

Chapter Nine

Experiences from Greece

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Overall National Context, Facts, and Legal Basis

Overall Context: Facts (and the Most Important Numbers)

Refugees consider Greece as a transfer state, a gateway to other European countries. However, due to the strict European laws considering the influx of refugees, it is common for them to stay in Greece for a period longer than desired. Compared to the 2018 report regarding unaccompanied minors, there has been an increase of 40% in the absolute numbers (3,010 in 2018, 4,222 in 2020). In addition, there has been a change in the ratio between boys and girls, with the latter now occupying a larger percentage compared to 2018. There are multiple entry points for refugees, and upon entry, they are met by the Greek authorities, the Asylum service, the Greek police, and the Coast Guard. More specific information can be found below.

As of 30 September 2020, 4,222 unaccompanied minors reside in Greece. Out of the total: 92.8% boys, 7.2% girls, 8.8% <14 yrs. old. 23% of UAC are from Pakistan, 39% from Afghanistan, 11% from Syria, and 27% from other countries. The total number of places in shelters for UAC is 1,797. 1,557 UAC are on the waiting list, of which 120 are in Reception and Identification Centres, and 226 in Protective Custody. The total number of UAC referrals received and processed between January 2016 and 30 September 2020 is 32,364.

Legal Basis or National Legislation, Relevant for Migrants

The legal framework and official procedure guidelines for unaccompanied minors are as follows:¹

1. The competent authorities for the protection of dependent minors shall immediately take appropriate measures to ensure the neces-

¹ <http://www.opengov.gr/yypes/?p=4665>.

sary representation of the dependent minors to ensure the exercise of their rights and compliance with the obligations laid down herein. To this end, all public authorities and any third party informed in any way of the arrival or presence of an unexpected minor, inform without delay the Department for the Protection of Vulnerable Groups, Applicant Asylum Seekers of the General Directorate of Welfare. The latter shall take the necessary steps to appoint the Commissioner through the staff and the local competent prosecutor. The unaccompanied minor is immediately informed of the appointment with the Commissioner, who carries out his duties to ensure the best interests and the overall well-being of the child. The person acting as agent is replaced upon request. Persons whose interests might conflict with the interests of the unaccompanied minor cannot be defined as guardians. The competent authorities for the protection of unaccompanied minors regularly assess the suitability of the commissioners and the means necessary for the representation of the partners.

2. In the case of depended minors, and for as long as they remain in the territory, the competent authorities for the protection of them shall ensure:
 - to accommodate unaccompanied minors together with adult relatives, to find a prospective family, to stay in special centres for the accommodation of helpless minors, or to hospital-ity centres, provided there are suitable areas for it and always in the best interest of the child,
 - co-existence and coexistence of the siblings, considering the age, maturity and generally the interests of every minor,
 - changes in the place of residence of disabled children kept to a minimum.
3. Authorised authorities for the protection of disabled children may exceptionally place unaccompanied minors aged 16 or over in accommodation centres for adult applicants if this is in the best interests of the child in accordance with Article 17 hereof.
4. The competent authorities for the protection of unaccompanied minors shall seek the members of the family of the dependent child, possibly with the assistance of international or other relevant organisations as soon as possible, following the submission of international protection, while at the same time protecting its best interests. If the life or integrity of the minor or their close rela-

tives is threatened, especially if they reside in the country of origin, the collection, processing, and transmission of information concerning such persons is done in a secret manner in order to keep them safe. In case of non-submission or a final application for the expulsion of international protection, the provisions of Chapter C of Law 3907 (Nómos 3907, 2011) and Article 25 shall apply. The competent authorities for the protection of dependent minors shall ensure the application of the cases a, b and d of paragraph 2 of Article 19A of Law B, based on the interest of the child, as added by paragraph 25 of Article 8 of Law 4332 (Nómos 4332, 2015).

5. Personnel dealing with cases of minors must have and continuously receive appropriate training on their needs. Such staff shall be obliged to protect the confidentiality of personal data of which they become aware in the course of their duties.

Minor Migrants in Transition to Adulthood: Situation and Challenges

The total number of unaccompanied minors and separated minors in Greece on 15 February 2020 was 5,424 – the highest number ever. Of these, 1,790 were in the Reception and Identification Centres of the islands and the Outpost. Seven months later, there were no more unaccompanied minors in the Island Reception and Identification Centres – from 1,790, the number had fallen to zero. It is noted that the number of unaccompanied minors on the islands had decreased by 54% before the arson that destroyed the facilities of the Reception and Identification Centre in Moria.

