolation
* the exception is the Asylum service, which is not sufficiently staffed
* It has been observed that requests from unaccompanied minors from Morocco, Algeria and Pakistan for international protection are rejected without even being considered, according to data from the National Council of Resistances (NCR).
* The issue is the education of unaccompanied minors who in practice seem to be excluded from participating in the country's formal education (UNHCR, 2018)

**Responsible bodies**

 In Greece, the responsible for the management of immigrants and refugees organization is the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum. The Asylum Service reports directly to the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum. The Ministry of Education is responsible for education and vocational training, the Ministry of Health is responsible for health issues and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is responsible for access to work, etc.

The Appeals Authority was established by article 3 of law 3907/2011 and operates in accordance with article 5 of law 4375/2016, as in force, as the secondary body for reviewing appeals who ask for international protection against the rejection decisions of the Asylum Service (a ' degree). The Appeals Authority is part of the General Secretariat for Immigration Policy (p.d. 106/2020). Twenty-one (21) Independent Appeals Committees operate in the Appeals Authority, consisting of three Judicial Officers of the Ordinary Administrative Courts who are appointed, upon their relevant request, by the General Commissioner of the General Committee of the Ordinary Administrative Courts.

The Independent Appeals Committees are supported in their work by rapporteurs, who compile a report containing a record and processing of the facts of the case and the allegations made in the appeal, as well as their matching with the information on the country of origin.

The action of the High Commissioner in Greece, as in other EU countries, is mainly advisory and assistance to the respective government, in order to develop and strengthen effectively a protection system for refugees.

In addition, the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum (migration.gov.gr) and more specifically the Reception and Identification Service implement the ESTIA 21 Program funded by the European Commission (DGHOME) and it is a housing program for applicants for international protection and their families. The Reception and Identification Service of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum implements the program in collaboration with partners. Implementing partners are the bodies that provide housing and ancillary services to the beneficiaries and cooperate with the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum for the implementation of the program. Potential implementing partners are bodies such as national, regional and local authorities, international organizations with a branch or representative office in Greece, unions, non-profit civil society organizations, branches of international organizations and foreign non-governmental organizations in Greece, and other bodies (KYA 270/05-02-2021).

Finally, the National Center for Social Solidarity (NCSS) in collaboration with UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) investigates the number and status of unaccompanied minors in Greece.

1. **Refugee Reception and Identification Procedures in Greece**

The procedures for the reception and identification of third-country nationals or stateless people are divided into the following stages:

• Arrival at the Reception Center or the Mobile Unit after the arrest by the Police / Coast Guard

• Recording and Medical Examination

• Referral to the Procedure for inclusion in an international protection regime

• Further Referral and Movement

*All procedures are performed with the help of a certified interpreter.*

* 1. **Arrival at the Reception Center or Mobile Unit after arrest by Police / Coast Guard**

*UPDATE*

Upon arrival, third-country nationals or stateless people are informed by the *Information Center of the Reception and Identification Center* or by personnel of the *Greek Police* or the *Hellenic Coast Guard* or the *Armed Forces,* in a language they understand, for their rights and obligations at the reception stage. The *UNHCR for Refugees* and the *International Organization for Migration* can provide information.

The Medical Examination and Psychosocial Support Ladder staffed by EODY conducts the initial / preliminary medical examination and identifies those in need of immediate medical assistance. The triage system is used to assess and tackle the medical needs of the population of third-country nationals entering without legal documents and to identify cases that may require special assistance (https://migration.gov.gr/ ris / diadikasies /).

* 1. **Recording and Medical Examination**

*SUBMISSION*

In the second stage, the third country nationals or stateless people are subject to the reception and identification procedures, being in a regime of restriction of their freedom within the Center, by decision of the Governor. The procedures are the following: a) personal [basic and additional] data are recorded in the Information System of *EL.AS.* (Application FIRST RECEPTION), b) Identification and Citizenship verification, obtaining biometric data for EURODAC I, II & III and face photograph, c) Medical Examination - medical examinations (medical record) and d) care for vulnerable groups – psychological support. Third-country nationals or stateless people who wish to be subjected to international protection status are referred to the locally competent *Regional Asylum Office*, while those who do not wish to do so are referred to the competent bodies.

***VULNERABILITY IDENTIFICATION***

During the stage of the medical examination (medical recording) the *Medical Examination and Psychosocial Support Ladder* of the *Reception Center* identifies the vulnerability and suggests it to the Commander of the Center, in order to provide them with specialized care and protection.

