

**Defending and safeguarding
the rights of children on the move
in Greece**

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Competence and actions of the Greek Ombudsman

The G.O. has **access** to all sites, shelters and detention centres and has authority to investigate cases after submission of complaints or on his own initiative, acting also as OPCAT N.P.M.

The G.O. has also a mission to defend and promote **children's rights**.

Since July 2016 the G.O. agreed with UNICEF to collaborate in order to strengthen a **monitoring mechanism** on the situation of the rights of children on the move.

During 2016 the G.O. conducted more than **40 site visits** in reception centers, camps and shelters where children on the move live.

We held regular meetings and exchanged information with all

Public interventions of the G.O.

The Ombudsman has written and publicized letters to the competent ministries and issued press releases on the need:

- to **safeguard all the rights** of the children on the move
- to avoid **deprivation of liberty** of UAC
- to adopt and implement legislation on **guardianship**
- to improve the **child protection** system
- to secure **access to education** to all children
- to establish **standards in shelters**
- to put pressure on the international community for the implementation of the agreement on **relocation**

Figures

Currently in Greece (end October 2016) rough estimates:

Total number of children on the move: **24.500**

(around 40% of the total population of **61.000**)

Children in school age: around 17-18.000

Children in first reception centers in the islands: 6.000

Children in (44) camps in the mainland: 10.500

Children in UNHCR hostels and flats: 5.000 + ↑

Children in other flats – occupied buildings: 2.000 + ↓

Unaccompanied children in (44) shelters: 1.000 +

-1.400 in waiting lists, living in camps or elsewhere-

UAC relocated since Nov 2015: **96** out of **4.700** total

Major challenges

To:

- Improve **living conditions** (especially in some camps)
- Provide proper access to **health** care services incl. vaccinations
- Protect children from **violence + exploitation**
- Secure safe accommodation / representation / guardianship to all **unaccompanied children**. Avoid detention
- Secure **timely** examination of applications for **international protection** (asylum, relocation, family reunification).
- Provide **information** on legal issues, services and rights
- **Guarantee access of all children to education**
- Facilitate **participation** of children in social life

Concerns and uncertainty...

- Persons trapped in the islands (15.500) are faced with possible **return** to Turkey
- The procedures of application for international protection are slow. People become nervous and do not trust the authorities
- Rumors are spread about still **illegal paths** to NW EU countries
+ Strong presence of smugglers (especially for UAC)
- Some youth, with limited prospects to access international protection, become involved in **deviant activities**
- Parents who permanently reside in Greece, **react** regarding possible threats to their children's health and security, if they meet and mix with refugee children in their schools

Access to education

- Informal English, German and mother-language lessons offered by ngos and volunteers in camps and shelters in **makeshift “schools”**
- Access to public **morning schools** is allowed for children living in hotels, flats and houses in the cities. Reception classes are formed in selected schools.
- Operation of **evening schools** (2-6 pm) is being organized for children living in camps, with the possibility of some of them to move to morning schools, depending on their progress (so far around 1.000 kids attend evening classes)
- **Nurseries** are being prepared to operate **in the camps**, for children aged under 6

Some questions for the next day

What happens to families who will not be given the chance to go to other EU countries? Will they be spread and integrate in society or will they concentrate in particular areas and live in **ghettos**?

How quickly will the Greek society and permanently living parents overcome their fears and **prejudices** regarding the co-existence of their children with those coming from third (muslim) countries?

Could the more permanent presence of refugee children and their families in Greece help towards the strengthening of the **child protection mechanism** for all children living in the

Children on the move need **normality, creativity, inspiration** and **positive relations** with the surrounding social environment, to overcome their painful experiences. They deserve to find these in their schools, either in Greece or in any other country they will end up to go.

