

# NETWORK FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

## ANNUAL REPORT

January 2017 – January 2018

(Short English version)

### I. ABOUT THE NETWORK

The “Network for the Rights of Children on the Move” is an informal network operating under the initiation and **coordination** of the Greek Deputy Ombudsman for Children Rights. Its operation started in January 2017 and its main **objectives** are a) to support the monitoring of the situation of children on the move across Greece, and b) to promote evidence – based advocacy actions on issues of shared concern related to children.

The **work** of the Network complements the Ombudsman’s children’s rights monitoring mechanism, already in place. According to Network’s operation rules, an information exchange process has been established, focused on the issues related to the protection of the rights of children on the move that have been given prominence by the Network members. Within this framework, joint advocacy actions and interventions have been developed throughout the year.

The Network is supported by UNICEF/Refugee and Migrant Response in Greece.

The Network includes 22 **members**, i.e. 3 UN agencies, 19 civil society organizations, and the municipality of Athens (as collaborative member).

**Members’ list:** United Nations Children Fund/UNICEF - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/UNHCR - International Organization for Migration/IOM - ARSIS Association for the social support of youth- ETIMA (AITHMA)- Babel Day Centre - Danish Refugee Council/DRC - Doctors of the World - Greek Council for Refugees- HIAS - Hellenic League for Human Rights - International Rescue Committee/IRC- Medical Intervention/MedIn- Melissa Network of Migrant Women in Greece - METAdrasi Action for Migration and Development - Network for Children’s Rights - PRAKSIS – Save the Children International - SOS Children’s Villages Greece - Solidarity Now- Smile of the Child - Terres des Hommes - Municipality of Athens ( Vice-mayor office for Migrants, Refugees and Municipal Decentralization).

The **current report** reviews the operation of the Network from the beginning of its operation, in January 2017, to January 2018.

The original full report is available in Greek [here](#)

## II. MAIN ISSUES BROUGHT UP BY THE INFORMATION EXCHANGE PROCESS OF THE NETWORK

From January to December 2017, about **120 issues** have been brought up by Network members, with concern to the situation of children on the move throughout Greece. Most issues referred by members were related to 3 main thematic areas: **a. education, b. protection of unaccompanied children and c. access to international protection**. Out of those, about **60%** concerned unaccompanied children, while about **40%** were issues specifically concerning accompanied children.

In more detail, the key issues given prominence by the abovementioned information exchange process were: access to education (30 references), access to international protection (21 references), access to health (12 references), sites and accommodation facilities (17 references), child victimization (8 references), civil status (4 references), issues concerning specifically the protection of unaccompanied children (25 references).

### Education

The main problems raised by the members of the Network in the area of education of migrant and refugee children were:

- Problems in the planning and coordination among relevant stakeholders on ensuring access to education for migrant and refugee children, especially with regard to their transportation among various locations and/or types of accommodation
- Not timely/late registration of children to school
- Issues concerning the operation of special reception classes<sup>1</sup> that had mainly to do with language barriers, the lack or the capacity of the reception classes in various locations. Similar problems also referred in the operation of morning classes, which are included in the regular school programme.
- Difficulties and delays in the establishment of kindergartens
- Issues regarding the non-regular attendance and /or high dropout rates
- Difficulties in access to education for children above the age of 15 (non-compulsory education) and for unaccompanied children

### Access to International Protection

The main problems raised by the members of the Network in the area of access to procedures for international protection of children concerned mainly unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). The issues related to accompanied children mainly concerned family reunification process.

Main issues concerning UASC cases:

- Information, support and legal representation of children upon arrival, including issues related to lack of interpretation services, as well as similar issues on following up their legal cases.
- Late registration of asylum claims (in some cases awaiting period is up to 3 months)
- Serious gaps in best interests' assessment procedure, resulting, among other things, in the misidentification of family links with adults in the environment of the child.
- Issues linked with the country of origin of UASC (negative preconceptions regarding the validity of the asylum claim)

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<sup>1</sup> Afternoon classes, called "DYEP", established in local schools near open sites/camps, in the context of the ministry's plan for the support of refugees' education.

Main issues regarding family reunification:

- Gaps and serious delays in the procedure (often longer than one year or more)
- Especially with regard to transfers:  
Difficulties in issuing travel documents (especially for single parent families) - the long awaiting period beyond the legal provision of the 6-months period for the completion of the transfer - negative impact of the delays especially on UASC (some of them become 18 prior to transfer) – difficulties in issuing the tickets

### **Conditions of operation of reception and accommodation sites/facilities**

The main problems raised by the members of the Network with regard to the conditions of operation of reception and accommodation sites/facilities had to do with:

- Issues linked with the serious gaps in the management and coordination of the various reception and accommodation facilities
- The multiple transfers of children and families from one location to the other that create problems in the coordination and continuation of provided services and in the follow up of their cases
- Poor living conditions in the Reception and Identification Centers (RICs) on the islands and temporary accommodation facilities (camps) in the mainland
- Deterioration of living conditions and of services' provision in RICs and camps, following the pull out of NGOs (during the second semester of 2017)
- Specific issues with regard to the accommodation facilities (shelters) for UASC, including: lack of legal framework providing for the establishment and operation of shelters, limited accommodation capacity resulting in long periods of children in detention or homelessness, lack of psychosocial and mental health support services, gaps in support services in transition to adulthood

### **Healthcare**

The main problems raised by the members of the Network regarding access to healthcare were:

