

A. Foreword by the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors

Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors is a pioneering initiative for political planning and implementation, assessed by International and European Organizations as a best practice in the field of child protection.

The Secretariat was established 2.5 years ago, on the initiative of the Prime Minister himself. His main goal was to ensure that no unaccompanied child is left alone, without the protection and care of the state. Since then, the imprint of our work is visible in data reports on the safe housing of thousands of children, their institutional and legal protection, their psychosocial support, and their inclusion in education and vocational training, all necessary for their smooth transition to adulthood.

In summary, during 2022 the Special Secretariat managed 5,660 accommodation requests of unaccompanied minors, ensuring their safe housing in accommodation centers and supervised apartments for semi-independent living, with a maximum occupancy of 2,500 accommodation places.

At the same time, through a) the continual operation of the helpline, b) the mobile units acting in the field and c) the info desk of the National Emergency Response Mechanism, we managed to locate and provide accommodation to approximately 3,000 children who were living in precarious conditions or were homeless inland. Also, the contribution of the psychosocial groups that act as "Assistants" in the Regional Asylum Offices was valuable.

In addition, the voluntary relocation program continued its actions, through which more than 1,300 children were relocated and now live safely in 13 European countries.

Moreover, in 2022, the adoption of the law on Guardianship, as promoted by the Special Secretariat, was of decisive importance for the child protection system in our country. Already from the beginning of 2023, 180 guardianship mandated persons and coordinators will be recruited across the territory, so that every unaccompanied child has a stable reference person, who will ensure their best interest and well-being. At the same time, the establishment of the Standard Operating Procedures and Licensing Framework of Accommodation Centers, the National Registry of Unaccompanied Minors, and the institutionalization of accompaniments for unaccompanied children within the country, ensure an even more comprehensive child protection framework.

Also, promoting the mental health of both unaccompanied minors and professionals who work with children is a priority for us. In this context, the participation of approximately 900 frontline professionals in monthly trainings on mental health issues, as well as the supervision of all staff in the accommodation centers is ensured.

Finally, we promoted the development of the Mentorship project, where former unaccompanied minors act supportively, as positive role models, for the children who live in the accommodation facilities.

Our fundamental goal is the substantial integration of unaccompanied children into Greek society through their access to the school, the provision of supportive non-formal education, the interconnection of local agencies to coordinate integration actions throughout the country, but also the creation of appropriate tools for the development of children's professional skills.

Extroversion and multi-sectoral cooperation are fundamental principles for the Secretariat. From this perspective, actions and programs are successfully implemented and are supported by an experienced and specialized child protection staff, who cooperate and integrate harmoniously into the ecosystem of Organizations of the European Union and the United Nations. At the same time, certified Civil Society Organizations are strategic partners of the Secretariat. Bilateral cooperation with countries that have developed child protection systems, such as the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Norway, and Switzerland, was also further strengthened.

With the guidance of the political leadership of our Ministry and the daily cooperation of its Services and executives, we will respond to the challenges of 2023, to build an even stronger protection framework for every minor who arrives unaccompanied in our country. Our goal is to deal with identified difficulties, which are risk factors for children, i.e. to limit abscondments from accommodation centers, school dropout rates, and child exploitation, by strengthening their smooth transition to adulthood and their inclusion in Greek society.

Iraklis Moskoff

B. Introduction

The Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum is the competent national authority for the protection of unaccompanied minors and minors separated from their families living in our country. In this context, policies and actions are planned and implemented to ensure the protection and overall well-being of minors third country nationals or stateless minors who are in Greek territory without their parents.

A key strategic priority of the Secretariat is the development and establishment of an integrated child protection and childcare system. For this reason, the Secretariat designed the National Strategy for the protection of unaccompanied minors in Greece, through which it develops actions and programs, reforms institutions, and proposes legislative regulations or promotes practices, aimed at better safeguarding all minors' rights.