Positions in long-term inland accommodation structures increased by 30%. In 2019, these places showed a downward trend, with the result that while the number of unaccompanied minors in the country was smaller, a high number of unaccompanied minors remained in the Reception and Identification Centres. By the end of 2020, Greece achieved the goal of 2,000 unaccompanied minors in long-term accommodation structures for the first time since the outbreak of the refugee crisis. This goal had been repeatedly set by the European Commission for at least three years, but with no success. Finally, a new method for assessing underage has been introduced, which incorporates international guidelines, while at the same time improving the readiness of the operational mechanism to facilitate referral and detection of underage and not to delay procedures. Improving the operational mechanism and conduct-

ing the age determination was also something that the European Commission was urgently requesting and had not done so far.

Key Coordinating Actors

Actors (the Most Important in the Country)

State Actors

Greece is a party to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and a member of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Executive Committee, which currently consists of 87 countries. It cooperates with the Greek government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the media and civil society to protect refugees and asylum seekers. The UNHCR's main governmental partner is the Ministry of Public Order and Citizens Protection (PSC) and its services, including the Asylum Service, the Appeal Authority, the First Reception Service, and the General Directorate of Welfare (Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare).

The Greek Asylum Service started operating five years ago and quadrupled in size since June 2013: a total of 22 Regional Asylum Offices and Units have been established all over Greece. The Asylum Service operates Asylum Units in all Reception and Identification Centres (RICS) as well as in all pre-removal detention centres.

NGOs and Other Organizations

1. Arsis Guesthouse²
2. Charitable organisation of the Holy Archdiocese of Athens 'Apostoli (Mission)'³
3. Refugee Home Arsis⁴
4. World NGO Doctors of the World (Greece)⁵
5. International Medicine and Humanitarian Organisation Médecins Sans Frontières⁶
6. Structure of temporary accommodation of asylum seekers ΕΚ-ΠΟΣΠΟ 'Nostos'⁷

² <http://arsis.gr/xenonas-asinodeston-anilikon/>.

³ http://www.mkoapostoli.com/?page_id=998.

⁴ <http://arsis.gr/estia-prosfigon/>.

⁵ <http://mdmgreece.gr/our-mission/>.

⁶ <https://www.msf.gr/association>.

⁷ http://www.nostos.org.com/site/gr/about_us.html.

7. Greek Red Cross⁸
8. Greek Council for Refugees⁹
9. The non-profit company 'Ena paidi, enas kosmos' (A Child, A World)¹⁰
10. The non-profit organisation 'Iatriki Paremvasi' (Medical Intervention)¹¹
11. Idryma Neolaias kai Dia Viou Mathisis (Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation) (EIN)¹²
12. Disease Control and Prevention Centre¹³
13. Temporary Residence Centre for Non-Natives – Lavrion¹⁴
14. The non-profit organisation of special care and protection of mother and child 'Kivotos tou Kosmou' (Ark of the World)¹⁵
15. The non-governmental organisation 'Aitima' (Request)¹⁶
16. The non-governmental organisation 'Metadrasī'¹⁷
17. Ecumenical Refugee Programme¹⁸
18. Sylogos Merimnis Anilikon (Juvenile Care Association)¹⁹
19. United Nations High Council for Refugees (UNHCR)²⁰
20. The Praxis non-governmental organisation (Development, Social Support and Medical Cooperation Programs)²¹
21. Unaccompanied Minors' Housing 'Stegi Plus' (House Plus)²²
22. Hostel for the temporary accommodation of asylum seekers 'Melon' (Future)²³

⁸ <http://www.redcross.gr/default.asp?pid=7>.

⁹ <http://www.gcr.gr/index.php/en/about-gcr/what-we-do>.

¹⁰ <http://www.paidi-kosmos.gr/>

¹¹ <http://medin.gr/>

¹² <http://www.indeivim.gr/>.

¹³ <http://www.keelpno.gr/>.

¹⁴ <http://www.redcross.gr/default.asp?pid=122&la=1>

¹⁵ <http://kivotostoukosmou.org/kivotos/content/view/32/60/lang,el/>.

¹⁶ <http://aitima.gr/index.php/gr/>.

¹⁷ <http://www.metadrasī.org/>.

¹⁸ <http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/koinonia/kspm.html>.

¹⁹ <https://www.sma-athens.org/>.

²⁰ <https://www.unhcr.gr/>.

²¹ <http://www.praxis.gr/el/>.

²² <https://stegiplus.wordpress.com/>.

²³ <http://tvxs.gr/news/kala-nea/dimioyrgia-neoy-ksenona-prosorinis-filokseniasaitoynton-Asylo>.

