

Child Protection Sub-Working Group
24.02.2021 Minutes of Meeting

Date:	Wednesday, 24 February 2021 at 10.00-12.00 a.m., via Webex	
Participants:	UNICEF, Terre des Hommes, IOM, IRC, SOS Children's Villages Greece, MoLSA (Department for Unaccompanied Minors), the Home Project, the Smile of the Child, Faros, Caritas, GCR, MdM, METAdrasi, Juvenile Probation Office of Athens, Elix, Hellenic Red Cross, Arsis, Praksis, NCR, Velos youth	
Chair:	UNHCR: Theodora D. Tsovili (tsovili@unhcr.org)	
Agenda	Alternative Care and de-institutionalization in Greece: the way forward	
	<p>MoLSA</p> <p>The representative of MoLSA, advisor at the Deputy Minister's cabinet, Mrs Serafimidi highlighted their commitment to cooperate and expand the area of foster care and their intention to participate in consultations with relevant actors who have been active in the field and have built experience. Foster care in the law is not implemented yet, however MoLSA has submitted a project proposal for European funding, which includes unaccompanied children, pending confirmation.</p> <p>The Head of the unit for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, MoLSA, Mrs Voula Aroukatou reiterated that the purpose of the Ministry is to link the registry of Greek children in need for foster care with the registry of Unaccompanied Minors in a meaningful way.</p> <p>Deputy Ombudswoman for Children's Rights</p> <p>The Deputy Ombudswoman for Children's Rights stressed the fact that our questions should be carefully separated and consider the technical shortages, the role of each state authority and the needs for complementary services. Foster care exists in Greece since the '90s with no significant progress which poses challenges in its implementation to date. The Ombudswoman stressed that our common efforts should concentrate in the de-institutionalization of care, the protection of unaccompanied children, including emergency care for children removed from their families due to abuse as well as inclusion of children with disabilities. According to the Ombudswoman, professional foster care needs to be expanded taking into account the small number of foster care applicants since the introduction of the new legal framework (4538/18).</p> <p>Small-scale issues raised by the Ombudswoman:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Pending issuance of Ministerial Decision for foster parents to receive the relevant allowance ⇒ Expansion of professional foster care and family-type homes ⇒ Citizens' mobilization through awareness raising incentives 	<p>Action Points: N/A</p>

The Ombudswoman emphasised the importance of the distinction of two institutions i.e foster care and adoption as well as the significance of addressing inhomogeneous practices in several areas such as in the case of local authority investigations of child abuse, best interest assessment processes etc.

The Ombudswoman underlined the need to enhance the role and build a common framework at municipal and regional level and the introduction of a curriculum to adopt common understanding of alternative care. She also argued that staffing, training, supervision, and a uniform framework is required for the transition to community-based care and prevention or institutionalization.

The Ombudswoman evoked the Article 20 of the CRC noting that we should approach children's best interests in an individualized manner when choosing families, not considering only Greek families as potential foster parents.

UNICEF

The representee of UNICEF, Ms Michailidou presented the *Child Guarantee: enhancement of alternative and community-based care for children in Greece* project, implemented by six member states for two-years, which started in August 2020. The focus of the project in Greece is the de-institutionalization and establishment of alternative, community- based care projects. The project is funded by DG Home and aims at tackling child poverty and social exclusion around EU. The pilot project will introduce policy changes and institutional reforms to address these issues.

Target groups of UNICEF's project:

- ⇒ Children in institutional care
- ⇒ Children with disabilities
- ⇒ Children in immigration including unaccompanied children
- ⇒ Children belonging to minority groups

The pillars of the UNICEF project, which will be operationalized in Attica include the following:

- Pillar I: De-institutionalization and enhancement of community-based care
- Pillar II: Support of Community-based care including foster care (deployment of one seconded expert in the MoLSA and launch of awareness raising campaign)
- Pillar III: Supported Independent Living through partners
- Pillar IV: Life skills and preparedness for employment for vulnerable youth
- Pillar V: Inclusive education

- Pillar VI: Evidence -based support to development of national strategies for the elimination of poverty focused on children and efforts for social inclusion

METAdrasi runs the pilot foster care scheme which was established in 2014 under EEA grants and continued in 2016 with UNHCR funds, with the first placement in foster family taking place in 2015. METAdrasi foster care scheme benefited 107 UAC since its establishment in 2015 while 43 UAC in foster care were supported throughout 2020.