The National Strategy is developed in four main pillars as follows:

(a)

improving the reception and accommodation system and ensuring the rights of unaccompanied minors

(b)

finding and implementing sustainable solutions for each child

(c)

protecting each child from any form of violence or exploitation

(d)

improving data collection on unaccompanied minors and facilities for unaccompanied minors

The Special Secretariat closely monitors the implementation of the National Strategy through the supervision and coordination of the actions, activities, and programmes of the bodies and authorities involved, aimed at the protection and care of unaccompanied minors, the promotion of their rights and best interests, and updates it regularly.

At the same time, through its four units, the Special Secretariat promotes the social and child-centred character of the state for minors who lack parental care and seek to strengthen the responsiveness and effectiveness of the child protection system. For this purpose, scientifically evidence-based practices that are applied internationally and have been found to be deemed effective, adopting a child rights-based approach, following strategic priorities set at international and European level for the protection of unaccompanied minors, and adhering to the United Nations' sustainable development goals, are used and implemented.

C. The situation of unaccompanied children in Greece—Data reports

image

Situation Update: Unaccompanied Minors (UAM) in Greece. Number and places of UAM shelters, apartments SIL, emergency accommodation facilities, 01 January 2023

image

In December 2022, a total of 2,624 unaccompanied children were recorded in our country. More specifically, 1,736 unaccompanied boys and girls are residing in accommodation centers for unaccompanied minors (known as unaccompanied minors' shelters)

241 unaccompanied children are accommodated in supervised apartments for semi-independent living

214 unaccompanied children are accommodated in emergency accommodation facilities

44 unaccompanied children are living in accommodation facilities for asylum seekers

389 unaccompanied children are living in the Reception and Identification Centers and Closed Controlled Access Centers until the process of their registration and quarantine period imposed due to the pandemic is completed.

D. Flagship actions implemented by the Special Secretariat in 2022

1 Institutional Protection of the rights of unaccompanied minors

Through the Institutional Protection Unit, the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors works in the best interest of unaccompanied minors, coordinating the action of services and agencies, governmental and non-governmental, involved in issues associated with minors' protection, such as accommodation, nutrition, health, education, and work. It ensures children's access to their rights and intervenes on issues related to child protection, such as the age assessment process, provision of AMKA (i.e., National Insurance Number), PAAYPA (i.e., Temporary Insurance and Health Care Number) and VAT (i.e., Tax Identification Number) for minors, as well as issues of protection from abuse and violence.

In this context, in cooperation with Asylum Service, we try to ensure the process of providing PAAYPA and the unhindered access of unaccompanied minors, whose request for international protection has been rejected, to medical care and health services, with the amendment of a joint ministerial decision (to implement par. 2 of article 59 of Law 4939/2022).

The Unit mapped the legal framework, directives, procedures and practices related to unaccompanied minors, with the aim of identifying points of intervention, but also to further improve institutional protection. For this purpose, clarifications were sent to child protection agencies regarding the access of minors to work and better support of unaccompanied minors in legal proceedings.

Also, a proposal was put forward to legalize the residence of young adults – who entered the country as unaccompanied minors – through an integration process, within the framework of amending the Immigration Code.

At the same time, emphasizing de-institutionalization, the gradual integration of unaccompanied minors into the national foster care and adoption system began, in cooperation with the competent Services of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. With the implementation of a foster care system, unaccompanied children can receive care and support within a family or within smaller care units, in order to ensure the provision of personalized care and the facilitation of social integration in Greece, as well as their smooth transition to adulthood. To date, all unaccompanied minors under the age of 12 have been registered in the registry of the National Fostering and Adoption system. Furthermore, training seminars have been held for, inter alia, professionals working in Reception Centers for Unaccompanied Minors, on fostering and adoption the relevant procedures, in order to ensure their smooth implementation in the light of the best interest of each child.

