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Supporting un-Accompanied children with Family-based care and Enhanced protection:

Gap analysis and needs assessment: Greek Report

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The "Discussion Papers" series aims at widely disseminating the research results of KMOP's various activities, stimulating academic discussion and offering a forum for new approaches on contemporary social issues.

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1. Introduction

“SAFE - Supporting un-Accompanied children with Family-based care and Enhanced protection” is a project funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union. SAFE is implemented by a consortium of four (4) partners consisting of British Red Cross (UK), which is the project coordinator, CARDET - Centre for Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology (Cyprus), KMOP - Family and Childcare Centre (Greece) and Danish Red Cross (Denmark). The project’s main objective is to build knowledge and capacity of professionals and foster carers, kinship and Dublin family caretakers to enhance family-based care to promote welfare and ensure protection of unaccompanied children in the UK, Cyprus, Denmark and Greece. Through the development and the delivery of e-learning training modules as well as of face-to-face training and capacity building workshops to professionals and foster carers and kinship/Dublin caretakers and, in addition, through raising awareness and advocating of policy regarding family-based care for unaccompanied children, with institutional and policy makers, and wider public, the project is expected to:

1. Improve knowledge and capacity of professionals on implementing family-based care for unaccompanied children
2. Improve knowledge and capacity of fosters carers, kinship, Dublin family carers to support unaccompanied children
3. Increase awareness of institutional authorities, policy makers, wider public on benefits of family-based care for unaccompanied children.

The present national report has been prepared as part of the Gap Analysis and Needs Assessment Report. The objective of this activity is to identify and analyse gaps and challenges in the existing family based care services available to the unaccompanied refugee children and to assess the training needs of practitioners and foster carers, kinship carers and Dublin families in the UK, Greece, Cyprus and Denmark. The findings from all national analyses will constitute the basis for the development of e-learning training modules on core knowledge and skills as well as on country specific issues addressed to the above mentioned groups. The study was designed to be carried out in two parts: part 1 focuses on the gaps and training needs of practitioners working with unaccompanied children and part 2 looks into the gaps and needs of foster carers, kinship carers and Dublin families. The present national report fully explores the situation of unaccompanied children living in Greece, the provision of relevant child-care services, the relevant legislation, the role that professionals and stakeholders hold as regards the protection of unaccompanied children as well the gaps and the training needs of all these actors. However, due to the absence of family-based care system in Greece, it is reasonable that this national study does not explore the needs of foster carers, kinship carers and Dublin families.

2. Methodology

In order to describe and analyse the current situation as regards unaccompanied children in Greece, the services provided as well as the training needs of the professionals and practitioners working with them, the following methodology was applied:

- Desk review: this focused on national legislative framework and policy documents, on statistics and on research studies and reports relevant to the topic.
- Consultation with professionals and experts from IOM Greece and the Greek NGO METAdrasi, who have extensive knowledge and experience on the issue, as they work with unaccompanied children.

3. Overview on the situation of unaccompanied children among refugee population in Greece

In the course of 2015 and during the first months of 2016, the refugee crisis changed the migration landscape in Greece, when an increased number of refugees and immigrants started to move towards the European Union, via the Mediterranean Sea or Southeastern Europe, mainly through Greece and Italy, so as to ask for asylum primarily in countries of Central and Northern Europe. Given that, Greece, as south-eastern border of the European Union, was required to cope with the inflow of an immense number of refugees and immigrants, most of whom originate from Syria, which is plagued by civil war, and other countries experiencing unrest and conflict.

The figures concerning refugees' arrivals in Greece are indicative, as they were registered by UNHCR (2018). In 2015, 856,723 refugees arrived, while in 2014 the respective number amounted to 41,038. In 2016, the number of refugees coming to Greece was 173,450 and the respective number for the year 2017 was 29,718. By March 19, 2018, the arrivals of refugees amounted to 4,119. The majority of refugees come from Turkey to the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Castellorizo, Samos, Kos, Leros and Tilos. According to the most recent statistical data of the UNHCR (2018a), 41,1% of refugees arriving to Greece come from Syria, 20,1% from Iraq, 11,7% from Afghanistan and 11% from other countries. Regarding newly arrived refugees, 40,5% were men, 22,3% were women and the remaining 37,1% was children.

Refugees consider Greece as a transit country and not as a final destination country. Although refugees hold a positive view about Greece just over three quarters (77,6%), only 0,4% of the refugees wishes to stay in Greece, while 68% of the refugees

want to go to Germany, 5,8% to Sweden, 4,5% to the United Kingdom, 4,1% to France and 3,4% to the Netherlands (Ένωση Περιφερειών Ελλάδας και Κάπα Research/ Association of Greek Regions and Kapa Research, 2016). Even if – on their first attempt – do not manage to cross the borders towards central Europe, just 12,5% of the refugees would choose to stay permanently in Greece, either in an organized accommodation structure (8,6%), or in relatives/friends who already live in Greece (3,9%), while 27,9% of them stated that they would stay in Greece if they find a job and dignified living conditions (Ένωση Περιφερειών Ελλάδας και Κάπα Research/ Association of Greek Regions and Kapa Research, 2016).

The introduction of the EU-Turkey Agreement, stemming arrivals via the Balkan route, together with the closure of the borders, as well as restrictive measures taken against the entry of refugees in countries like FYROM, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria, which were implemented in 2016 resulted in the entrapment of thousands of refugees in Greece. More than 46,000 refugees remained stranded in Greece, according to data collected by 11th April 2016 (Amnesty International/Διεθνής Αμνηστία, 2016). Due to this fact, many of the trapped refugees applied for asylum in Greece, thus ensuring their stay in a country of the European Union, while at the same time it is highly likely to relocate to another country of the European Union. According to statistical data of the Greek Asylum Service (Υπηρεσία Ασύλου, 2018), asylum applications totaled to 9,431 in 2014, amounted to 13,188 in 2015, climbed to 51,061 in 2016, while they reached the number of 58,661 in 2017. The following table depicts the situation regarding the number of refugees who arrived in Greece during the last four years and the number of relevant asylum applications.

