

**13 March 2021**

**Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Greece**  
**39th session of the Working Group on the UPR**

**Defence for Children International – Greece (DCIG)** is the Greek national section of ‘Defence for Children International (DCI)’, an international child-rights movement and non-governmental organization established in 1979 in Geneva. ‘Defence for Children International – Greece’ is committed to securing a just and viable future for all children present on the Greek territory. DCIG aims to ensure through its actions that children’s voices are heard and their rights are fully respected in practice. Since DCIG’s inception in 2016, we are one of the few human rights organizations specifically focused on children’s rights in Greece. Our highest value is the pursuit of each child’s best interests and the enjoyment of their childhood with dignity. To this end, our work is guided by the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as well as other international, regional and local standards. As a national section of Defence for Children International (DCI), we pledge to follow DCI’s mandate to “promote and protect children’s rights in accordance with international standards.” At the same time, DCIG autonomously develops its own programs in response to contextual needs of Greece.

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The major objective of this complementary report is to provide additional information that reflects the actual situation of children on the move in Greece that includes both unaccompanied and separated children and children in families. This report highlights recent issues on Child Rights and Protection as it relates to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and other international human rights instruments.

*‘Refugee children have a very hard life. Their nightmare starts with the smugglers, they do all kinds of tortures to them. They force them to carry drugs, in their stomach or any other way, telling them they will kill their families. When they arrive in Greece, they face terrible conditions. They don’t have food, clothing, or a bed to sleep and rest.’ 15 year old unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan, homeless in Athens*

## Situation Analysis & Children's Rights/Protection Issues

### 1. Reception Conditions:

The situation in the islands: DCIG argues that the Reception and Identification Centres in the Greek islands (Samos, Chios, Kos, Leros and Lesvos) constitute indicative examples of inadequate reception settings for children on the move since they violate numerous minimum standards regarding the rights of children to an adequate standard of living and a dignified life. In the UPR 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle, Austria recommended Greece to: 134.129 *'Ensure adequate reception conditions so that asylum seekers receive support in line with the requirements of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and of European Union law'*<sup>1</sup>. This recommendation was supported by Greece but the RICs and the safe areas where unaccompanied minors are hosted, are overcrowded, without enough personnel, especially with what regards doctors, psychologists and social workers. The systematic failure of meeting the particular needs of these children coupled with their exposition to the existing living conditions in the various Sections of the Camps, aggravates their already unstable psychological state and heightens the risk of triggering additional acts of despair. Moreover, in the RICs there are no distinct places for families. Thus, children in families live with the general population of the camps exposed to multiple dangers, while Finland had provided recommendation 134.145 *'Pay special attention to living conditions of reception facilities and to the needs of vulnerable groups'* which was also supported by the Greek government.

The new camp that was built in Lesvos<sup>2</sup> after the fire in Moria in September 2020 is found to be even worse than Moria. The new camp is extremely exposed to [inclement] weather conditions literally by the sea. The people live in unstable tents who cannot protect them from the rain and the snow. The people have to sleep on the mud that takes over their tents. The food lines are endless and there is not enough food available to cover the needs of all the population. There are also serious safety issues in the camp. There have been incidents of rapes against children as young as seven years old at the area of the toilets. Although the law 4636/2019 and the Ministerial Decision 1140/2019 allows the transfer of unaccompanied and separated minors from the islands in the mainland, this usually does not happen quickly as the capacity in the shelters for UAC in the mainland is really limited. Thus, children have to live for long periods of time in the so called 'Safe Areas' in the islands.<sup>3</sup> Mexico raised this concern in the previous UPR cycle in 2016 when it was recommended: 134.146 *'Continue to reinforce strategies to avoid the prolonged stay of migrants, particularly unaccompanied minors, in centres without the necessary care infrastructure'*.