2 Adoption of Law 4960/2022 “National Guardianship System and Accommodation Framework for Unaccompanied Minors and other provisions within the competence of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum” (A’ 145)

The Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors drafted and proposed a draft law, which included the National Guardianship System, by reforming the previous institutional framework. Under this law, the framework for hosting unaccompanied minors was organized and regulated, the National Registry for the Protection of unaccompanied minors was established and the National Emergency Response Mechanism for children in precarious conditions and the accompaniment of unaccompanied minors in their movements within the country were instituted.

In particular, in July 2022, Law 4960/2022 “National Guardianship System and Accommodation Framework for Unaccompanied Minors and other provisions within the competence of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum” was adopted, which amended and introduced new provisions in the “Code of Reception for the reception, the international protection of third-country nationals and stateless persons and the temporary protection in case of a mass influx of displaced foreigners” - Law 4939/2022, which is bringing together the current legislation of integration into the Greek legal order of four (4) European directives.

2.1 National Guardianship System for Unaccompanied Minors

The aim of the National Guardianship System for Unaccompanied Minors is in place to ensure the best interest of each child, their overall well-being, and the enjoyment and effective protection of their rights, starting with their identification and registration under the competent authorities. For the execution of the Guardianship System, relevant procedures and institutional actions for smooth implementation of Guardianship have been initiated by the Institutional Protection Unit. More specifically, these actions include the issuance of ministerial decisions for operational implementation of the system, such as the mechanism for submitting and managing complaints of unaccompanied minors within the Guardianship System and the organizational and operational regulation of the Guardianship Council for Unaccompanied Minors.

The new initiative sets the rules for a functional and flexible guardianship system, where the state exercises control and supervision, gives directions for the exercise of guardianship duties, and supports the implementation of the program itself. At the same time, non-profit legal entities, specializing in children protection, undertake the provision of guardianship services, following their designation by the competent Prosecutor, and provide guardianship services to an estimated number of 2,700 unaccompanied minors throughout the Greek territory.

The guardian carries out his/her duties by employing competent professionals, the so-called “guardianship mandated persons”, while each one can be responsible for a maximum of 15 children. The role of a coordinator is established, for better coordination and support of

guardianship mandated persons with the management of each case, creating a system with more accountability and oversight.

Guardianship functions for an unaccompanied minor concern

(a)

the custody of the unaccompanied minor (such as accommodation, medical care, education and training, daily care)

(b)

his/her representation in personal status issues (principally for international protection and immigration, age determination assessment, family reunification, relocation, and court proceedings)

(c)

his/her assistance in property issues (access to immigration policy and social protection benefits, participation in economic life and employment, access to banking services and work)

2.2 National Registry for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors

In the National Registry for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, data is kept on all issues on the protection of children, so that we can make the best decisions for the children's benefit, but also to have a clear picture of the number of minors under the care of the state at any time. Thus, we can control the capacity and operation of the accommodation facilities and design policies and services based on reliable statistics on the actual needs of unaccompanied minors.

2.3 Accompaniment of Unaccompanied Minors

The framework for the organized and safe transfers of unaccompanied minors, accompanied by persons who have been adequately trained in child protection issues, from the reception points in the hinterland and from other areas to a safe hosting environment was established.

2.4 Standard Operating Procedures Framework for Accommodation Facilities for Unaccompanied Minors

The operating framework of accommodation facilities for unaccompanied minors was established, to ensure their best interests and provide them with quality services. Alongside, the ministerial decisions, which set the Standard Operating Procedures and Licensing Framework of the Accommodation Centers for Unaccompanied Minors, the Standard Operating Procedures for Supervised Apartments for Semi-Independent Living, and the Standard Operating Procedures for Emergency Accommodation Facilities, are in their final stage of processing.

Also, the development and monitoring of a Code of Conduct for the frontline staff of accommodation centers are foreseen, as well as a comprehensive Child Protection Policy for the Accommodation Centers for Unaccompanied Minors.