Refugees arrived / Asylum applications				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of refugees arrived	41,038	856,723	173,450	29,718
Number of asylum seekers	9,431	13,188	51,061	58,661

It should also be noted that the promise on the part of the European Union that it will provide a legitimate outlet from Greece for asylum seekers, has remained to a great extent unfulfilled, which is largely due to lack of political will on behalf host countries (Amnesty International/Διεθνής Αμνηστία, 2016). It is indicative of this fact that by 14th February 2018, 21,767 asylum seekers had been transferred from Greece

to other European Union member states out of 63,302, who were offered relocation commitments (European Commission, 2018). According to the latest data of the Coordinating Body for the Refugee Crisis Management (Συντονιστικό Όργανο Διαχείρισης της Προσφυγικής Κρίσης, 1st August 2017), the number of refugees in Greece adds up to 62,206 people. Besides, as of 13 June 2017, only 365 unaccompanied and separated children have been relocated from Greece to other member states, despite EU member states commitments to prioritise the relocation or family reunification of the most vulnerable, including unaccompanied girls and boys (International Rescue Committee and METAdrasi, 2017).

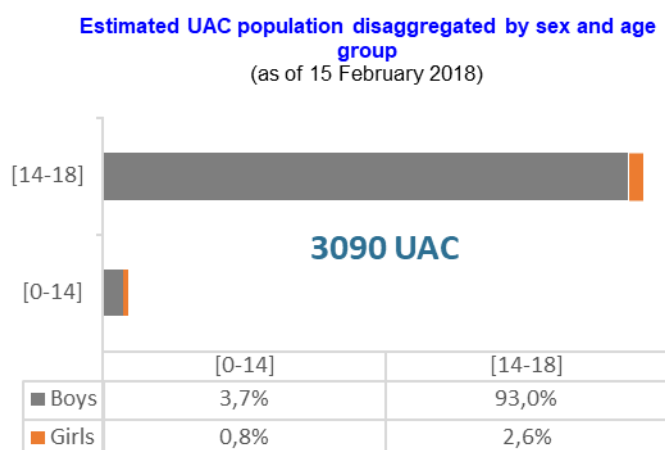
Based on the abovementioned conditions, in early March 2016, the Greek Government and NGOs were tasked with adapting the response to a stationary population likely to remain in Greece for months or even years. This shift in context required the Government to quickly establish camps to safely accommodate people and systems to deliver basic services to meet the needs of now-stranded men, women and children, including a growing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (International Rescue Committee and METAdrasi, 2017). Although the situation has been completely different from one camp to another, most asylum seekers used to live under miserable conditions, which very often has negative consequences for human health and especially more vulnerable people's health (Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontiers, 2016). Gradually, refugees and immigrants settle in hotels and apartments all over Greece, through a housing benefit programme of the UNHCR, funded by the European Union.

The Government, NGOs and donors have made substantial efforts and investments towards improving the living conditions of the unaccompanied minors; thanks to donors' and NGOs' active engagement, the number of safe shelter spaces and associated services available to them significantly increased. According to EKKA - National Center for Social Solidarity, in June 2017, 1,270 spaces were available throughout Greece—a 366% increase since March 2016, when only 347 spaces and a waiting list of 119 children were available. However, the expectation for relocation has resulted in children being placed in short-term care arrangements or worse, detention, for months or sometimes even more than a year. The absence of less-expensive and better alternative care options (e.g., foster care or semi-independent living for children 16 and older) necessitates an increased number of expensive, staff-heavy, temporary shelters throughout the country to meet the needs of a waiting list of often more than 1,000 girls and boys. Some of these children — who languish on the waiting list for months — go without access to needed services and are exposed to significant risks, likely suffering long-term detrimental effects (International Rescue Committee and METAdrasi, 2017). What is worse, some children run away from these shelters and live on the streets, so they are exposed to even greater risks, including trafficking, child abuse and sexual exploitation.

The following sections provide a more comprehensive picture of the unaccompanied children living in Greece.

4. Statistical info and trends

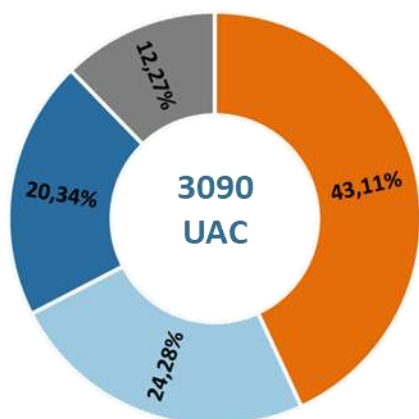
According to EKKA - National Center for Social Solidarity, which is the government authority responsible for managing the placement of unaccompanied children in shelters as of 15 February 2018, the estimated number of UAC (unaccompanied children) in Greece is 3,090. As regards their gender, 96,7% of them are boys and 3,4% are girls. The majority of the unaccompanied children (95,6%) belongs to the age group from 14 to 18 years, while only a small percentage (4,5%) concerns minors under 14 years old.



As for the nationality of the unaccompanied children currently in Greece, 43,11% of them come from Pakistan, 24,28% come from Afghanistan, 12,27% from Syria and the remaining 20,34% concern other nationalities.

Estimated UAC population disaggregated by nationality
(as of 15 February 2018)