* 1. **Referral to International Protection Procedure**

After the completion of the Reception and Identification procedures, the refugees who do not seek asylum are referred to the *Hellenic Police* for return procedures (voluntary or forced) to the countries of origin or for other administrative measures (in cases of IDPs that can not be returned to their countries). Instead, asylum seekers are referred to the *Asylum Service* for registration and examination of their application for international protection. Unaccompanied Minors & other vulnerable groups are referred to the *National Center for Social Solidarity* to find a Hospitality Structure (https://migration.gov.gr/ris/diadikasies/).

The Reception and Identification Service cooperates with European and International Organizations that are active in the field of migration flow management. Particularly: • With the UNHCR for the refugees

• With the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

•With the organization Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC)

• With the European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

• With Non-Governmental Organizations that meet the appropriate specifications for registration in the respective register

**5. Identification Procedures for Unaccompanied Minors in Greece**

The procedures for the reception and identification of unaccompanied minors in Greece begin with the process of determining their age, provided that they are initially arrested by the responsible Police Bodies and their details are identified by specialized personnel to determine their nationality.

For unaccompanied minors with an estimated age between 15 and 18 years, bone medical examinations are performed in the context of the most accurate possible determination of their minority. From the moment that a minor comes up, a written Application is prepared by the Prosecutor's Office of First Instance Judge as well as a Prosecutorial Order to EKKA in order to find a place to stay.

At the same time, a Prosecutorial Order is given at the Border Center, in order for the minors to be transported to the Hospital for the necessary child psychiatric examinations as well as examinations of communicable diseases. After the receipt of the answer from EKKA with the specification od a certain accommodation place the unaccompanied minors, then the Prosecutor of the Court of First Instance Judge issues an order and determines their transfer and accommodation in the mentioned hostel or reception center. Sometimes, from some Courts of First Instance Judge (eg Ioannina, Kos, Chios) in the frame of practicing the services of the Committee of Unaccompanied Minors, they appoint from the Service of Juvenile Curators, a Juvenile Curator who acts as either a single person who represents a supervisory board or a unique supervisor. More specifically, the Reception and Identification Service informs the Juvenile Prosecutor or the Prosecutor of the Court of First Instance Judge, who acts as a temporary commissioner and follows the necessary steps to appoint a commissioner who will be responsible for the protection and best future of the unaccompanied minor.

Unaccompanied minors during their stay in the Reception and Identification Centers are separated from the adults and are hosted in a separate zone (safe zones) for protection reasons. At the same time, there is provision for their protection, their creative employment, as well as their discreet psychological support. When they leave the Reception and Identification Centers, they are referred to appropriate open accommodation structures in various parts of the territory. The appointed commissioner for unaccompanied minors shall take care of their application for international protection.

With regard to the criminal proceedings of unaccompanied minors, the following possibilities apply on a case-by-case basis: if a case is filed by the Police Department against the unaccompanied minor for illegal entry into the country, it is submitted to the competent Prosecutor of the Court of First Instance Judge who may either: with his order, approved by decision of the Appellate Prosecutor, to abstain from the Criminal Prosecution according to article 83 par.2 L.3386 / 2005 in order for the minor to be returned to his country of origin - if this is possible or b) to exercise criminal prosecution for violation of article 83 par. 1 of Law 3386/2005 and to refer the unaccompanied minor to the competent Juvenile Court.

**6.1 Data on unaccompanied minors in Greece**

According to the latest official data, the number of unaccompanied children in Greece amounts to around 4,000 (15/5/2021), of which are:

• 2491 in long-term or temporary hosting

• 110 \* in Reception and Identification Centers

• 37 \* in Protective guard

• 196 \* in Open Hosting Centers

• 598 \* in Informal / Unsafe housing conditions - including 159 children accompanied by an adult who is not by law their main guardian (separated) and

• 107 for transfer to long-term or temporary accommodation

In the following graphs we observe the distribution of the number of AAs in Reception and Identification Centers (fig. 5), their distribution by type of accommodation (graph.6) and the distribution of the number of Referrals AA to EKKA per month of the current year.

**Fig. 5 Number of unaccompanied refugees in reception and identification centers / Protective custody**



 **R**eception and identification centers

Protective custody

**Fig.7 Number of referrals A.A. at EKKA in 2021**



 35129: Total number from April 2016 until April 2021

**6.2 Data of unaccompanied minors in Thessaly**

According to the latest official data, the number of unaccompanied minors in Thessaly is 60. Of these, 30 are in Larissa (Kokkino Nero) and the other 30 in Volos (Makrinitsa). The care of unaccompanied refugee children has been undertaken by 2 NGOs, KEAN in Larissa and ARSIS in Volos. These organizations care for unaccompanied refugee children on a 24-hour basis with responsible staff covering the daily needs of these children, such as social workers and psychologists, cooks (for food), officials / administrators for the family reunification process. or with families waiting for them in other countries.