2.5 Institutionalization of the National Emergency Response Mechanism

After the legislative abolition of protective custody by virtue of article 43 Law 4760/2020, Law 4960/2022 institutionalized the National Emergency Response Mechanism, as a culmination of the efforts of the Special Secretariat for safe and immediate access to protection for unaccompanied minors who are homeless or in precarious conditions. In the provision that establishes the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM), the purpose is explicitly defined (the identification and immediate referral and placement in emergency accommodation facilities of a homeless unaccompanied minor or a minor living in precarious conditions) and the competencies of NERM which include, not only housing minors in emergency accommodation facilities, but also the development of specialized actions for unaccompanied persons at risk, victims of human trafficking, exploitation or violence. The provision also establishes the emergency accommodation facilities of unaccompanied minors, for immediate, temporary accommodation, in which the necessary services are provided (best interest assessment, psychosocial and legal assistance) and the necessary procedures are carried out for the transition of minors to long-term accommodation facilities.

3 Harmonization of best interests assessment procedures

In collaboration with the UN High Commission for Refugees and the European Union Agency for Asylum, a system is being developed to harmonize the procedures for assessing the best interests of unaccompanied minors and to certify professionals. The two main pillars of the certification process concern the creation of unified tools for the assessment of best interests and the training of frontline professionals. The aim of these actions is for the professionals, who will undertake the best interests assessment, to be trained and certified in their ability to carry out the aforementioned assessment, while at the same time the primary objective is to establish its implementation in every step and circumstance of an unaccompanied minor's case.

4 Enhancing the capacity of long-term accommodation facilities for unaccompanied minors

The capacity of long-term accommodation facilities for unaccompanied minors, which operate with a high occupancy rate (over 80% for Accommodation Centers and over 70% for Supervised Apartments), has been strengthened. Today, there are 2,272 long-term residence places in 70 Accommodation Centers for Unaccompanied Minors and 77 Supervised Apartments for Semi-Independent Living. Also, there are 240 places in Emergency Accommodation Facilities, where minors identified via the NERM are placed.

5 Management of accommodation requests

The Special Secretariat, and specifically the Accommodation and Relocation Requests Management Unit, standardized referral forms for housing unaccompanied minors and their submission procedures and drew up protocols for assessing vulnerability and prioritizing accommodation requests. In 2022, the Accommodation and Relocation Requests Management Unit managed about 5,660 requests for accommodation of unaccompanied minors and processed all the necessary procedures for their placement in long-term and temporary accommodation facilities.

At the same time, the Unit manages vulnerable cases of unaccompanied minors and cases that need special care, in cooperation with child protection agencies and reception and identification authorities (Ministry of Public Health, Reception and Identification Centers, Public Prosecutor for Minors, Police Reference Departments, Open Accommodation Facilities) and coordinates all involved agencies towards the best interest of minors.

The following graphs give an overview of accommodation requests for 2022:

--Representation of housing conditions for unaccompanied minors

--Representation of housing requests and occupancy per accommodation type

6 Voluntary Relocation Program

After two and a half years of operation, the Voluntary Relocation Program continued its function. Since April 2020, the Greek Government, with the support of the European Commission and the cooperation of EU Member States and other countries, has been implementing the voluntary relocation program of unaccompanied minors residing in Greece to other European countries.

A total of 1,313 unaccompanied children have been transferred to other European countries. In 2022 there were 13 flights to France and Portugal. From January 2022 until the first week of December, a total of 113 unaccompanied minors were relocated. On June 30, 2022, France completed the relocation of all its beneficiaries, with Portugal remaining in the Relocation Program expecting to receive another 195 unaccompanied minors.

Aggregated figures for relocation of unaccompanied minors since the start of the program.

Data on the relocation of unaccompanied minors by the year of program completion, 2022.