***'It feels like living in a prison. There is police everywhere around us and no place to go and play with the other children', 10 year old resident of the New Camp in Lesvos island***

***'I don't want my mum to give me a bath because there are so many people around watching me, I feel shy and I don't want to be naked out in public in front of others', 8 year old girl resident of the New Camp in Lesvos island***

The Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) Fylakio in the Greek mainland borders in Evros is different as this is a closed centre and the children living there are deprived of their liberty for long periods of time, even though the law prohibits the detention of minors for registration purposes for

<sup>1</sup>Source of position: A/HRC/33/7 - Para. 134

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/greece-moria-refugees-new-camp-conditions/a-55053895>.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2019/10/5da059144/lone-children-face-insecurity-greek-island.html>.

more than 25 days (art 39 law 4636/2019). As it is sometimes difficult to find a shelter in 25 days, children are usually kept in detention for more than a month although this is forbidden in law. This situation shows that Greece didn't implement recommendation 136.26 '*Prohibit the detention of unaccompanied children in law and end it in practice, and increase shelter capacity for unaccompanied children seeking asylum*' (Belgium)<sup>4</sup>. This recommendation was supported by Greece during the adoption of the previous UPR report.

At the same time, the Greek government has already announced the establishment of closed-controlled reception centres in the Greek islands that were foreseen in the law 4686/2020.<sup>5</sup> Children on the move will have to live in these closed-controlled centres without specific guarantees and adherence to the best interest of the child principle. It is still not known when these centres will start to operate and for how long asylum-seekers will have to stay in these camps. However, it is announced that the reception and identification procedures, but also the asylum border procedures will take place while third country nationals live in these closed-controlled camps.

The situation on the mainland: As the permanent shelters for unaccompanied minors in Greece are really limited and with no capacity, many of the unaccompanied children have to live in inappropriate accommodation sites, which are named 'Safe Zones'. However, these are actually camps, and are not safe at all. Safe zones are designated supervised spaces within temporary open accommodation sites dedicated to unaccompanied children. They should be used as a short-term measure to care for unaccompanied minors in light of the insufficient number of available shelter places, for a maximum of 3 months. However, this is not the case, and safe zones are actually a permanent solution for many of the unaccompanied minors. As they have somewhere to stay, priority is given to other children i.e homeless/or children in detention to be transferred to a shelter. Also, in the camps in the mainland there are not separate sections for families with children. The children in the sites face many difficulties with regards to access to formal education. These camps are usually far away from the cities and the children cannot join any activities. There are some non-formal educational activities taking place in the sites but this is not enough. Moreover, there are many security incidents in the camps and the children are at risk. They do not live in a child-friendly space and they cannot adequately develop their personality. Finally, these camps make it impossible for children to integrate in the Greek society as they are usually far away from the cities and the local population.

Recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection: The law 4636/2019 foresees in its article 114 that the beneficiaries of international protection will have to leave their shelter in 30 days after they receive the positive asylum decision.<sup>6</sup> For unaccompanied children, the 30 days deadline begins once they reach adulthood. There is a program that is run by the International Organisation for Migration, called Helios, that helps beneficiaries of international protection to rent a house. However, this may take long periods of time, it also requires the refugees being in a position to pay the deposit and first rent on their own and thus, many children and families become homeless and sleep rough in the streets or the parks. It has to be added here that recognised refugees may have to wait even 10-12 months to get their travel documents and be able to travel in Europe.

### **Recommendations:**

<sup>4</sup>Source of position: A/HRC/33/7/Add.1

<sup>5</sup><https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/reception-conditions/housing/conditions-reception-facilities/>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.humanrights360.org/joint-letter-about-the-exits-of-recognized-refugees-from-accommodation-and-cash-assistance/>

- urge the Greek State to amend the law 4686/2020 in order to ensure appropriate material reception conditions to beneficiaries of international protection, and thus to not proceed with the establishment of closed-controlled reception centers at the greek borders. Alternatively, to provide reception conditions to all children on the move and their families, when accompanied, compatible with the standards envisaged in the CRC Convention. Implement the recommendations of the United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty (2019)<sup>7</sup> which includes a Chapter on children deprived of liberty for migration-related reasons
- urge the Greek State to transfer the unaccompanied children from the RIC Fylakio (Evros) to appropriate accommodation, as this hotspot is actual detention
- urge the Greek State to proceed to direct staffing and reinforcement of the public health and social support services in the RICs
- urge the Greek State to respect in practice the initial purpose of the Hotspots to function as First Identification Centers and ensure that children reside in them only for a couple of days
- urge the Greek government to transfer the children from the open accommodation sites in the mainland to appropriate shelters for unaccompanied minors
- urge the Greek State to accelerate the procedures for issuing travel documents to beneficiaries of international protection
- urge the Greek State to amend the law 114 of 4636/2019. The law should provide for a longer deadline - than 30 days, to make sure that recognised refugees and beneficiaries of international protection will have enough time to find appropriate accommodation.