**7. Profile of unaccompanied minor refugees in Greece**

**7.1 Most common reasons to escape**

The most common reasons for juvenile refugees to leave their country are the following:

* war
* conditions of political instability and insecurity
* serious financial problems
* child labour
* unstable political conditions
* civil wars and serious human rights violations
* reunion with their family who immigrated in the past
* Natural Disaster
* job search
* opportunities for education and quality of life
* avoidance of difficult family environment (sexual - physical abuse, forced marriage)
* mutilation, organ trafficking, any form of human trafficking
* escape with the urge of the parents expecting financial help from him
* human targeting because of their parents' religious or political beliefs
* poverty
* child labour
* chronic health problems due to hardship and premature labor

**7.2 Country of origin / birth / origin - breakdown by nationality**

Unaccompanied minor refugees arriving in Greece come from the following countries: Afghanistan, Somalia, Congo, Syria, Palestine, Cameroon, Iran, Pakistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Nigeria. In the next Graph we can observe an estimated distribution of the population of uncompannied minors by nationality.



**8.** **Problems of Unaccompanied Minor Refugees in Greece**

Refugee children are exposed to a number of factors that upset their mental balance. Due to Fazel & Stein's survey, which was conducted in the United Kingdom and compared a group of refugee children and a control group on the frequency of mental health problems, almost a quarter of refugee children developed psychological problems, three times more than the control group (Fazel & Stein, 2004).

The manifestation of mental health problems is even more pronounced in unaccompanied refugee and immigrant minors. A study by Derluyn and Broekaert (2007) on 166 unaccompanied refugee children showed that 47% had severe to very severe symptoms of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The reception of unaccompanied minors in the host countries reveals the following main problems:

• the culture of mistrust and suspicion that exists towards unaccompanied minor refugees.

• the refusal on the part of any state mechanism to show responsibility and solidarity in the treatment of minor refugees. Thus, the existing laws for the protection of refugee children are not sufficiently implemented.

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• the refusal on the part of any state mechanism to show responsibility and solidarity in the treatment of minor refugees. Thus, the existing laws for the protection of refugee children are not sufficiently implemented.

• the difficulty of unaccompanied minors in showing the trust in the authorities of the host country due to their traumatic experiences and their different cultural background (European Union Committee, 2017).

More specifically in Greece, the main problem that creates difficulties in the integration of unaccompanied minors (in education, work, etc.) is that they do not intend to stay in the country. Most of the unaccompanied minors consider Greece as a transit country and their stay there is considered temporary. Even though migration to Northern Europe is much more difficult after the signing of the EU-Turkey agreement, most unaccompanied minors do not consider Greece as their final destination. This creates a lack of motivation to learn the language and to integrate into the workplace through apprenticeship or any other project.

Another key problem is that, due to the EU-Turkey agreement, Greece hosts an increased number of unaccompanied minors in relation to the country's capabilities and economy. Many of them are located on the islands and while they have the right to be sent to the mainland, the process is usually slow. Age identification is another challenge, as unaccompanied minors usually do not have an identity and sometimes have the benefit of pretending to have a different age from their actual one.

While on the mainland, there are accommodation structures in which unaccompanied minors can find decent housing and support, on the islands the situation is very difficult as they usually live in camps, together with adults or in "safe zones" in very precarious conditions. Many of them have the right, due to their young age, to be transferred to the mainland, but many times this process is delayed. In many cases, unaccompanied minors registered upon arrival on the islands "disappear" from the official authorities. This is either because they manage to leave the country illegally for Northern Europe or because they live outside the protection system.

**8.1 Risks faced by Unaccompanied minors**

Refugee-migrant children who are unaccompanied and minors are constantly exposed to risks such as:

* Violence (including reception centers)
* Physical abuse
* Exclusion in the host country
* Vulnerability to disease, poor nutrition and physical injuries.
* Dependence on adults
* Delay in one of the developmental stages, which can harm the child as a whole personality (UNHCR, 1994).
* Lack of education and socializing.
* Existence of a difficult legal status for them.
* Dealing with bullying and racist behaviors during the accession process.
* Difficulties in communication due to lack of language skills (Ayotte 2000, German, 2004, Stanley 2001).
* Difficulties in integration
* Prolonged stay in the refugee environment, which negatively affects the emotional development of children
* The feeling of isolation and deprivation of traditional standards due to the living conditions of the surrounding community.