■ Pakistan ■ Afghanistan ■ Syria ■ Other

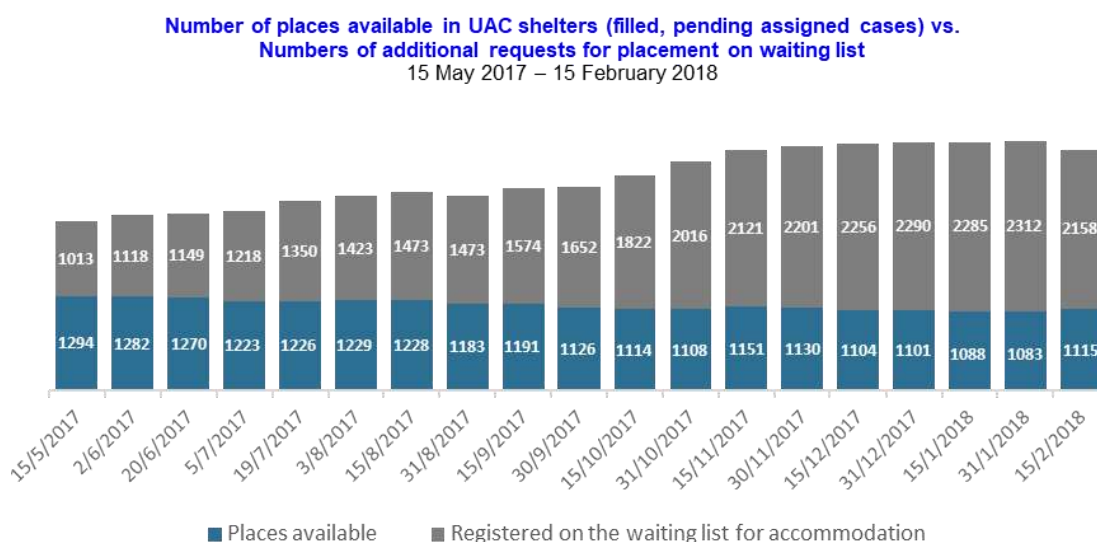


It is also worth mentioning some very important data about demographics mentioned at IOM's report on the programme "Addressing the needs of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in Greece" (2016), which give a very representative picture of the unaccompanied minors' situation in Greece. During the outreach activities of the programme, 1206 unaccompanied children were identified, out of which 1203 were male and 3 were female. The majority of unaccompanied children were between the ages of 13 and 17. The main countries of origin of the unaccompanied minors were Afghanistan (609), Egypt (216), Pakistan (176) and Bangladesh (54). As it is emphasized in the report, the gender and age break-down of the identified minors was predictable considering that most UAMs come from countries having socially distinct norms for boys and girls. In many countries, the burden of providing financially for the family lies with the male beneficiary and the boys approached reported that they expected to reach their destination country, find work and send money to their families. In addition, because of their vulnerability, girls are kept closer to parents and it would not be socially acceptable for them to travel alone. Besides, while some of the children were as young as 13, the majority were between 15 and 17 years old, which is an age, when boys are considered old enough to leave the family to find work.

In addition, out of the 1206 unaccompanied children approached through the programme, over 508 stated from the outset that they would not consider returning to their country of origin because it was their intention to reach a northern European country. They were also adamant on continuing to try to reach their final destination no matter what services were made available to them in Greece, as they considered that they would ensure a better future in other European countries. Even in cases where the unaccompanied children had the option of being reunited with their family members in another European country through the Dublin III Regulation, they

preferred to travel irregularly to their intended final destination country as they believed it was the fastest option available and because of their mistrust of authorities. Out of the 508, approximately 32% stated their final destination would be Germany, 23% the United Kingdom, approximately 22% Sweden, 9% Norway, 5% France and 9% other European countries, such as Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland and Canada (IOM Greece, 2016).

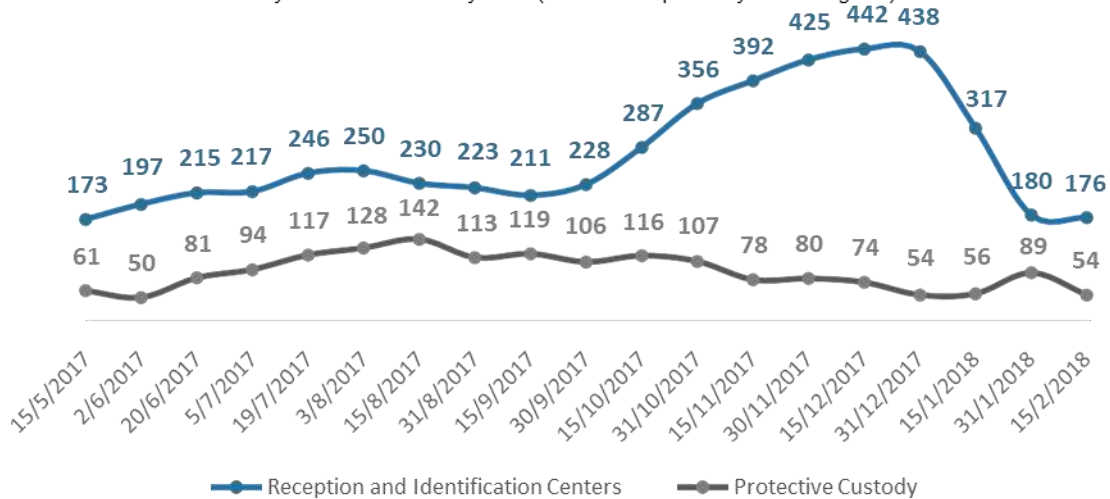
Unaccompanied children in Greece are placed in UAC shelters. According to EKKA’s latest data (15 February 2018), the total number of places available in UAC shelters is 1,115, increased from 423 places in March 2016. Currently there are 48 UAC shelters (transit and long- term), while 1 new shelter with total 15 new places has been planned. The total number of UAC on waiting list for shelter is 2,158, including also 190 separated children.



In addition, there are 10 Safe Zones for UAC with total 300 places. Safe Zones are designated supervised spaces within accommodation sites which provide UAC with 24/7 emergency protection and care. They should be used as short term (maximum 3 months) measures to care for UAC in light of the insufficient number of available shelter places. Safe Zone priority is given to UAC in detention as well as other vulnerable children, in line with their best interests. Finally, there are also 4 Hotels for UAC with total 240 places. Hotels are short term accommodation spaces being used as a measure to care for UAC in light of the insufficient number of available shelter places. Priority is given to UAC in Reception and Identification Centers.

Among the 2,158 unaccompanied children who are on waiting list for shelter, 176 of them are placed in Reception and Identification Centres, while the number of minors in protective custody is 54, according to EKKA’s data, as of 15 February 2018.

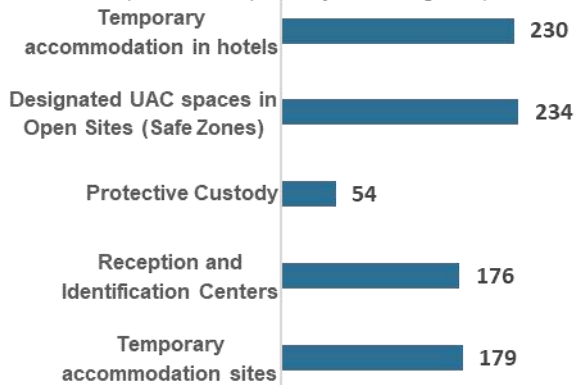
Number of UAC placed in Reception and Identification Centers/Protective Custody
 15 May 2017 – 15 February 2018 (based on requests by referral agents)



As for the remaining unaccompanied children who are in the waiting list, some of them, i.e. 234 are being accommodated in Safe Zones, 230 in Hotels and 179 in temporary accommodation sites.

Number of UAC on the waiting list in first and second line reception facilities or protective custody

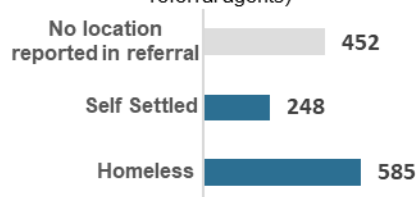
as of 15 February 2018
 (based on requests by referral agents*)



*The actual number of UAC in the RICs as of 15 February 2018 is higher than the referrals received by EKKA. In addition to the above 42 extra referrals are pending submission to EKKA.