7 National Emergency Response Mechanism

The National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) was designed in 2020 by the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and was implemented in 2021. NERM was institutionalized in

2022 with the aim of identifying and immediately housing in Emergency Accommodation facilities unaccompanied minors who live in homelessness or precarious conditions. Central axis of the National Emergency Response Mechanism is the Emergency Response Helpline of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, to which cases of unaccompanied minors who are homeless or living in precarious conditions are referred, and through which guidance is provided for their immediate transport and housing in a safe environment.

The National Emergency Response Mechanism has developed cooperation with civil society organizations, specifically with the “Network for Children’s Rights” in Attica and “Arsis” in Thessaloniki, which have taken over the operation of an Information Desk and a Mobile Unit, per region. Minors can visit the Information Desks every day, to receive information regarding their rights and access to accommodation facilities, but also to get legal and psychosocial support. Social workers and psychologists carry out the evaluation of minors’ best interest and the minor immediately joins an emergency accommodation facility. Finally, the Mobile Units consisting specialized scientific personnel carry out a rapid best interests assessment of the minors, accompany them to the Police Departments of referents for their identification, and then accompany them to emergency accommodation facilities where they are accommodated.

Currently, six (6) Emergency Accommodation facilities for Unaccompanied Minors are operating nationwide, with a total capacity of 240 places, under the operational responsibility of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It is noted that the places recently (in December 2022) increased from 200 to 240, due to the steadily increasing need to accommodate unaccompanied minors. In particular, five (5) of these shelters are located inland, in Attica and Thessaloniki, and the sixth in Lesbos. Specialized services are provided in the aforementioned facilities, such as psychosocial and legal support, education, and health care, while during the stay of the minors in them, the registration of their request for international protection at the Regional Asylum Offices is also completed. In addition, during their stay, the specific needs of each minor are assessed, the required medical examinations are carried out and the process of evaluating their best interests is completed, with the aim of finding a suitable place for long-term accommodation.

Furthermore, given the Ukrainian crisis which started in February 2022, the NERM recommended a defined procedure and strengthened its cooperation with the Police and co-competent bodies. In particular, the Best Interests Assessment Team of Arsis Thessaloniki was active at Promahonas Passport Control Point every day, consisting of social scientists and interpreters, and is responsible for assessing the best interest of each child who is separated from their parent or unaccompanied minor who arrives at this point, by drafting and sending a rapid assessment form to NERM. Then, for the cases of minors who are separated from their parents, NERM refers the cases to the Social Services of the Municipalities, depending on their place of residence, as well as for further actions in terms of checking their documents and conducting a social investigation, if deemed necessary. For the cases of unaccompanied minors, who do not have a supporting network in Greece, the Police at Promahonas Passport Control Point immediately informs NERM so that all the necessary actions are carried out for their accommodation in emergency accommodation facilities. Indicatively, it is stated that the referrals received by NERM through the Tracking Line for separated and unaccompanied minors from Ukraine from the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis until 30/11/2022 were 515.

Also, the National Emergency Response Mechanism has developed targeted actions, through the innovative program "Protection for All Minors", which is implemented in Athens by the "Network for Children's Rights" with funding from INTERSOS and aims at the reduction of unaccompanied and separated minors living in precarious living conditions. More specifically, at the reception area of Urban Safe Space for unaccompanied minors, specialized services are provided to encourage minors who do not wish to join accommodation facilities, to leave precarious living conditions and move to emergency accommodation facilities or to supervised apartments for semi-independent living.

A decisive role in this programme is played by the "Assistants". They consist of social workers and psychologists who are responsible for developing an action plan for each minor, while, at the same time, have a daily physical presence at the Regional Asylum Offices, to identify unaccompanied and separated minors transitioning. By the end of 2022, the program was implemented only in Attica, while the possibility of its extension to Northern Greece from the beginning of 2023 onwards is being considered.

Finally, in June 2022, on behalf of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, the National Emergency Response Mechanism participated in the training course "Combating Human Trafficking", organized by the Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Human Trafficking of the General Security Directorate of Thessaloniki with the assistance of the Education Department of the General Police Directorate of Thessaloniki, basic subject of which was the training in handling cases of human trafficking cases to combat the phenomenon and protect the victims.