23. To Hamogelo tou Paidiou (Smile of the Child)²⁴
24. ΕΚΚΑ (National Centre for Social Solidarity) – Administration of Housing Claims for Asylum Seekers and Unaccompanied Minors²⁵

Cooperation and Coordination among Different Actors

About the Directorate of Social Integration of the Greek Republic for the Care and Integration of Migrants, and Its Coordination with Different Actors

The operational goal of the Directorate of Social Integration within the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum (Proedrikó Diátagma 106, 2020, Art. 23) is planning, monitoring of implementation and the actual implementation of integration policy and respective national strategy for social integration of legal third country nationals, as well as the respective sectoral policies and social inclusion programmes, in cooperation with Ministries, local authorities, international organisations and civil society actors, which develop actions in the field of social inclusion.

Actions and measures that are designed and implemented aim at the integration of the beneficiary immigrant and refugee population and are causally related to the needs of each group:

- In the case of the newly arrived refugee population that has received international protection status, integration aims at the smooth transition from the protection regime to the entry into the host society, through programs that support their successful and rapid integration into the Greek society.
- In the case of immigrants, integration aims at their faster and more efficient licensing, their return to legal status, ensuring their non-discriminatory access to health, insurance, employment, and education, improving the services provided to them as well as ensuring their public participation.

The Directorate of Social Integration cooperates with:

- Ministries;
- Local government bodies (Municipalities, local development companies);

²⁴ <http://www.hamogelo.gr/>.

²⁵ <http://www.ekka.org.gr/>.

- European Agencies (European Integration Network, European Migration Network, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, European Economic and Social Committee, European Committee of the Regions, European Commission against Racism);
- International organisations (United Nations, International Organisation for Migration, International Organisation for Intergovernmental Consultation on Migration, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Council of Europe);
- Civil society actors (Immigrant and Refugee Communities);
- Immigration and Refugee Integration Councils of the Municipalities of the country;
- Non-Governmental Organisations active in the field of immigration and the social integration of immigrants and refugees.

Key Competencies Needed for Professionals, Ensuring the Acquisition of Needed Competencies

Within refugee accommodation structures, the largest part for the care and coverage of the needs of the population is covered by the NGOs. The role of NGO workers is, depending on their position, to provide protection, food, water, shelter, health care in situations of global humanitarian crisis and emergency (e.g., civil strife, poverty, disaster).

Due to many responsibilities of the workers in refugee accommodation structures or in similar structures, but also situations that may be faced by those who work there, international literature often states that working conditions are particularly difficult and stressful. More specifically, working conditions, which have become synonymous with sources of employee stress, are described as:

- physically demanding and unpleasant,
- heavy workload, many hours, chronic fatigue,
- lack of privacy and personal space,
- lack of sufficient resources, personal time, logistical support, and skills to do the job expected of them, and
- constant exposure to danger, chronic fear, chronic uncertainty.

Therefore, apart from the basic knowledge regarding the law, psychology, social work, health, social integration, etc., professionals need

competences that will help them work more effectively and without damaging themselves psychologically. Personal psychological competences that would be vital in this aspect are resilience, emotional stability, positive attitude, openness to experience, empathy, creative problem-solving, and stress management competences.

Findings from CiSOTRA Qualitative Research

- Poor efficiency of organisations is the result of a project-based way of working that prevents the development of sustainable and systemic solutions.
- Efficiency of organisations could be improved through study visits abroad; transfer of knowledge and practices from the international environment (e.g., adaptation to the situation in Slovenia); joint national or international projects; regular joint meetings.
- Training for professionals should become a permanent practice. Professionals who work directly with UMA and young adults shall have empathy, social skills, know the methods for work with young migrants and know how to motivate them.
- Young migrants need a holistic support system.
- It is necessary to provide better protection for minors who choose to leave Greece (ensuring safe transition to the target country).
- Several initiatives and concrete solutions are needed in the field of transition of minor migrants to adulthood – main highlights:
 1. It is necessary to establish support programmes for transition of unaccompanied children into adulthood. Support programmes need to be focused on strengthening autonomy.
 2. Even before they turn 18, visits to institutions that could help them with empowerment (visit, get in touch, get to know people there) should be organised.
 3. It is important that adequate accommodation and care are provided even after they reach the age of 18.