The rest unaccompanied minors are either homeless (585) or self settled (248), while 452 have not reported any location in referral agents.

Number of UAC on the waiting list reported out of first and second line reception facilities or protective custody as of 15 February 2018 (based on requests by referral agents)



Children living out of first and second line reception facilities or protective custody are reported above, taking into consideration that their current place of stay might differ from the one reported at the time of referral.

It is obvious that only about one third of the unaccompanied children can be accommodated in shelters, as the number of unaccompanied children currently in Greece (3,090) exceed the 1,115 available places. According to UNHCR (2018b) this results in children risk spending extended periods in the reception and identification centres and in protective custody. For this reason, UNHCR and its partners are working with the authorities to develop diverse alternative care arrangements. This includes family-based foster care for younger children, and Supported Independent Living (SIL) for older adolescents where they will be assisted by dedicated guardians and support teams. UNHCR also facilitates the transfer of children who turn eighteen to rented housing in its Accommodation Scheme. This helps free much needed space in shelters and also ensures support to the young adults during this transitional period which is often challenging and represents particular risks and concerns.

In addition, it is noteworthy that a significant number of children choose not to register as minors. The lengthy period of time spent in detention centres, coupled with poor living conditions there, directly discourage registration. This includes individuals of 17 years or below who have not registered as children because they want to avoid detention. It also includes those who believe that the time spent in protective custody will jeopardise their chances of moving forward, a belief often encouraged by smugglers (INTERSOS & Mixed Migration Platform, 2017).

It has to be noted that the unaccompanied children who are placed in shelters or other alternative care arrangements have access to psychosocial support and educational, health and legal services, while child protection actors work to identify and complete the process of achieving a durable solution in their best interests i.e., relocation, family reunification elsewhere in the EU, or asylum in Greece (International Rescue Committee and METAdrasi, 2017).

However, major gaps in critical services remain, for instance in their access to health care services and psychosocial support. Asylum-seeking children, including UASC, have inadequate access to health services (e.g., vaccination) and continue to

face issues with receiving social security numbers that facilitate their access to available care. Most are without access to specialised health care, especially on the islands. In addition, despite the increasing need for mental health and psychosocial support services, there remain limited service providers and a complete absence of specialized facilities for children suffering from mental health issues, and public hospitals cannot support serious psychiatric cases (International Rescue Committee and METAdrasi, 2017). According to a rapid assessment of mental health and psychosocial support needs and services for unaccompanied children in Greece, carried out by the Institute of Child Health (2017), UAC are considered to be at high risk for mental health and psychosocial distress; the reasons for this are related to the conditions leading them to leave their home countries (e.g. conflict, displacement, death of family members, persecution, violence including sexual violence, forced recruitment into military or paramilitary groups), the hardships they faced along the journey (e.g. exposure to smugglers and possible violence, exploitation) as well as conditions in their present situation (e.g. extended asylum delays and uncertain future, absence of supportive family network). The survey with shelter coordinators showed that the majority of 'worrying signs' exhibited by UAC are related to mild, moderate and severe mental health issues (~75%); almost half related to aggressive, violent behavior and bullying (~44%); while a considerably lower percentage related to delinquent behavior and substance abuse (~5% and 8%, respectively). It was also reported that many UAC in Greece struggle with stress or anger related to uncertainty or fears about their future, related feelings of hopelessness, as well as loneliness due to separation from family and community. External conditions upon arrival in Greece, also directly or indirectly contributed to increasing the psychosocial distress of UAC including long delays in asylum procedures and a resulting state of limbo due to an uncertain future; contradictory information about asylum procedures, and absence of an individual (e.g. guardian) to advise and provide them with continuous support through their stay in Greece; stress related to co-habitation with up to 30 other UAC in shelters; limited opportunities to exercise autonomy (e.g. absence of pocket money); limited opportunities to access suitable education or vocational training; and in some cases discrimination. Only a relatively small percentage of UAC displayed signs linked to strictly defined and severe psychiatric disorders such as those requiring medication or hospitalization (e.g. 1.5% reported UAC suffering from overt psychotic symptoms).

The gaps are also obvious as regards their access to education. According to national legislation, children are entitled to education irrespective of their legal status. While in October 2016 the Government introduced reception classes in public schools for asylum-seeking children under 14, to date only 2,500 children on the mainland (roughly 12% of the 22,000 children targeted by this programme) are benefitting from these classes, and not all children have access to even non-formal education. Children on the islands and those over 14 are still without access to formal education

(International Rescue Committee and METAdrasi, 2017). It is also worth mentioning a snapshot of access to education activities, identified barriers and the perception of education of refugee and migrant children in a selected number of locations, including shelters for unaccompanied and separated children across Greece, which gives an indicative overview of the situation (UN Children's Fund, REACH Initiative, 2017). 59% of assessed children attended education activities, including formal, non-formal and informal education, administered in the assessed locations or nearby, while 41% of assessed children did not attend any type of education. Among children attending any type of education activities 63% attended non-formal education, 22% attended formal education, 12% informal, 1% formal and non-formal education and 1% not reported. As regards the reasons for children not attending formal education, they reported difficulties with Greek language, they found lessons not helpful, they mentioned that registration time has passed; also that children cannot concentrate, school is too far away, transport, school material's costs are too high and that parents are afraid of racism. These are also some of the reasons, why children stopped attending formal education. Besides, children who attended formal education often reported their expectations were not met, for the following reasons: 1) classes conducted in Greek not attractive for some children: several children did not intend to stay in Greece, so lessons conducted in Greek did not correspond to their priorities, 2) teaching entirely in Greek without translation: some children who did not speak Greek well had difficulties in catching up with classes. This was of particular concern to children who had never been to school in their country of origin. On the contrary, children positively assessed non-formal education classes, because: 1) classes introduced routine into daily lives of children, 2) children were able to learn something 'new', 3) children enjoyed the range of activities available, including sport, language and crafts.

Finally, as regards the provision of legal services, unaccompanied children only receive them, when they are placed in a shelter. According to a survey Mixed Migration Platform (2017) on unaccompanied and separated children perception in Greece, these seemed to be satisfied with the legal advice they receive at the shelter, with 49% saying that they have the information they would like on their legal options and available support services in Greece. Children would like to have more information about their rights in Greece and Europe, their options for resettlement, how to procure the right documents, and how to access updates on their status more frequently. Some of the children request face-to-face meetings with lawyers.