## 2. Sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking (including homelessness)

**The latest data proves that, more than 2.000 unaccompanied minors on the move are exposed to homelessness and rough living conditions incompatible with their needs and rights as children.** Due to this predicament they are exposed to serious on-going protection risks such as sexual and labor exploitation, abuse and threats of their life.

DCIG has observed that many unaccompanied minors either have been sexually abused in Athens and in the reception camps, where they used to reside, or that they are continuously harassed and exploited by the criminal gangs that operate in the country. DCIG dealt with numerous cases where the unaccompanied minors were trapped into channels of exploitation from their arrival at the borders of the country and while residing in one of the reception camps. All these cases go unreported because children are too afraid and unsupported to file a complaint to the authorities, since there is no system to protect them as witnesses.

*‘Parks and squares became my home. I was sleeping there for many months. Alone and afraid. One night a man approached me and offered me, house and food. He invited me to his place. I thought he was a nice man...He forced me to have sex with him’* Unaccompanied minor, 15 years old, homeless

<sup>7</sup><https://defenceforchildren.org/children-deprived-of-liberty/>

Additionally, DCIG has encountered many cases of children who have crossed the country through the borders of Evros and who were not registered by the authorities at all. These children make their way to Athens and reside in parks or in shared apartments with strangers to them adults, not knowing how to register to the official Authorities and apply for international protection and access to housing. These hundreds of children are in a limbo situation, invisible by the authorities and exposed to all kinds of dangers and exploitation that homelessness and youth can bring in the absence of a legal guardian provided by the State. In 2016 (UPR 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle), Norway recommended: 134.152 ‘*Establish and adequately resource a well-functioning guardianship and care system for unaccompanied minor refugees or asylum seekers*’ which was supported by Greece. **Despite the fact that the Guardianship legislation was adopted in 2018, it is yet not implemented in practice and the unaccompanied minors do not have a legal guardian provided by the Greek State. In absence of guardianship, the Prosecutor of minors or the prosecutor of first instance acts as a temporary guardian of the children.**

The main cause of the sexual exploitation of children on the move are the failure of the official child protection and welfare system to act as a safety net for these children, the prolonged exposure to inhumane living conditions and a protracted and overly burdensome path to obtain legal status. In addition to the above mentioned factors children on the move who find themselves trapped into oppressive and apparently endless temporary situations might become desperate for exit strategies. Securing the funding to pay smugglers presents itself as a promising way to address this otherwise untenable situation as a result of an ineffective official child protection system. However, as time passes, children who get engaged in the sex trade without the hope of collecting enough money to leave Greece, but simply to survive. This kind of exploitation can also make children more vulnerable to self-harming behaviors, including alcohol and drug abuse or trade.

*‘Older men take advantage of the vulnerable children, forcing them to have sex. They take naked pictures of them, in order to blackmail. It’s hard to escape. They will come and find you. No money for food, children have forced sex with men for a few coins. It’s hell.’* 16 years old unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan, homeless in Athens

Sexual exploitation of children is illegal in Greece. Greece is a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, which requires member states to criminalize transactional sex with children, in humanitarian settings.

At the same time, there is an urgent need to step up efforts to identify children victims of trafficking and exploitation, especially children, as it was recommended by the Republic of Moldova in: 134.85 ‘*Take necessary measures to strengthen identification, rehabilitation and social integration of victims of trafficking in human beings, including by providing them with shelter and assistance*’ (Supported)<sup>8</sup>. Without being identified, these children are not given access to the rights and services they are entitled to according to national, European and international law. Children are trafficked from origin countries, through transit countries and within the destination countries without being detected. For this reason, particular attention should be paid in providing proper training in child protection field to police and migration authorities, in order to conduct the interview in the best interest of the child.

<sup>8</sup>Source of position: A/HRC/33/7 - Para. 134

There is also a lack of access to free legal assistance for children which creates a barrier to effective access to justice. Children do not have enough information about their rights and how to effectively exercise them. There is also an absence of complaint mechanisms accessible for children. This leads to serious violations of the rights of the child in accordance to national and international standards. Counseling regarding the legal and administrative processes for migrant and trafficked children is vital, in addition to psycho-social support and protection for child victims throughout the legal process. Child victims often hesitate to testify and fear involvement in judicial proceedings against their abuser due to lack of protection and support.