8 Establishment of standard procedures for conducting on-site inspections

Predefined Project 8 (PDP #8), entitled «Enhancing the capacity

of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors to evaluate the quality of services provided to unaccompanied minors within the Accommodation Centers" is going to strengthen the capacity of the Special Secretariat to coordinate a monitoring mechanism of accommodation facilities, which will provide suitable care conditions for unaccompanied minors. The development and use of specialized tools during the monitoring and evaluation process will provide the Special Secretariat with the necessary data, which will form the basis for policy-making and the development of social intervention actions.

In addition, PDP #8 will strengthen the expertise and capacity

of the Special Secretariat to coordinate more effectively the existing social care network of unaccompanied minors, in order to take on, within 2023, a supervisory role in the operation of the National Emergency Response Mechanism and the Accompaniment Mechanism. Also, 13 professionals are to be hired with fixed-term contracts in order to carry out on-site inspections in long-term accommodation facilities and to implement support and capacity building for frontline staff. Moreover, the electronic platform Helidon 2 will be developed, with a connection to Alkyoni II, for the maintenance of the National Registry for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors and the supervision and evaluation needs of long-term accommodation facilities.

The project is implemented within the framework of the GR-G Program “Development of the management capabilities of the National Asylum and Immigration Systems”, of the Financial Mechanism of European Economic Area 2014-2021.

Finally, we should mention that in 2022, on-site inspections and evaluations were carried out, both in Attica and in provinces.

9 Promoting the mental health of unaccompanied minors and empowering frontline professionals

In order to support frontline professionals in managing mental health issues of unaccompanied children, the project “Promoting mental health and preventing mental disorders in unaccompanied minors in Greece: UAM Mental Health Hub” is being implemented from May 2022 in cooperation with SOS Children’s Villages Greece. The program is funded by the Government of Tyrol and SOS Children’s Villages Austria and aims to develop skills, provide adequate training, and raise awareness among all professionals working in Accommodation Centers for Unaccompanied Minors with the ultimate goal of promoting mental health and preventing mental disorders in the population of unaccompanied minors.

More specifically, the Mental Health Hub is implemented on three levels:

1st level

Horizontal trainings of all staff specialties of Accommodation Centers in key thematic sections such as adolescence, the management of incidents of suicide attempt or suicidal ideation, the management of loss and bereavement, as well as the role of a professional, etc. At the same time, a Training of Trainers model was developed, in which 20 of the 22 agencies participated throughout Greece. The aim of future trainers is to act multiplicatively in relation to the new employees and to ensure the continuous training of staff.

2nd level

Clinical supervision by specialized professionals in the field of mental health to provide substantial support and relieve staff groups.

3rd level

Specialized services to children, formulation of common crisis management protocols for Accommodation Centers, timely and effective intervention of professionals regarding the management of mental health challenges and disorders experienced by unaccompanied minors. For greater efficiency, the Special Secretariat in collaboration with SOS Children’s Villages Greece have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Health and specifically with the Directorate of Mental Health since September 2022.

The graph lists the participants as well as the thematic areas that were available to professionals working in Accommodation Centers for unaccompanied minors.

The graph records the number of supervisions the program offered to unaccompanied minors in Accommodation Centers per month.

10 Mentorship project

The mentorship project was remarkably developed in 2022. Three new members were added to the group increasing the representation of different nationalities and models of social integration. The new group continued its action through visits to Accommodation Centers and Supervised Apartments for Semi-Independent Living in Athens and Thessaloniki, while it managed to reach children through alternative activities of creative work and participation. More specifically, following the example of other European countries, such as the Netherlands, the group of mentors in collaboration with the Unit for Integration and Support of Unaccompanied Minors created the "Teens Network", a group of unaccompanied children who meet once a month with the mentors representing their accommodation center and, by extension, their community. Through this Network, children have the opportunity to connect, chat, meet other unaccompanied children from all over the territory and "raise" their voice on the issues that concern them, while at the same time creating a special bond with the mentors.