5. Relevant legislative frameworks and major policies

In August 2010, Greece has submitted to the European Commission an Action Plan on Asylum and Migration Management, which was revised in 2013. The Action Plan was the strategic implementation of the Government's determination to reform

the asylum and immigration processes; it is part of its efforts to tackle the issues related to asylum, including creating first-reception centers, establishing screening procedures, addressing detention conditions, and improving facilities for families with children and for vulnerable groups. Based on the first version of the Action Plan, the Presidential Decree (Προεδρικό Διάταγμα) 114/2010 on the “Procedures concerning the recognition of refugees and person entitled to subsidiary protection” was adopted. Among others, the Presidential Decree provides the following as regards unaccompanied minors:

1. According to article 2 of the Presidential Decree, “unaccompanied minor” is a person below the age of 18 who arrives in the Greek territory unaccompanied by an adult responsible for him/her whether by law or by custom applying in the country of origin, and for as long as he/she is not effectively taken into the care of such a person, or a minor who is left unaccompanied after he/she has entered Greece.
2. “Representative of an unaccompanied minor” is the temporary or permanent guardian of the minor or the person appointed by the territorially competent Public Prosecutor for Minors or, in the absence of this latter, by the First Instance Public Prosecutor to ensure the minor’s best interests.
3. The article 4 states that a minor whether unaccompanied or not, aged above 14 years, can lodge an application on his/her own behalf, if the competent authorities to receive an application deem that s/he has the maturity to understand the consequence of his/her actions. If an unaccompanied minor does not fulfill the above mentioned criterion of maturity may lodge an application through his/her representative.
4. According to Article 12 about “Applications by unaccompanied minors”:
 1. when an application is lodged by an unaccompanied minor, the competent authorities shall take action according to paragraph 1 of article 19 of Presidential Decree 220/2007 in order to appoint a guardian for the minor. The guardian or the person exercising particular guardianship acts shall be given the opportunity to inform the unaccompanied minor about the meaning and possible consequences of the personal interview and, where appropriate, how to prepare himself/herself for the personal interview. The guardian or the person exercising particular guardianship acts is invited and may be present during the minor's interview and shall be allowed to ask questions or make comments, so as to facilitate the procedure.
 2. Applications lodged by unaccompanied minors shall always be examined in priority and according to the regular procedure.
 3. The officials conducting interviews with unaccompanied minors and make recommendations on their application for international

protection shall have the necessary knowledge of the special needs of minors and conduct the interview in such a way as to make it fully understandable, taking account, in particular, of the child's age.

4. The competent authorities to examine applications may use medical examinations to determine the age of unaccompanied minors.
 5. If the results of the medical examination are not firmly conclusive that the applicant is adult, s/he shall be treated as a minor.
 6. The fact that an unaccompanied minor has refused to undergo such a medical examination shall not prevent the Determining Authority from taking a decision on the asylum application.
 7. The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration when implementing the provisions of this article.
5. Article 13 "Detention of applicant" states that in the cases that applicants for international protection are being detained, the competent authorities to receive or examine, without prejudice to the international and national legislation on detention, shall apply the following: ...They shall avoid detaining minors. Children separated from their families and unaccompanied minors shall be detained for only the necessary time till their safe referral to adequate centres for accommodation of minors.

Besides, in 2011, Greece legislated the Law (Νόμος) 3907/2011 "Establishment of an Asylum Service and a First Reception Service". According to the Law, an Asylum Service is established which is composed of the Central Service located in Athens and the Regional Asylum Services. The Asylum Service is responsible for implementing the legislation on asylum and any other forms of international protection of foreign nationals and stateless persons, as well as for contributing to the planning and formulation of the national asylum policy. The Asylum Service, among other, receives and examines applications for international protection and rules on them at first level; informs the persons applying for international protection on the application consideration procedure, as well as on their rights and obligations under it; provides the foreign nationals applying for international protection, as well as the beneficiaries of international protection with the legalizing and travel documents provided by the applicable law. In addition, the Law foresees the establishment of the First Reception Service, whose mission is to effectively handle third-country nationals illegally entering the country, in conditions of respect for their dignity, by subjecting them to first reception procedures. All third-country nationals arrested entering the country without legal formalities are subject to first reception procedures. The first reception procedures for third-country nationals include:

- a. a verification of their identity and nationality,
- b. their recording,
- c. their medical check and the provision to them of any required care and psychosocial support,

- d. their update on their rights and obligations, in particular with regard to the conditions under which they may be placed under international protection status, and
- e. the care for those belonging to vulnerable groups, so that they are subject to the procedure laid down for such cases.

For the purposes of the present law, vulnerable groups are

- a. unaccompanied minors,
- b. people with disabilities or suffering from incurable diseases,
- c. elderly persons,
- d. women in pregnancy or having recently given birth,
- e. single parents with minor children,
- f. victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or exploitation, and
- g. victims of trafficking.

Article 25 “Return and removal of unaccompanied minors” states that:

1. Before deciding to issue a return decision in respect of an unaccompanied minor and after having given due considerations to the best interests of the child, assistance shall be given by appropriate bodies, other than the authorities enforcing return who shall act accordingly.
2. Before removing an unaccompanied minor from the territory of the country, the competent authorities shall ascertain that he or she will be returned to a member of his or her family, a nominated guardian or adequate reception facilities in the State of return.

According to Article 29 “Safeguards pending return”, the competent authorities ensure that the following measures are taken into account as far as possible in relation to third-country nationals during the period for voluntary departure and during periods for which removal has been postponed:

- a. to provide access for minors to the compulsory education system, depending on the duration of their stay
- b. to provide access to emergency health care and necessary treatment
- c. to take into account the special needs of vulnerable persons.

Article 32 “Detention of minors and families”

1. Unaccompanied minors and families with minors shall only be detained as a measure of last resort, only when no other adequate and less coercive measure can be used for the same purpose, and for the shortest appropriate period of time.
2. Minors in detention shall have the possibility to engage in leisure activities, including play and recreational activities appropriate to their age, and shall have, depending on the length of their stay, access to education.

3. Unaccompanied minors shall as far as possible be provided with accommodation in institutions provided with personnel and facilities which take into account the needs of persons of their age.
4. The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in the context of the detention of minors pending removal.

