

Child Protection Sub-Working Group
23.09.2021 Minutes of Meeting

Date:	Thursday, 23 September 2021 at 10.00-12.00 a.m., via Webex	
Participants:	Special Secretary for the Protection of UAMs/ MoMA, MoLSA, EKKA/EMA, EKKA/NRM, UNICEF, WHO, IRC, KMOP, GCR, SOS Children's Villages, Solidarity Now, Caritas Hellas, IOM, DRC, Faros, NCR, ELIX, Terre des Hommes, Safe Passage, Velos Youth Center, ELIL, The Home Project, METAdrasi, Smile of the Child, Iliaktida, ICSD, Equal Rights Beyond Borders, European Expression, EASO/Directorate of RICs/MPRICs, EASO/Directorate of North Greece Facilities, RIS/Directorate of South Facilities, JUVENILE PROBATION OFFICE, Medin	
Chair:	UNHCR: Theodora D. Tsovili (tsovili@unhcr.org)	
Agenda	Current situation of refugee and migrant children in Greece	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Operational updates from islands' RICs and land-borders- UNHCR ➤ Briefing on main developments in mainland, sites/ Safe Zones – IOM – UNHCR ➤ National Emergency response Mechanism for Unaccompanied children in precarious living conditions – Tracing & Protection Experts/SSPUAM ➤ UAC Relocation scheme: updates – SSPUAM representative 	
	<p style="text-align: center;">Operational updates from islands' RICs and land-borders: UNHCR (Evros, Lesvos & Samos)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In Lesvos there are 141 UAC hosted by Iliaktida, 129 in shelters for UAC and 12 in SIL. There are 3,044 beneficiaries on the island out of which 934 are children in families, 506 boys and 428 girls while in the safe area there is only one UAC. ➤ One of the main challenges currently faced is the lack of sufficient space for recreational activities in RIC Mavrovouni despite the high number of actors operating on site. UNHCR is advocating for extra appropriate spaces to be identified. ➤ Mental health situation of children and youngsters is also a challenge, mainly due to the living conditions, the legal limbo that many families are in and the fire in Moria. ➤ The recent cessation of the guardianship programme by METAdrasi left a gap in the legal representation and initial registration with the authorities for new arrivals. The issue was timely raised in the local CPsWG and CP actors identified ad hoc solutions. ➤ A long-standing issue on the island is the age assessment procedures, which were put on hold from January 2021 up to the middle of the year. It was announced by the authorities that from the approximately 70 pending cases, there is 	Action Points:

currently only one decision pending and no newly alleged minors were identified on site. Some of the cases were pending for more than a year.

- **Since the issuance of the Ministerial Decision last year on age assessment procedures**, there are different practices in different locations and not a homogenous approach. UNHCR is monitoring and mapping the situation and the challenges across the country.
- **In Lesbos, the situation has improved** as it has been observed that in the last few new arrivals, the children who declare to be minors during the initial registration are registered as such.
- **In Samos, there are 21 UASC** out of which 10 are unaccompanied children residing in the new multipurpose RIC, in a temporary safe area as of 19 September, 4 are separated and 17 are hosted in METAdrasi's UAC shelter. There are also 121 children in families, 73 boys and 48 girls while the 38% of children are Farsi speaking, 20% speak Lingala, 11% Arabic and Kurmanji. There are 17 families with children and there are in total 622 beneficiaries on the island.
- **There are gaps created in Samos as well after the cessation of the guardianship programme.** In their absence, Praksis, UNHCR's CP partner, currently undertakes the legal cases of UAC. Also, PSS to UAC and young adults.
- **The capacity of the official safe area for UAC in the new RIC, once completed, will have capacity for 200 children**, a separated space for boys and girls and space for recreational activities.
- **Regarding age assessment procedures**, in the arrivals of the past three months, they were not any cases of children who declared to be minors and were not registered as such. In May, there was a considerable backlog however EODY sent a team on mission and addressed all cases. There are currently no pending cases in Samos.
- **The SSPUAM has issued specific guidance on age assessment procedures** that have been disseminated to CP actors.
- **In Evros, the numbers of arrivals and the procedures are different than on the islands.** In the CP front, Arsis is present in the RIC Fylakio on a daily basis, UNHCR, METAdrasi but also GCR and HR360 who are providing services to the newly arrived population with a focus on families and children. UNHCR conducts monitoring in the police facilities around the whole region of Evros.
- **This year the arrivals in the land border are higher** than the ones on the sea and there is a steady number of UAC in the newly arrived. The majority of children are Afghans but also a number of Pakistani and Syrian, Palestinian and in occasions Turkish nationalities.
- **Despite the government's intention to abolish protective custody** which is happening around the country to a great extent, in Evros the situation differs. There are currently 50 UAC in protective custody in RIC Fylakio which is though an improvement from last year where there were more than 100-120 UAC.

Receive permission from SSPUAM to share the age assessment guidelines with the CPsWG participants.