### **Recommendations:**

- **urge the Greek State to adopt measures to prevent homelessness and create new appropriate shelters for children on the move**
- **urge the National Centre for Social Solidarity to implement the Guardianship Legislation that was adopted in 2018 and ensure that for all unaccompanied minors a guardian will be appointed**
- **urge the Greek State to adopt measures to prevent and respond effectively to child sexual exploitation and trafficking; to create a database of child victims of sexual exploitation**
- **urge the Greek State to develop a protective framework in law and practice for children victims of sexual abuse and/or exploitation and trafficking**
- **invite the Greek State to establish appropriate protection channels for children that have been victims of sexual abuse and/or exploitation and trafficking with a special focus on the creation of an emergency response procedure and the creation of a safe space for the child to resort and find protection immediately after reporting the incident of violence**
- **invite the Greek State to establish special rehabilitation programs for children exposed to sexual abuse and/or exploitation and trafficking**
- **urge the Greek State to implement the N4478/2017 Law that establishes the so-called ‘Homes of the Child’ providing for a child friendly forensic interview for children victims of sexual exploitation and abuse**
- **Migrant children, especially unaccompanied and separated children, must be identified and registered as children and automatically referred to child protection systems on arrival**
- **urge Greece to put in place dedicated and standardized procedures for the identification of indicators of young migrants’ vulnerabilities, including to trafficking and exploitation must be in place. Such procedures need to clearly identify the responsibilities and actions of all actors involved, both within the official child protection sector, as well as the civil society sector**
- **urge Greece to ensure that identification procedures are child-friendly and proactive and take into account age, gender, maturity and the best interest of the child as a primary consideration, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In case of doubt when a child has no identification documents to prove his/her age, a child-sensitive age assessment procedure must be carried out. Until the age assessment is finalized, the person concerned should be considered a child and receive full protection by childcare authorities**

- invite Greece to ensure protection proportionate with the risks that victims of trafficking face in regard to possible repercussions to them and/or their families from organized criminal groups;
- urge Greece to ensure that victims of trafficking are given information about their rights in accordance with international and national obligations and facilitate their access to justice and remedies, including by providing independent legal support
- invite Greece to prioritise funding on developing and implementing an Action Plan to combat child trafficking and exploitation. Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.

### 3. Asylum & Family Reunification

#### Asylum

First Instance: In practice, there are significant delays regarding the conduct of the asylum interviews. For instance, children that were registered and applied for international protection throughout 2020, have their interviews scheduled for 2022 or 2023. Moreover, the state does not fund free legal aid at first degree. That means that children who are not supported by an NGO are not legally represented in their asylum interview. Unfortunately, due to the high number of cases and the lack of staff, case workers that conduct the asylum interviews do not always have sufficient time to prepare the child and speak with her/him before the hearing in a child friendly space/environment so as to reduce their anxiety and to build a relationship of trust.

At the second instance, the deadlines to apply for an appeal are very tight. Specifically, it is only 5 days for those in the islands and 30 for the applicants in the mainland. This automatically means that many applicants lose their right to appeal. In the second instance, there are also huge delays for the final decision of the Appeals authority.

In general, there is a difficulty in registering the asylum application to the Asylum Service. The unregistered children do not have access to socio-legal support and thus, they find it difficult to access the asylum procedure. They stay out of the child protection system and sometimes there are prolonged periods of time that they cannot get registered and once they are registered, they have reached majority, losing all the privileges they would have as children.

**Finally, there is a great need for granting residence permits on ‘Humanitarian grounds’ such as integration level, education plan, school, mental health, serious health problems etc. (in case of rejecting decision where children remain without official papers and there is the danger to be deported once they reach adulthood)**

#### Family Reunification

The procedures and requirements are very strict in state practice in terms of required criteria refugee children need to fulfill in order to be reunified with their families, hampering the possibilities for family reunification, which would provide children with more stability and motivation. Moreover, the family reunification procedure usually takes a lot of time, even a full year due to bureaucratic barriers and delays in the communication between the states. It has to be noted here, that even in cases of positive decisions, the transfer of the minors in Europe may delay due to bureaucratic barriers and the late issuing of the air tickets, and this may result in the loss of the deadlines to reach the destination country foreseen in the Dublin III Regulation.