In addition, the Presidential Decree (Προεδρικό Διάταγμα) 141/2013 defines the standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons who qualify as refugees or are eligible for subsidiary protection. In order to be granted the refugee status, the applicant must face a well-founded fear of being persecuted for one of the following reasons: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group (based on a common characteristic of gender, age, invalidity or health condition or sexual orientation), political opinion. As regards the grant of the subsidiary protection status, this concerns a third country national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to his or her country of origin, or in the case of a stateless person, to his or her country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm. According to the same Presidential Decree, both refugees and persons eligible for subsidiary protection have a series of rights and benefits. Article 32 about unaccompanied minors states that:

1. As soon as possible after the granting of international protection the Department of Refugees and Asylum Seekers' Protection, Directorate of Social Solidarity, Ministry of Employment, Social Security and Welfare shall take all necessary measures to ensure the representation of unaccompanied minors by the appointment of a guardian or, when needed, by the assignment of relevant responsibility to an organisation responsible for the care and protection of minors, or by any other appropriate representation in accordance with legislation in force and Courts' decisions.
2. The above mentioned authority shall also ensure that the minor's needs are duly met according to the present Presidential Decree by the appointed guardian or representative and shall make regular assessments of the minor's condition.
3. The aforementioned authority shall ensure that unaccompanied minors are placed either: (a) with adult relatives, or (b) with a family having the minor's custody, or (c) in centres specialised in accommodation for minors; or (d) in other accommodation suitable for minors. The views of the minor shall be taken into account in accordance with his or her age and degree of maturity.
4. Siblings shall be kept together, taking into account the best interests of the minor concerned and, in particular, his or her age and degree of maturity. Changes of residence of unaccompanied minors shall be limited to a minimum.

5. In the context of the protection of the unaccompanied minor's best interests, the aforementioned authority shall endeavor to trace the members of the minor's family as soon as possible. In cases where there may be a threat to the life or integrity of the minor or his or her close relatives, particularly if they have remained in the country of origin, care shall be taken to ensure that the collection, processing and circulation of information concerning those persons is undertaken on a confidential basis.
6. Those working with unaccompanied minors shall have had or receive appropriate training concerning their needs

As regards the age assessment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, according to the article 45, Law (Νόμος) 4375/2016, the competent Receiving Authorities may, when in doubt, refer unaccompanied minors for age determination examinations according to the provisions of the Joint Ministerial Decision (Κοινή Υπουργική Απόφαση) 1982/16.2.2016 (O.G. Β' 335). When such a referral for age determination examinations is considered necessary and throughout this procedure, attention shall be given to the respect of gender-related special characteristics and of cultural particularities. Attention shall also be given so as:

- a. a guardian for the minor is appointed who shall undertake all necessary action in order to protect the rights and the best interest of the minor, throughout the age determination procedure;
- b. unaccompanied minors are informed prior to the examination of their application and in a language which they understand, of the possibility and the procedures to determine their age, of the methods used therefore, the possible consequences of the results of the above mentioned age determination procedures for the examination of the application for international protection, as well as the consequences of their refusal to undergo this examination;
- c. the unaccompanied minors or their guardians consent to carry out the procedure for the determination of the age of the minors concerned;
- d. the decision to reject an application of an unaccompanied minor who refused to undergo this age determination procedure shall not be based solely on that refusal and
- e. until the completion of the age determination procedure, the person who claims to be a minor shall be treated as such.

If after the age determination procedure, it does not transpire with certainty that the applicant is an adult, he/she shall be treated as a minor. The fact that an unaccompanied minor has refused to undergo a medical examination shall not prevent the Decision Authorities from taking a decision on his/her application. Besides, in article 43 of the same Law, it is stated that the date of birth can be modified after the age determination procedure under Article 45, unless during the interview it appears that the applicant who is registered as an adult is manifestly a minor; in such

cases, a decision of the Head of the competent Receiving Authority, following a recommendation by the case-handler, shall suffice.

The Joint Ministerial Decision 1982/2016 of the Minister of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction and the Minister of Health provides for an age assessment procedure for persons seeking international protection before the Asylum Service. In particular:

- In case of doubt during the asylum procedure, the competent officer informs the Head of the RAO, who shall issue a decision specifically justifying such doubt in order to refer the applicant to a public health institution or an entity regulated by the Ministry of Health, where a paediatrician and psychologist are employed and a social service operates;
- The age assessment is conducted with the following successive methods: based on the macroscopic characteristics, such as height, weight, body mass index, voice and hair growth, following a clinical examination from a paediatrician, who will consider body-metric data. The clinical examination must be carried out with due respect of the person's dignity, and take into account deviations and variations relating to cultural and racial elements and living conditions that may affect the individual's development. The paediatrician shall justify his or her final estimation based on the aforementioned examination data;
- In case the person's age cannot be adequately determined through the examination of macroscopic features, following certification by the paediatrician, an assessment by the psychologist and the social worker of the structure of the entity will follow in order to evaluate the cognitive, behavioural and psychological development of the individual and a relevant report will be drafted by them. This procedure will take place in a language understood by the applicant, with the assistance of an interpreter, if needed. If no psychologist is employed or there is no functioning social service in the public health institution, this assessment may be conducted by a psychologist and a social worker available from civil society organisations;
- Wherever a conclusion cannot be reached after the conduct of the above procedure, the following medical examinations will be conducted: left wrist and hand X-rays for the assessment of the skeletal mass, dental examination and panoramic dental X-rays. The opinions and evaluation results are delivered to the Head of the RAO, who issues a relevant act to adopt their conclusions.

6. Care framework in Greece

As already mentioned, the primary mode of accommodation and care for unaccompanied children in Greece is provided through medium-sized (20-30 bed) UAC shelters, which are managed by EKKA - National Center for Social Solidarity. These shelters are staffed by multi-disciplinary teams of social workers, caregivers, interpreters, social scientists, lawyers, psychologists, and educators. Front-line psychosocial support is provided by shelter personnel to all UAC accommodated in shelters (Institute of Child Health, 2017).

A range of services is also provided by international NGOs; for example UNICEF offers a comprehensive package of accommodation, care and protection services for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in 5 UNICEF-supported Safe Zones (in the sites of Schisto, Thiva, Diavata, Lagadikia and Agia Eleni), as well as food provision to UASC outside safe zones (UNICEF, 2018).