METAdrasi President, Ms Papa reiterated that they have established synergies with UK, Belgium, Norway and noted the good practice of the Netherlands to place all UAC below 14yo to foster care. METAdrasi conducts approximately two sessions to prospective foster parents per month.

METAdrasi noted that UAC have various cultural backgrounds, they have experience harsh circumstances in CoO, through transit and often after their arrival in Greece while they might also have different notion of family environment.

METAdrasi noted that approximately 30-45% of UAC in Greece are Family Reunion cases so short-term fostering is recommendable for this category of UAC. As such METAdrasi recommends three types of fostering: long-term, short-term and emergency fostering

METAdrasi intends to work on the gradual inclusion of at least some UAC in the national registry as a pilot.

METAdrasi is concerned that mobilizing families listed in the existing registry might not be feasible – METAdrasi has attempted this in one case that turned out to be really challenging in practice.

METAdrasi added that short- term foster parents listed in METAdrasi’s registry cannot be included in the national registries since short term foster care is not included as a possible solution which creates additional challenges.

According to METAdrasi, short-term fostering is a solution for quick placement of UAC living in precarious conditions, while it also matches the needs of the high percentage of UAC whose FamReun proceedings are pending. METAdrasi expects that the launch of the interim Guardianship scheme will lead to increased caseload for UAC for fostering.

METAdrasi noted that our ultimate aim should be that foster care placements are concluded within a month, passing from relevant evaluations and through the national system.

METAdrasi noted that social workers registered in SKLE (*National Social Workers’ Association in Greece*) can be trained by METAdrasi through seminars. Lastly, Metadrasi stressed the importance to involve municipalities in this scheme.

IOM

IOM presented the “*You care project*” which was just initiated by IOM Belgium, Germany, Greece (through Arsis Thess/niki) and is expected to conclude until 2022.

IOM will be delivering trainings to potential foster parents, targeting mainly migrant communities, as well as professionals in foster care. In Greece the trainings will be conducted by IOM and Arsis Thess/niki targeting prospective foster parents, of immigrant and non-immigrant origin. In addition, a video through the FAB (*Fostering Across Borders*) project and campaign will be launched and a manual which will be translated in Greek and used in the training will be also issued.

MoLSA (Mrs Papadimitriou):

The representative of MoLSA, the Advisor of the Deputy Minister on Foster Care, Ms Papadimitriou welcomed the IOM initiative and expressed their intention to coordinate efforts since the Ministry has also a relevant campaign in the pipeline for March 2021. The representative of MoLSA reiterated that all actors need to align procedures since at the moment there several parallel systems, stakeholders and procedures.

Regarding the applications of prospective foster parents there is a very structured procedure with many layers which probably does not allow foster care placements to be concluded within a month as METAdrasi suggests.

State -wide campaign will be organized by MoLSA in the purpose of clarifying the content of foster care as it differs from adoption and to train potential fosterers while making sure that they are aware of the realities of children’s caseload (e.g. children aged in their majority above 5 years old) and relevant challenges.

The MoLSA is currently working on several actions such as training of professionals who handle applications, information campaign, render the platform user-friendly i.e by expanding the age limits and other relevant actions.

In addition, the Ministry intends issuance of the Ministerial Decision on the expansion of the allocation of benefit for foster parents as set in the Law. The benefit will be monitored by an information system and will be proportionate to number of children in foster care.

UNHCR

UNHCR welcomed the coordination efforts of all actors and stressed the need for the establishment of one harmonized alternative care system in Greece. In this regard, dissemination of information on a more regular basis is very important to ensure complementarity.

The Home Project inquired about a training program on foster care targeting social workers. According to **MoLSA** one cycle of the training for trainers is completed, as a pre-requisite set by the law where trainers from regional level participated.

On the latter, the **Ombudswoman** complemented that they submitted a proposal for a common protocol adopting uniform training curriculum for social workers and highlighted the importance of inter-ministerial and inter- agency coordination in this regard.

DRC noted that girls on the move should be considered in an individualized manner, as well as children with disabilities and other categories of children affected by multiple vulnerabilities.