*‘All I want is to see my brother again! When I crossed the borders nobody informed me about what I should do and where to go. Later at the asylum Office they informed me about the procedure and all the documents I must gather but I did not have support at all and I missed the deadline. Now they tell me that I should apply for asylum in Greece and wait for the decision. My interview will take place in two years. I can’t wait anymore. I am tired.’ Unaccompanied minor, 16 years old from Syria*

### Recommendations:

- urge the Greek government to safeguard the legal guarantees during the asylum and the family reunification procedures
- provide and ensure free access to a trained legal representative to support the young refugee and asylum seekers during the asylum process (including during the first degree) and administrative procedures
- invite the Greek state to ensure access of children to the asylum procedures, through facilitating the registration process. Unregistered children remain invisible in the child protection system, and thus, their registration from the Asylum Service is indispensable.
- urge the Greek state to amend the law 4636/2019 as per the deadlines to submit an appeal as - especially in the islands, the deadline is very tight
- urge the Greek state to establish legal referral paths and develop a focal socio/legal case management Agency for unaccompanied and separated children
- comply with international standards in relation to providing legal residence based on humanitarian grounds and respect the *non-refoulement* principle also in cases of youth who have reached majority
- invite the Greek state to train all employees in the Asylum Service and the Dublin Unit, especially those that handle cases of unaccompanied minors
- Speed up the family reunification procedures and eliminate the bureaucratic obstacles to ensure that children will be reunified with their families in Europe
- invite the Greek State to ensure the issuance of air tickets swiftly so that children do not lose their right to travel and be reunified with their families

### 4. Age Assessment Procedure

The age assessment procedure per se is not complying with the international standards on child protection. Specifically, in Greece based on the new Ministerial Decision 9889/2020, the age assessment procedure initiates with the assessment of the biometric characteristics such as the height or the weight of the minor. In the sole case that there is still a justified doubt as per the age of the minor, the minor will be referred to the Psychosocial Unit for an assessment of psychologists and social workers. However, following our visit in Lesvos we noticed that currently there is no social worker in the RIC and only one Psychologist from EODY (Nation centre for health). This means that there is a common practice that no alleged child should be referred to this second stage of age assessment and a final determination should be made at the first stage from the medical unit, that means from a sole doctor even if he is not a children’s doctor (biometric characteristics). The same happens with the children that are not living in the RICs but outside, that are referred to Public hospitals. In the hospitals, the doctor assesses solely the biometric characteristics of the alleged minors and there is no assessment from a psychologist or a social worker. This has as a result that for most of the cases referred to an age assessment procedure, the result is that they are adults. The



psychosocial assessment from trained psychologists and social workers in these procedures is essential.

### Recommendations:

- Minimum standards are needed to ensure that the age assessment procedure respects children’s rights and in order to provide appropriate safeguards to the individuals whose age is being disputed, prior to and throughout the entire process. Age determination is an important issue as the process may turn out to be detrimental to the wellbeing and development of a child, as it will impact on their reception conditions and access to education and accommodation, and may cause a premature transition to adulthood.
- The benefit of the doubt principle must be applied through age assessment procedures which must treat the person as a child at all times
- Greece should uphold the principle of non-discrimination in referral to age assessment and during procedures
- A guardian or representative should be appointed in all cases
- Urge the Greek state in Medical procedures to fully respect the individual’s dignity, to ensure that it will be the least invasive procedure possible, and respect cultural sensitivity
- urge the Greek state to implement a holistic and multidisciplinary approach on age assessment, such as to always refer the asylum-seeker to both medical and no-medical examinations such as Psychologists and social workers and make both examinations compulsory
- invite the Greek state to implement this procedure always in accordance with the best interest of the child

### 5. Non-discrimination: education, health and social services

#### Access to health

DCIG has witnessed many cases of unaccompanied children who are not issued PAAYPE number (the new social security number that was established with the MD 717/2020) due to bureaucratic obstacles and dysfunctions in the system that issues this number, or because the children remain unregistered and excluded from free access to medical and pharmaceutical assistance and healthcare. DCIG is deeply concerned about this situation and the failure of the government to ensure that all children have access in the public health system. Without this number, thousands of children will stay out of the Greek healthcare and pharmaceutical assistance. Despite the fact that some doctors and health workers tried to help by providing health assistance to children - even without PAAYPE, the situation is alarming because even in these cases, children would not be able to access medication free of cost.