As regards the system of family-based care (such as foster family care or small family-type unit), this is extremely underdeveloped in Greece in general. Consequently, family-based care for children in migration/ unaccompanied children is almost non-existent. The implementation and monitoring of family-based care / foster care in Greece is under the responsibility of the Child Protection Branches of the Social Welfare Centres of each region. However, Social Welfare Centres and social services do not have the necessary resources, staff and know-how for the implementation of foster care programmes or other types of non-residential rehabilitation services. Moreover, they have no operational procedures regarding the placement of minors in foster care. Another problem, is the lack of national standards and procedures for the selection, training, certification and monitoring of foster parents from the responsible bodies, so as to ensure their suitability and the protection of the interests of the children during the foster placement. Finally, there is no awareness raising for the wider public in Greece and no clarity regarding the nature and the purpose of foster care, the rights and obligations of foster parents, of birth parents and of children in foster care, and the framework of cooperation of the involved parties (foster family, birth family, child, responsible professionals) in relation to decision making about foster care. It should be noted that changes in the foster care system in Greece are expected soon as a new law is under development by the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity and expected to be introduced for voting to the Greek Parliament in the coming months. The new law will aim at improving the existing procedure and introduce radical changes to the institutional framework, with detailed identification of those involved in the procedure and of the responsible monitoring bodies and development of a National Register of Foster Parents, reduction of bureaucracy and increase of foster care and adoption centres.

There are some examples of covering this gap through specific programmes implemented on a very short scale though, by the Greek NGO METAdrasi. (<http://metadrasi.org/>). METAdrasi developed a temporary foster system, which includes safe housing in families offering the security and the integrated support they need until they are reunited with relatives in Europe. This practice has been in existence for decades in other European Union countries and it has been shown that children staying with families is the optimal option for the child's best interests. This Foster Care activity is implemented by METAdrasi in accordance with the national law and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child in cooperation with the local Prosecutor's Offices and authorities. As part of its foster care activity, METAdrasi implemented the innovative action "A Home for Human Rights", which was funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants Greek NGO Programme "We are all Citizens" and operated by the Bodossaki Foundation. Thanks to this action, some unaccompanied children have found a home. In the context of the programme, METAdrasi proceeded with creating a record of families that would be interested in providing temporary accommodation for unaccompanied children. Priority was given to families that speak the same language with the child, have a similar cultural background and would be able to undertake the responsibility to offer a family environment until such time as the child could be reunited with his/her family. This practice has been followed for decades in other European Union countries and has been identified as the best option for these children. It is worth mentioning that more than 15 families have registered for this program, while many more have expressed interest and have begun the process to register.

Following the conclusion of the programme "A home for Human Rights", METAdrasi has secured funding from the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM) to continue the initiative for temporary accommodation of unaccompanied and separated children in families through the implementation of the programme titled "Fostering Alternatives to Detention for Children". The programme aims to ensure the continuation of a foster care system as an alternative measure to the detention of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in Greece. The main goals and activities are:

- Placement of children in foster families as an alternative to unsafe environments i.e. being homeless, held in detention centres or police stations.
- Creating a Registry of foster families that could be used long term to facilitate a national institutional framework aiming at the sustainability of this programme.
- Creating an integrated framework to address the basic needs of UASC in Greece and facilitate their integration into the Greek society.
- Transfer of know-how and best practices through workshops and study visits with European organizations that have long standing and specialized

experience in foster care. Specifically an ongoing collaboration has been established with organizations from the Netherlands, Belgium, Brussels, France and Italy.

- Promotion of the foster care system, at a national institutional level, through best practices aiming at the protection and the best interest of UASC's.

In addition, it is worth also mentioning METAdrasi's programme titled "Supported Semi-independent Living for unaccompanied minors", funded by UNICEF, which offers an alternative initiative regarding care provision for unaccompanied minors aged 16 to 18, identified refugees or asylum seekers, irrelevant of nationality. The programme offers, apart from safe housing, a series of services that cover their basic needs (education, health, psychosocial development, legal aid, interpretation etc), along with a proper level of care and guardianship. Emphasis is given to setting targets, boosting self-esteem and self-preservation, developing their personalities, improving and empowering the skills developed, with the aim of enabling their smooth coming of age and integration to Greek society. The programme is framed by an interdisciplinary team, which consists of social worker, psychologist and other caretakers and offers psychosocial support with a view to the teenagers' gradual independence.

7. Stakeholder overview

The main stakeholders who aims at the protection of the unaccompanied minors in Greece include:

- The Public Prosecutor for Minors, who acts as a provisional guardian and shall take the necessary steps in view of the appointment of a guardian for the minor.
- Guardians are the representatives of the unaccompanied minors. They are appointed by the territorially competent Public Prosecutor for Minors, so as to ensure the minors' best interests. Ensuring that every UASC is allocated a trained, vetted guardian upon arrival can make the difference between a child accessing services, shelter and a durable solution in a timely manner, or ending up on the streets, outside of the system and at heightened risk. To date, this remains a critical gap in the response for UASC in Greece, with just one NGO (METAdrasi) providing this enhanced guardianship role.
- All professionals/ practitioners providing services to unaccompanied minors, including psychologists, social workers, caregivers, lawyers, medical staff, interpreters, educators.

8. Gaps between policies and practices of practitioners/ professionals

Despite the great efforts made by all stakeholders and professionals to support and protect unaccompanied children in Greece and the existence of adequate policies and legislation, in practice there are still many gaps.

First of all, the limited availability of shelters, the long waiting lists for shelter together with the expectation for relocation has as a result children's placement in short-term care arrangements or worse, in detention or even their escape from any of these arrangements. This means, as already mentioned in previous sections, that children do not have access to the provisioned and much needed services, such as health and psychosocial support, education, especially formal education and legal aid. Even though, as already mentioned, there is an increase in the number of shelter spaces available, there are no common minimum standard operating procedures (SOPs) for all shelters to ensure consistent quality of care (International Rescue Committee and METAdrasi, 2017). In addition, the absence of family-based care system in Greece is a major gap as regards the provision of care and protection to unaccompanied children.

Another major gap is the lack of trained and trusted guardians, who of course are the most important features of a protection system for children who are deprived of a family environment or who cannot have their interests represented by their parents; guardians can support children in accessing services and finding the best durable solution for them, such as relocation, family reunification in the EU, or asylum in Greece (International Rescue Committee and METAdrasi, 2017). It is worth mentioning METAdrasi's initiative "Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors", which aims to cover this gap. METAdrasi created in 2014 the innovative for the Greek standards "Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors" which has as a main purpose the effective implementation in practice of the role of guardian for the protection and exercise of the rights of children as well as the safeguarding of their basic needs. The ultimate goal is to provide those children with the right to enjoy their childhood, something that will affect their whole life. The Guardianship Network consists of 70 members who act in close cooperation with the Public Prosecutors for minors and with the First Instance Public Prosecutors in their areas of operation. The Guardianship Network acts in the following areas: Athens, Thessaloniki, Kavala, Orestiada, Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros. It supports minors who are detained or staying in accommodation centers and open or closed camps and provides them with care specific to their needs. The members of the Network are social scientists (psychologists, lawyers, specialists in international law, sociologists, teachers, etc.) with experience in the field of protection of minors and other vulnerable groups. They

are people with communicational, cooperational and organizational skills, who also possess great sensitivity, humanism and altruism.