In total, through the initiative of mentors, the Special Secretariat aims to support unaccompanied children, to inform them about issues of interest to them, and to empower them with the ultimate goal of their smooth transition to adulthood. Through their personalized integration model and their experiences, mentors motivate and encourage children to integrate in Greece. At the same time, the constant feedback from the field acts as a bridge of connection between the children and the creation of policies that concern them.

A total of 465 children have benefited from the project, while 56 visits were made to a) Accommodation Centers for Unaccompanied Minors to inform them about the program of the Supervised for Semi-Independent Living and b) Supervised Apartments for Semi-Independent Living to support the children with school, integration, and preparation to adulthood.

*Statistics are from the archive of the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA).

The graph shows the number of visits per month by the group of mentors to Accommodation Centers for unaccompanied minors and to supervised apartments for semi-independent living in 2022.

*Statistics are from the archive of the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA).

The graph shows the main thematic discussions of the mentor group with unaccompanied children during 2022.

11 Supporting Education and Vocational Training of Unaccompanied Minors

In order to facilitate the access of unaccompanied minors to school and to strengthen their systematic school attendance, to expand cultural and sports activities and to create more professional training opportunities with the aim of social inclusion and smooth transition to adult life, the Integration and Support Unit for Unaccompanied Minors of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors implemented specific actions in the following areas during 2022:

11.1 Formal & Non-Formal Education

In collaboration with the Refugee Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, through mediation to service registration requests, creation of Reception Classes, transportation to and from schools, training teachers, communication with Refugee Education Coordinators, etc., all necessary actions were taken to ensure the unhindered access of unaccompanied minors to school. At the same time, the basic conditions for the inclusion of children in schools, such as their access to the national vaccination program and the mapping of unaccompanied minors in collaboration with the Asylum Service with the aim of intensifying their registration process, were ensured.

Also, the donation and distribution of 321 computers was ensured, to facilitate distance education and implementation of educational programs of non-formal education attendees.

Workshops and seminars were organized and conducted by the Integration and Support Unit throughout the year, with constant participation of teachers from the Accommodation Centers, which aimed to develop the professional skills and support case management of educators who work with children in Accommodation Centers. Typical examples are the cycle of work counseling and career guidance workshops, in collaboration with SOS Children's Villages Greece, the KETHEA/ MOSAIC workshops on interculturality and dependency, the educational seminars on sexual health and reproductive system and the rights of young refugees.

Furthermore, workshops were organized in schools, with the aim of informing and raising awareness among Greek students about their refugee peers. At the same time, these workshops were also addressed to school teachers to make the school environment more inclusive and supportive towards refugees.

11.2 Cultural & Sports Activities

A mapping of pre-integration actions has been prepared per geographical region of the Accommodation Centers for Unaccompanied Minors, in order to facilitate children's access to cultural, sports and other types of activities, depending on the minors' interests and the available facilities per region.

In collaboration with agencies and organizations, coordinated efforts are being made to enhance the participation of unaccompanied minors who live in Accommodation Centers, in cultural and sports activities, workshops, meetings and festivals.

In addition, we have developed cooperation with the Coordination Center of the Municipality of Athens for Migrants and Refugees (ACCMR), the National Museum of Contemporary Art, the Acropolis Museum and the Thessaloniki Museum of Photography, in order for the children to cultivate skills and abilities and to further develop their inclinations and talents.

11.3 Vocational Training & Employment Counseling

The elaboration and publication of the Job Integration Guide for Unaccompanied Minors entitled “Tomorrow as a guide / I guide tomorrow” has been completed in collaboration with and funded by UNICEF. It is addressed to professionals of Accommodation Centers for Unaccompanied Minors. It has gathered, in short and comprehensive texts, the basic, introductory information that is useful for young people with a refugee / immigrant background and it focuses on unaccompanied minors, presenting, at the same time, the alternative paths for education, training, work and entrepreneurship. The hardcopy version of the guide is also accompanied by a digital - extended version for those looking for more detailed and in-depth information on one or more of the contents.