Finally, in the hotspots on the Greek islands, access to health remains particularly restricted due to lack of staff, coupled with persisting overcrowding. As noted by UNHCR, “across the islands and on some camps in the mainland the low number of staff under the Ministry of Health, in particular doctors and cultural mediators, is not sufficient to help refugees with medical and psychosocial needs”.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR, Factsheet: Greece, January 2019.

### **Mental health**

The living conditions in the hotspots traumatize even more children and give them little or no hope for healing. A well illustrated example is this of Ayesha. Ayesha is a 9-year-old girl who lives in Moria Camp and for two weeks now she has not opened her eyes, walked or spoke to anyone. She has what the mental health team believes could be one of the first cases of resignation syndrome. Ayesha's state embodies what can happen when a child loses all hope. Children that have experienced conflict and war and are led to these kinds of camps, get more traumatized and lose all hope. Resignation syndrome represents a state of extreme withdrawal that can last for months or even years and occurs in the context of severe psychological trauma.<sup>10</sup>

Mental health support is necessary, however it has been witnessed that this is not adequate. In the hotspots there is only one psychologist from EODY (the National Health Centre) that cannot provide support to all the children. Some NGOs are there to provide psychological assistance to children but still this is not enough.

On the mainland, the situation is the same. There is no provision of mental healthcare and the gap is covered by the willingness of NGOs. The limited public mental health institutions in Greece are also a particular concern.

Children on the move have encountered massive human rights violations and arrive in Greece with a trauma that becomes deeper during their presence in Greece. There is a complete lack of a rehabilitation service system in place to heal their trauma and empower them to reach their fullest potential.

### **Access to education**

Despite the fact that in the law it is enshrined that children on the move have access to education (see art. 14 Reception Conditions Directive and art.53 law 4636/2019), in practice, children at both primary and secondary level of schooling face difficulties with access to education, due to language barriers, previous education levels, bureaucracy, lack of permanent home address, the structure they live is far away from the schools, discrimination and particularly if they are over the age for compulsory education (above 18). On the issue of hate speech, Norway recommended 134.22 'Undertake further initiatives to address hate speech directed against members of vulnerable groups, and ensure sufficient focus on this topic in the education system' (Supported), however violations are rising.

*'When I started school in Athens my life had a meaning again. I used to study many hours per day and I was in the first ones in class. Then the Government decided to find me a new shelter in the greek countryside where there was no school for me to attend there. I am desperate. I attempted to commit suicide last year.'* Bamba, 16 years old from Somalia

Access to education is highly problematic also for children living on the Greek islands, as they do not have access to formal education because supposedly they will be soon transferred to the mainland. They can only access informal education that NGOs provide. Many actors have urged the Government to allow access of children to education even on the islands as children have to stay in

<sup>10</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/06/moria-refugee-camp-lesbos-traumatized-children>

the hotspots for prolonged periods that can reach up to a year.

*‘ I have food but I also want to go to school and study. I want to have a better life in future, to follow my dreams and become a doctor so I can help other people’, Amila 15 years old from Afghanistan*

### **Inclusion-integration**

After reaching majority, young people have little or no financial support and limited access to employment. They need to move out of reception facilities and become self-reliant, often ending up working irregularly in poor conditions, with low and unsustainable income. Employment would be a facilitating factor in their transition to autonomy, yet even refugees who are entitled to work face difficulties with access to the labour market. Those who may have previous education or training in their home countries often find it difficult to have these qualifications recognised, and the lack of documents prevents them from finding employment in their field.

### **Recommendations**

- **urge the Greek State to immediately adopt measures to ensure free access of children (despite their legal status) in medical and pharmaceutical care, including mental healthcare, in line with national legislation and Greece’s obligations under EU and international law**
- **invite the Greek State to set up rehabilitation programmes explicitly designed for trauma recovery of children on the move**
- **urge the Greek State to ensure that all children have access to education and the Greek public school regardless of their documentation**
- **urge the Greek State to develop a short and long term action plan aiming to integrate the children on the move and young refugee adults**
- **urge the Greek State to enhance the multicultural dimension on the existing educational programmes run in the country**
- **ensure access of young refugee adults to internships/training to develop new skills, support from job counsellors to identify employment opportunities, short-term volunteer projects, and mentorship. Existing qualifications should be assessed and recognised in order to facilitate young people’s entry into the labour market.**

Sincerely on behalf of Defence for Children International-Greece,

Nantina Tsekeri

Vasiliki Apatzidou

Founder & CEO

Legal Expert