**9. Professionals, agencies and services involved in the support of Uncompanied minors**

Trying to record the professionals and the institutions or services involved in the support of unaccompanied minors in Greece, the following categories were identified (see tables 1, 2, 3).

• border police, doctors

• lawyers, prosecutors

• social workers

• staff of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

• the staff of KEPY and reception centers

• teachers

• interpreters

• NGOs

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| **Table 1: PHASE 1 and 2 - Arrest, Arrival at the Reception Center, Recording and Medical Examination** |
| **Responsible Bodies** | **Procedures** | **Professionals** | **Roles** |
| Greek Police | Arrest and information about their rights and obligations at the reception stage | Personnel of the Greek Police or the Coast Guard of the Greek Coast Guard or the Armed Forces |  |
| Information Group about the Reception and Identification Center  | Arrival at the Reception Center or at the Mobile Unit after the arrest by the Police / Coast Guard |  | Information |
| UNHCR fro Refugees | Information |  | Information |
| International Organization for Migration | Information |  | Information |
|  Responsible Group for Medical Examination and Psychosocial Support | Medical Examination | EODY staff |  |
| Responsible Group for Medical Examination and Psychosocial Support of the Reception Center |  |  | Initial / preliminary medical examination / medical examinations and identification of the needed immediate medical aid. Use of the triage system: assessing and addressing the medical needs of the population of undocumented third-country nationals and identifying cases that may require special assistance. |
| Responsible Group for Medical Examination and Psychosocial Support of the Reception Center |  |  | Recording of personal data in the Information System of Greek Police. |
| Responsible Group for Medical Examination and Psychosocial Support of the Reception Center |  |  | Identity and Citizenship verification, biometric data for EURODAC I, II & III and face photo |
| Responsible Group for Medical Examination and Psychosocial Support of the Reception Center |  |  | Caring for Vulnerable Groups - Providing Psychosocial Support |
| Responsible Group for Medical Examination and Psychosocial Support of the Reception Center |  |  | Identification of the vulnerability and a relevant suggestion to the Commander of the Center, in order to provide them with specialized care and protection. |

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| **Table 2: PHASE 3rd-4th- Reference to Inclusion Process, Further Reference** |
| **Responsible Bodies** | **Procedures** | **Professionals** | **Roles**  |
| Regional Asylum Office | Referral to a procedure for inclusion in an international protection regime |  |  |
| Regional Reception Services | Third-country nationals or stateless persons who do not wish to be granted international protection are referred to the competent authorities |  |  |
| Regional Reception Services | Referral to the National Center for Social Solidarity to find a Hospitality Structure |  |  |
| Regional Reception Services | Intervention of a Juvenile Prosecutor or a Prosecutor of the Court of First Instance | Juvenile Prosecutor or Prosecutor of the Court of First Instance | Necessary actions for the appointment of a commissioner who will be responsible for the protection and the best interests of the unaccompanied minor |
| Regional Reception Services | Referral to appropriate open accommodation structures | Interim Commissioner | Providence for the protection, the creative employment, as well as the discreet psychological support of the Un.Ms |
| Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum in cooperation with the competent Prosecutor | Referral to appropriate open accommodation structures | Appointed Commissioner |  Has the necessary knowledge and experience to perform his duties in a way that ensures the best interests of minorsCurates their application for international protectionEnsures that they have legal assistance in the process of their application for international protectionTakes care of the child, i.e takes care of his upbringing, his education, his housing and his well-beingRepresents AA in legal or judicial proceedingsTakes into account the opinion of the child before making any decisionInforms about the date of the interviewHe is invited and can be with them in the interviewAttempts to locate their family members in collaboration with the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors |
|  |  | Interpreter | At all of the above stages he offers interpreting services to file the asylum applicationto conduct the interview at all stages of the process |
|  |  | Lawyer  | Guarantees the practical application of the relevant provisions of the asylum procedure, including the access of the unaccompanied minor to the procedure and the exercise of the rights provided by law |
| UNHCR |  |  | Provides specialized support to the competent local authorities regarding the location and referral process of new arrivalsProvides information to newcomers about their rights, obligations and asylum procedure at entry points throughout Greece |
|  |  | Social workers | Their role is, basically, the social and psychological support of minors.They meet minors more often and know their situation better than anyoneThey take care of them, help them to express their feelings and build a relationship of trust with them.They play an important role in supporting unaccompanied children in the asylum application process.Before the minor can even decide whether to apply for asylum, the social worker can help by deciding whether or not to do so. |