11.4 Transition of unaccompanied minors to adulthood

The project “Building Futures, Sharing Good Practices: Migrant Children’s Transition to Adulthood / UAC Futures” was launched and is being implemented with the aim of developing an action plan for the transition of unaccompanied minors to adulthood, in collaboration with child protection agencies from other European countries and coordination from the Council of Europe.

As part of the project, study visits have been made to the Netherlands, Spain and Greece for the exchange of know-how between project partners and other interested parties, as well as composition of a National Report on good practices and challenges during the transition of unaccompanied minors to adulthood.

12 Exchange of know-how with other countries

In 2022 on-site work visits (study visits) were carried out, with the aim of optimizing the procedures and the continuous training of Special Secretariat staff, to other European countries, in the context defined in common Memorandums

of Understanding with institutional partners and European NGOs. Specifically, in the context of cooperation with the Ministry of Security and Justice of the Netherlands and the organization NIDOS, a delegation of the Special Secretariat visited the Netherlands with the objective of studying guardianship and fostering issues of unaccompanied minors. Accordingly, a delegation visited Norway to exchange know-how on issues and assessment procedures of long-term accommodation facilities for unaccompanied minors in cooperation with the Directorate of Migration of the Ministry of Justice in Norway. Finally, a corresponding visit with the same subject of study from Norway to Athens took place.

--Meeting of representatives of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors with officials of the NIDOS Organization in the Netherlands.

--Meeting of representatives of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors with officials of the Directorate of Migration of the Ministry of Justice in Norway.

13 Cooperation with agencies and communication strategy

In the context of close cooperation with child protection agencies, two meetings of the Special Secretariat were held with representatives of long-term accommodation facilities for unaccompanied minors, regarding financial issues, occupancy of the facilities and other challenges they face.

In the spirit of the extroversion of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, the Secretariat's social media accounts have been created and operate with great response, which constitute a channel of communication of the Secretariat's work.

E. Actions that are expected to be implemented shortly

1 Mobile Primary Health Care Units for Unaccompanied Minors

The Special Secretariat, taking into account the increased needs of long-term accommodation facilities to provide primary health care to unaccompanied minors, planned and will implement a program of mobile primary care units. The Mobile Primary Health Care Units for Unaccompanied Minors are going to meet the needs of the children regarding:

(a)

regular medical monitoring and provision of primary medical care

(b)

preventive medical examinations and interconnection with other medical services, when necessary

(c)

medical examinations required for inclusion in accommodation centers for unaccompanied minors (assessment for dermatological transmissible diseases and skin reaction, Mantoux)

Also, the Mobile Primary Health Care Units will support the age determination process, in accordance with the relevant legislation. The Mobile Units will consist of doctors, psychologists, nurses and interpreters, who have experience in child protection.

2 Collaboration with the University of West Attica

The goal of the Special Secretariat is the recording and systematization of good practices that have been developed in the field as well as training of new professionals in child protection and migration issues. To this end, the Special Secretariat collaborates with the University of West Attica. In 2023, a working group will be established, which a) will record the good practices developed by the Special Secretariat and its partners, b) will carry out research-level studies, and c) will conduct specialized trainings in child protection issues with the ultimate goal of training new specialized professionals.

3 Creating informative videos for unaccompanied children

In collaboration with the European Union Agency for Asylum, the group of mentors will create informative videos for unaccompanied children on issues of their concern, such as financial aid management, learning the Greek language, access to public services, the role of the guardian etc. At the same time, through these informative actions, the Special Secretariat aims to support children on their way to adulthood.

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

Ministry of Migration & Asylum

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