Relevant Good Practices

Welcommon Refugees Community & Hosting Centre²⁶

The Welcommon Refugees Community & Hosting Centre constitutes a comprehensive and integrated model addressing the refugee issue,

²⁶ <http://welcommon.gr/en/what-we-do/for-the-refugees/>.

which and immediately covers all the basic needs of the refugees arriving in Greece, aiming not only at housing them, but also at empowering and including them in the local community through capacity building and facilitation of their active participation and cooperation with the local population, providing adequate infrastructure and quality services, applying best practices with respect to the dignity of the refugees. Unfortunately, funding from the European Commission ceased and Welcommon now operates with the help of donations.

What Welcommon offers to the refugees:

- Decent and safe housing, food, and coverage of basic needs.
- Psycho-social support.
- Primary medical/health care and systematic support (medical records file, interpreting, escort) for secondary care, if necessary.
- Non-formal education of children as well as adults, such as: continuous and innovative language courses (Greek, Arabic, English, German and more), painting, music, photography, theatre, creative activities for adults and children, sports, dancing.
- Preparation of the children, who have been out of school for many years, to be able to return to school soon.

Helios (Hellenic Integration System)²⁷

Helios (Hellenic Integration System) is a pilot project aimed at examining the possibilities of implementing decentralised integration policies for refugees and immigrants. It is implemented under the coordination of the Ministry of Immigration Policy in collaboration with the Municipalities of Leivadia and Thebes and the International Organisation for Migration.

This innovative programme exploits measures that are already being implemented, such as education, financial assistance, housing, combining them with new supportive actions related to working life, social ties, and social participation.

During the pilot phase, the actions concern a sample of a population of refugees and immigrants, about 80 people in Leivadia and 40 in Thebes. The two municipalities offer different accommodation options, apartments in Leivadia and Open Hospitality Structure in Thebes.

²⁷ <https://government.gov.gr/parousiasi-programmatos-helios-gia-tin-kinoniki-entaxi-prosfigon-ke-metanaston/>.

The initial duration of the programme was set at six months, with the option of extending it for another six months if necessary. It was also crucial to ensure adequate funding. The aim of the pilot project was to create a model for the integration of refugees and immigrants that can be applied across the country.

*I_Ref_sos – Innovative Response to Facilitate Social Assistance for Young Refugees*²⁸

Within the framework of the ERASMUS+ Youth Programme, the Greek organisation for unemployment (OAED) has designed and implemented a project aimed at developing an effective reception system, social support and smooth employment of young refugees aged 16–24.

This was the project ‘I.REF.SOS-Innovative Response to Facilitate Social Assistance for Young Refugees,’ coordinated by the OAED, with the participation of the Educational Policy Development Centre (KANEP), the Ministry of Education of Turkey, country of entry of refugees, and the DEKRA Akademie Training Organisation in Germany, a country of potential final settlement of refugees.

The central idea behind the project is to take advantage of the time required from the arrival of new refugees in the countries of entry until the time of their final settlement in the host countries.

As stated in a relevant OAED statement, this time remains untapped by the official mechanisms of the states receiving mass refugee populations.

With the project ‘I.REF.SOS-Innovative Response to Facilitate Social Assistance for Young Refugees,’ the Agency sought to create a new approach to vocational training for the newly arrived, enriched with innovative educational counselling, mentoring, language and intercultural training and career guidance for trainers and trainees, which will be designed and implemented at a pilot level for new refugees who have applied for asylum. It attached particular importance to the evaluation and wide dissemination of this work and its conclusions.

The central aim of all partners was to incorporate these new methods and approaches, not only in the strategies and practices of the organisations involved, but also in the country policies to tackle the problem of newly arrived refugees of this age.

²⁸ <http://www.iefimerida.gr/news/402066/programma-gia-omali-ergasiaki-entaxi-neon-prosfygon-etoimazei-o-oad>.

The Project had a two-year duration (2017–2019) and was funded by the European Commission under ERASMUS+ Youth Sector – Key Action 2: Youth Partnership Strategies.

*The Greek Ministry of Education*²⁹

Education is a vital step in helping to integrate refugee and migrant youths into the Greek society, and at the same time in protecting fundamental human rights. In 2016–2017, the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs in cooperation with international organisations such as UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM started educational integration of migrant children in public schools, in specialised afternoon classes. Approximately 3,500 children aged 6–17 were in formal education in school year 2016–2017, in reception classes for children residing in temporary sites, as well as those living in urban accommodation.

For the school year 2017–2018, the Ministry aimed to integrate all refugee children in school by putting emphasis on the gradual integration to morning zone classes. Specialised reception afternoon classes were maintained, where necessary, for all children to have access to education. According to the Ministry, 2,493 children aged 6–16 living in urban accommodation had enrolled in schools throughout the country in all school levels and the number was growing. School education for 2,360 children living in Accommodation Centres in mainland was under preparation. When the project had been completed, almost 1,000 schools in Greece provided education to refugee children.