- **Based on the new guidelines for registration** to asylum and RIS procedures, RIS is conducting the full registration. Registrations of children below 15 years old are delayed due to the gap in the presence of the authorized legal representatives. UNHCR is trying to identify interim solutions. The UAC aged 15 to 17, are registered by declaration; however, in a large percentage of the cases, the RIS employees and specifically the medical department is raising doubts as to the declared age and many children are channelled for age assessment procedures. In the case of Fylakio, it could be the same doctor who refers and actually provides the age assessment examination. Although the age assessment procedures delay the stay of the children in the RIC there are no major delays in referrals to the shelters as observed in the past. The children who after age assessment procedures were found to be adults and released from Fylakio are either taken to open facilities or released alone without further assistance. Additionally, there is a number of people, including UAC who cross the area of Evros completely undetected. In these cases, all the appropriate procedures should apply.
- **There are challenges with the accommodation conditions in Fylakio;** the centre has a limited capacity of no more than 300 places and currently beneficiaries and children are being hosted in a mixed way. There are also gaps in the provision of medicaments and increase on the dermatological deceases.
- **UNHCR Greece is closely collaborating with other UNHCR offices,** such as in Turkey and also exit points such as Sofia, Skopje and Tirana to understand the irregular movements through the Balkan routes. The change in the provision of cash assistance in Greece is a factor of movement, however, no huge increase has been observed so far. Additionally, there are many reports of push backs from the Albanian and FYROM authorities including many children who are trying to re-enter. It is likely that many children who are found in the North have possibly experienced high levels of violence.
- **There are plans from the SSPUAM to address the age assessment challenges in Fylakio** which might include a visit of RIC's mobile unit. Regarding the undetected population, many children identified by the NERM are coming from Evros land border and are unregistered/undetected.

Briefing on main developments in mainland, sites/ Safe Zones – IOM – UNHCR

- **IOM is currently under transition as they are undertaking the CP services in 12 sites** where Solidarity Now was the CP actor before. IOM will take over case management with fully deployed schemes. The 12 sites are: Andravida, Kato Milia, Vagiochori, Drama, Kavala, Serres, Thermopyles, Malakasa, Thiva, Oinofyta, Eleonas & Ritsona. They have appointed focal points (one CP and one legal) in each site to receive the cases from SN and are cooperating with case conferences for the high-risk cases. IOM will officially take over from 01 October.
- **There were 11 Safe Zones across Greece under IOM's responsibility.** Thiva & Lagkadikia will be closing by the end of the month. In May the SZ of Skaramagkas closed and end of June Elaionas and Diavata followed. Vagiochoria and Schisto are temporarily operating under the NERM as emergency accommodation. IOM cannot undertake legal representation; they are in discussions to have an implementing partner for that.
- **UNHCR informed the participants that** from June onwards there was an announcement from the government that cash assistance will be given only to those who are accommodated in official state facilities or facilities that cooperate with the Ministry. Consequently, in May and June there was an increased number of beneficiaries who submitted applications for accommodation. 5,000 people were officially referred through NGOs to the Ministry to be officially placed, by mid-July there were 2,500 in the waiting list. The self-accommodated are not eligible for cash anymore. Effort from the Greek authorities to expedite the asylum application decisions. The cash programme is concluding by UNHCR on 30 September. There was a transit and handover period.
- **Due to cessation of cash programme,** UNHCR didn't have the possibility to enroll new people with few exceptions. The MoMA will be taking over from UNHCR from October onwards.
- **Since UNHCR handed over the cash program,** there has been a gap in the provision of cash in SIL apartments. The SSPUAM is trying to solve this issue with the responsible authority of AMIF and EC.

**National Emergency response Mechanism for Unaccompanied children in precarious living conditions –
Tracing & Protection Experts/SSPUAM (see also relevant PPP)**

- **The SSPUAM initiated the operation of the 24/07 tracing line** on the 5th of April 2021 under the National Emergency Response Mechanism. As of the 29th of June 2021, the two safe zones of Schisto in Attica and Vagiochori in Thessaloniki are being used temporarily as emergency accommodation facilities.
- **In the emergency accommodation facilities, the UAMs receive specialized services** and further support until they are transferred to long-term accommodation facilities.

- **From 05/04 to 12/09 the total number of incoming communications has been 907.** The majority of cases are located in the Attika and greater Thessaloniki region.

UAC Relocation scheme: updates – SSPUAM representative

- **As of 23 September, there are 985 relocated children,** at 64.7% completion rate of the process and have 541 remaining UAC to be relocated. SSPUAM is trying to negotiate with EUMSs and partners so that UAC who are still in the pipeline to be proposed and get relocated; it is not something that can be guaranteed as it depends on EUMSs' criteria, preferences, and situation. The EUMSs still open with a small number of slots are France, Portugal, and Bulgaria. It is advised that the colleagues on the field explain to the UAC already included in the programme that there is no guarantee that they will travel as this is a voluntary scheme. SSPUAM will explore how to facilitate the process here in Greece for the UAC that finally will not be relocated.
- **There are SOPs and procedures in place for the voluntary relocation scheme.** SSPUAM is advocating for a more stable mechanism of relocation in the framework of Dublin III regulation, along with the procedure of family reunification, which will be based on specific criteria that cannot be interchangeable and not on EUMSs preferences.
- **No additional BIAs are taking place at the moment** as there is still a large number of minors that have been interviewed and still need to be proposed and matched.
- **1485 BIAs have been conducted out of which 622 by UNHCR and partners.** 89 homeless children were interviewed and 33 have been relocated since the beginning of August.

AoB

- **Since 23 August the interim guardianship programme run by METAdrasi was completed creating a gap.** The responsibility of the guardianship of UAC will pass on from MoL to MoMA and SSPUAM soon. The SSPUAM is working on the amendment of the L.4554, it will be shared for public consultation by the end of the year. Hopefully, from 2022, there will be a flexible, effective and sustainable guardianship system in place in Greece.
- **The creation of the NERM led to a considerable decrease of the number of children in precarious conditions.** It is also worth mentioning that the numbers of children in protective custody are currently extremely low since the establishment of the NERM.