- Language barriers/lack of interpretation services in public health services/hospitals
- Issues with regard to the coverage of nutrition needs of children, especially those of infants' and of younger children
- Impediments with regard to access to free healthcare services, because of difficulties in issuance of social security number (AMKA), with serious impact on UASC access to health services
- Limited access to mental health services/ lack of such specialized services and services for children with addictions

### **Child victimization**

The main issues raised by the members of the Network concerning child victimization (or the danger of) were mostly linked with neglect and domestic violence incidents as following:

- Physical punishment of children and neglect (in the form of insufficient parental care and supervision, or sometimes even the denial of providing parental care) were some of the issues brought up in most references, while incidents of domestic violence against children were frequently linked with mental health or substance abuse problems of the parents or guardians. The latter problems seem to be further linked with the insecure and bad living conditions and to prior traumatic experiences.
- The aforementioned issues could be probably considered in relation to social practices and cultural factors. This requires an approach beyond the legal treatment

of such cases that would include targeted interventions and measures for further and special support for children and families and awareness-raising programmes.

- In severe cases of maltreatment, removing children from the family or guardian was referred as quite challenging, especially in cases when the child, after removal, is placed in hospital, where he/she remains for a long period, due to limited capacity of other proper services and lack of alternative care.

### **Civil status**

The main problems raised by the members with regard to the civil status of children concerned children born in Greece and were referred as following:

- Limited access to interpretation/cultural mediation services and incorrect registration of names and family names of children during their birth registration (which may also have a negative impact on children's inclusion in the asylum procedure)
- Non-coherent administrative registration procedures for name giving to new born children throughout Greece
- Non-coherent administrative procedures for the proof of civil status of parents/guardians and parental bonds

### **Specific issues regarding the protection of unaccompanied and separated children**

The main problems raised by the members with regard to protection of UASC were referred as following:

- Lack of a coherent, clear and legally binding practice that should be applied upon arrival/identification stage and in latter stages. This is linked with further gaps in identification, representation and support of children.
- Lack of a national and coherent procedure of informing the competent public prosecutors and lack of a pre-defined framework of cooperation among the involved, public and private actors involved in the field of children protection.
- Age assessment practices and means used in RICs and police detention facilities with medical examinations of doubtful accuracy prevailing over other methods of assessment foreseeing by the law.
- All the above issues reflect the serious gap in provisions and procedural safeguards for the protection of UASC on the basis of a strategic planning.

### III. JOINT ACTIONS & THE NETWORK'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE MONITORING OF THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

#### A. Joint advocacy actions

There were 3 main joint advocacy actions developed by the Network focusing on:

- **Strengthening access to formal education for unaccompanied and separated children:**  
An assessment examining the levels of access to education for unaccompanied children living in shelters has been carried out. The findings and recommendations of the assessment were shared with the Ministry of Education and were taken into consideration for the planning of the 2017- 18 school year (you can read the assessment in Greek [here](#) and the summary of findings in English [here](#)).
- **Effective promotion of family reunification and relocation procedures that include children:**  
The intervention mainly focused on the delays of the procedures and their impact on children and families. Following an open letter to the Asylum Service and to other competent authorities, a closed meeting was held in June 2017, with the participation of public stakeholders' representatives. In October 2017, another intervention took place, followed by a new letter to competent authorities, bringing up these issues, including the specific case of Germany and the protection of the rights of involved persons, whose cases are seriously delayed. On December 2017, the Greek Asylum Service sent an answering letter, elaborating on the family reunification transfers and the case of Germany as well (more details are available in Greek [here](#))
- **The issue of detention and deprivation of liberty of unaccompanied children and other crucial issues with regard to their protection**  
The feedback and information collected by the members of the Network were taken into consideration in the planning of targeted inspection visits in facilities where unaccompanied children are being detained. Priority has been given to raise awareness to authorities on the bad detention conditions. (more details are available in Greek [here](#) and [here](#)). In September 2017, a working group has been formed within the Network, working on recommendations and requests towards the abolition of detention of unaccompanied children and on the need for strategic planning with regard to their protection. Following to the feedback by the team, the Deputy Ombudsman for Children conducted a report on these issues in January 2018, with the aim to be used as an advocacy tool towards the abolition of children's detention and the protection of their rights.

#### B. The Network's contribution to support the Ombudsman's mechanism for the monitoring of the situation of children on the move

The feedback received by the Network's members has been considered systematically into the operation of the mechanism of the Ombudsman for monitoring the situation of children on the move in Greece. More specifically, the information has been used in:

- Planning of monitoring visits and field interventions in all sites where children on the move are located
- Cooperation and communication with relevant stakeholders
- Developing evidence based recommendations in the framework of specific interventions.

During 2017, the Deputy Ombudsman for Children's Rights and his team carried out 65 monitoring visits throughout Greece in all types of facilities where children on the move were located/accommodated. The Ombudsman also participated in many working meetings with

relevant stakeholders, such as public prosecutors and the Supreme Court, Ministry of Migration Policy, Ministry of Labor, Center for Social Solidarity, Institute of Child's Health, etc. Priority was also given on promoting access to education for children on the move through visits in education facilities and close collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

Throughout the abovementioned actions and interventions, the Deputy Ombudsman for Children's Rights has been aiming in corresponding to the identified needs and the promotion of recommendations on crucial issues with regard to children protection, using as a tool the feedback received from the Network. Within this frame, among other things, an action has been initiated at an accommodation site, with the aim to develop a good practice for tackling problematic issues concerning children protection. This action aimed at the support, supervision and exchange among professionals / stakeholders present in the site, focusing on the prevention and handling of child domestic violence and neglect. This practice could be further established in more accommodation facilities.