*Employers Together for Integration*³⁰

On 23 May 2017, the Commission launched the initiative Employers together for integration at the occasion of the second meeting of the European Dialogue on Skills and Migration, to give visibility to what employers are doing to support the integration of refugees and other migrants into the labour market.

Employers can join this initiative by describing their current and future actions to support the integration of refugees and other migrants in their workforce and beyond.

²⁹ https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/16_06_17_Epistimoniki_Epitropi_Prosofygon_YPPEETH_Apotimisi_Protaseis_2016_2017_Final.pdf

³⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/european-dialogue-skills-and-migration/integration-pact_en.

The successful integration of third-country nationals in the EU labour market represents an opportunity for our societies. When effectively integrated, they can help improve the functioning and performance of the labour market, as well as support fiscal sustainability. In this process, the role of economic and social partners, and of employers, is crucial. Several initiatives have been initiated by employers, trade unions, chambers of commerce in many member states.

The European Social fund is the main funding instrument supporting labour market inclusion, including of migrants. The Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) can also provide funding for preparatory measures to access the labour market.

Greece-Specific CiSOTRA Project Conclusions and Recommendations

Unaccompanied refugee youths can be characterised through three central elements: first, they are without a guardian, mainly adolescents and refugees. As refugees leaving their home country, they all share basic experiences of a 'loss': loss of home, property, friends, family, school, cultural identity, habits, status, etc. (Berman, 2001).

What is more, experiences of trauma are often an essential part of their daily experience in their native country (Hicks et al., 1993). Many of the refugees experienced war, physical or sexual mistreatment, brutal death of a loved one, stay in refugee camps, etc. (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1998; Weine et al., 1998; Barrett et al., 2000). Additionally, the journey to the host country can be traumatising, due to difficult or dangerous travelling and living circumstances, or dependency on human traffickers and smugglers (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2005). Even in the host country, these youths can experience traumatising events, such as the interviews as part of the asylum procedure, life in welcome centres, systemic racism, and so on.

Furthermore, as refugees, they must start a new life in a new, unknown country, where they are not familiar with the language, social services, bureaucracy and institutions, local habits and customs, et cetera. Finding a role and position in this new society and adapting to a new culture and way of life can as a result be a challenging and stressful process (Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998; Geltman et al., 2000).

Finally, these adolescents often quickly realise that achieving the goals and plans they carried with them to the new country will be extremely challenging, especially when they learn about the limited prob-

ability of obtaining a permit to stay in the host country. Since most of these unaccompanied refugee youths are adolescents, they must complete the important developmental task of forming their identity, which involves, amongst other things, personality development, sexual identity development, social skills acquisition and development, etc. (Derluyn et al., 2005).

For young refugees, dealing with traumatic experiences and staying without a guardian in an unfamiliar territory and society, it can be extremely complicated to emerge victorious in these vital developmental tasks (Ajdukovic, 1998; Bruce, 2001).

Also, due to their living circumstances as separated youths, some of them must develop their independence, but this is only a fragile independence, characterised by premature maturation which requires tools such as resilience, and which often contrasts strongly with the situation of dependence they encounter when they arrive at the host country (Derluyn et al., 2005). What is more, they often suffer from a lasting loss and deep loneliness. The list of psychological consequences for a minor refugee transitioning to adulthood is endless. However, there are still practical issues that need to be addressed in Greece. The focus groups and interviews that were held can shed light on these issues.

From the focus groups and interviews that were used to gather data from young refugees and youth workers, we can conclude the following:

- Basic needs such as housing need to be addressed for many refugees, and unaccompanied minors specifically. The transition to adulthood is quite challenging in this regard, as young adults are usually pressured to find accommodation, which often results in cohabitation with much older adults.
- There is a dire need for support regarding language learning, competency acquisition, integration in the local labour market and job search.
- The Greek bureaucracy is often a maze for a young adult who is trying to navigate it, even for local youth. There is a need to help in navigating unaccompanied minors and young adults through this complicated but necessary road.
- Unaccompanied minors during their transition to adulthood need to be empowered and motivated to strengthen their autonomy to successfully integrate into the local society.

- All the actors who are responsible for the care, inclusion, and transition to adulthood need to cooperate more and join forces to accomplish their goal more effectively.
- The communication between refugees and local population needs to be strengthened, as locals still view refugees as a threat to local culture.

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