In addition, there is a gap as regards the age assessment procedures, which are inconsistently applied, and together with some children claiming to be above 18, have resulted in children being erroneously registered as adults. This failure to correctly identify children upon arrival has not only led to unaccompanied children being accommodated with unrelated adults (at times in detention facilities), but has also rendered them without the age-appropriate services they need (International Rescue Committee and METAdrasi, 2017).

9. Challenges/ Barriers

Taking into account the above described gaps and despite the existence of measures and provisions as regards the protection of the unaccompanied children who are currently in Greece, there are also many challenges and barriers faced by the involved actors.

First of all, the hard financial conditions that exist in Greece in combination with the huge number of refugees and immigrants, including unaccompanied children, who landed in the country make the provision of services more difficult. Greece was not prepared to receive the large numbers of migrants and refugees who landed in the country the two last years, so this affected also the provision of support and not the covering of unaccompanied children's basic needs.

Besides, professionals and practitioners who support unaccompanied children face a series of challenges. The big challenge is the lack of trained guardians as well as of staff and volunteers who support unaccompanied children. All these actors have never had the time to be trained and be fully prepared, given the sudden arrival of refugees and migrants in Greece. It is worth mentioning the challenges reported by shelter personnel in their efforts to support unaccompanied children with primary mental health and psychosocial support needs, as they are stated in the assessment, carried out by the Institute of Child Health (2017):

- lack of adequate information sharing (case file transfer) concerning children's psychosocial and mental health history;
- challenges related to managing different age groups in the same shelter (including de facto adults who were not properly screened through age assessment procedures);
- high turnover of staff (making it difficult to establish trust with UAC);
- suitability of staff (need for more defined roles and responsibilities among different professionals in the team);

- lack of harmonized operational procedures to handle mental health and psychosocial support problems (currently each shelter develops and applies its own procedures to handle mental health or psychosocial problems of UAC internally with different levels of effectiveness);
- and the need for more specialised tools/skills and systems within shelters themselves to better equip staff to provide appropriate preventative care.

Besides, the unclear and delayed procedures on all sides of the asylum, relocation and family reunification processes are big challenges for both the Government and the responding NGOs, who wish to meet the needs of the unaccompanied children. These delays have also had a negative impact on their health, well-being and safety, when they need protection most. The combination of an overstretched Greek Asylum Service, delays in responses from destination EU member states on family reunification and relocation, and some member states' refusal to accept UASC in the relocation programme has had a negative knock-on effect for these children (International Rescue Committee and METAdrasi, 2017).

Despite all these challenges, mainly local and international non-governmental organisations, guardians, as well as volunteers and local communities make great efforts to support unaccompanied children and improve their living conditions.

10. Training needs of practitioners

There is no doubt that professionals and practitioners who provide services to unaccompanied children have increased training needs, which can be summarised as follows:

- training on background information, cultural diversity issues and methodologies on refugees and migrant issues, with special focus on the group of unaccompanied and separated children;
- training on the law about the provision of services to asylum seekers/ refugees and unaccompanied children;
- specific training for guardians as well as for public prosecutors for minors, taking also into account practices and models from other EU countries;
- training on specific standard operating procedures (SOPs) developed by other EU countries, which could be adapted in the local/ national context, so as to ensure a quality level in the provision of care;
- specialised training on how to support children with chronic diseases, children with disabilities, as well as victims of trafficking and/or sexual violence and children who are addicted to drugs;
- specialised training for intermediators, volunteers as well as support staff.

Finally, special emphasis should be given to training on family-based care systems and on how professionals and practitioners could increase the provision of family-based care to unaccompanied children.

11. Policy and practical implication/ recommendations

The current report indicates that unaccompanied children in Greece face many difficulties and barriers. They belong to one of the most vulnerable groups and at the same time they have been accommodated to a country which is called upon to deal with this phenomenon without any previous experience and which has assumed the heavy burden of the immigration and refugee crisis. In parallel, even though there is a protective legislation for unaccompanied children in Greece, there are many gaps and challenges as regards the implementation of specific steps and the provision of adequate services for this vulnerable group of children. There is no doubt that unaccompanied children need special support and assistance, so as they can make a new start under safe and dignified conditions. On the basis of the above-mentioned considerations, the following recommendations which could improve their situation are put forward:

- First of all, provision of adequate training to all actors and stakeholders who provide services/ come in direct or indirect contact with unaccompanied children, according to the above mentioned described training needs.
- Expansion of the “Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors”, established by METAdrasi, so as minors to receive assistance by trained and experienced guardians.
- Proper implementation of the age assessment procedures, so as the children to receive the most appropriate services.
- Reduce of delays in all related to asylum, relocation and family reunification procedures and at the same time better collaboration among all involved to these processes actors.
- Minimizing of detention of unaccompanied minors as well as their long waiting for shelters.
- Increase of the number of shelters as well as of alternative types of accommodation for the unaccompanied children and at the same time improvement of the accommodation structures and children’s living conditions; special arrangement for older unaccompanied children and those who turn 18 should be provided.
- Provision of adequate and accurate information regarding the available supported services, their rights, the next steps to be taken for relocation, family reunification or asylum in Greece, as well as regarding the risks for exploitation.

- Provision of specialised personalised psycho-social support services to unaccompanied children, considering their special needs.
- Establishment of standard operating procedures so as to ensure the best quality of services
- Close collaboration among all actors from the government and the public prosecutors to the guardians and the NGOs running shelters and providing services to unaccompanied children, so as to ensure their best interests.
- Awareness-raising of the wider society regarding the situation of the unaccompanied children.

Finally, as already suggested the development of foster caring system would definitely improve their situation, especially of those children who wish to remain in Greece. For this reason, it is very important to:

- Promote/support the development of national foster care standards (covering also the situation of unaccompanied children).
- Develop recommendations or procedures regarding the recruitment, training, monitoring and supervising (future) foster parents.
- Develop recommendations for the creation of the National Register of Foster Parents.
- Provide capacity-building to practitioners/professionals working with and for children in migration to promote increase in the provision of family-based care (for example foster care) to host unaccompanied children.
- Raise awareness about family-based care/foster care for unaccompanied children both of institutional authorities and policy makers, as well as of the wider public.

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