



Power2UAMs

Local report:

Athens



**GREEK
COUNCIL
FOR
REFUGEES**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present report was prepared by the Greek Council for Refugees within the framework of the POWER2UAMs project. The main objective of the report is to explore the obstacles unaccompanied minors (UAMs) face in accessing services at the local level, identifying unmet needs and gaps in the service provision system, and the impact of these deficiencies on their smooth integration in the community and enjoyment of rights.

The research combines desk research, service and stakeholders mapping, interviews with 10 UAMs and 11 stakeholders from key organisations in the city of Athens including among others social workers, psychologists, educators, shelter and project coordinators, guardians, lawyers, and municipal officers.

Throughout the desk research which constitutes the first part of the present report we are attempting to register some broader information about the institutional –national and local System of service provision to UAMs. We focus on the mapping of Athens service channels and attempt to sketch a realistic image of the way this system works in the city. At the same time, we explore the main gaps and malfunctions which lie within.

In the second part, we present the findings of the interviews conducted with unaccompanied minors and stakeholders in two separated subchapters. We present the answers of UAMs interviewed analyzing the findings on the topics of provided services in Athens and the assessment of them through children's eyes, their interaction with law enforcement and border police, their experiences on discrimination, violence, housing and homelessness. The children's voices were revealing and authentic sketching out the obstacles to their inclusion and integration into the community.

Stakeholders' opinions and insights provided us information on the topics of the identification of UAMs main challenges, the institutional and policy challenges in the service provision for UAMs, the good practices in the social care of them and their insights on discrimination and violence experiences of the children. Stakeholders from their part assessed also the adequacy of services for UAMs in Athens and shared their opinions on minors' interaction with police.

Main findings conclude that Athens municipal authorities having decisive capacity only at a local level, have only a limited role to play in securing children's rights, the protective authority and child protection system being under the responsibility of central government, seeming to lack a comprehensive integration strategy for children.

Despite positive legal developments, challenges persist over the years in the same areas of protection. (Limited accommodation capacity, detention, systemic barriers to education, challenges in the guardianship institution).

National legislation does not include supportive provisions for persons reaching adulthood. Protection and socioeconomic support is withdrawn immediately. Lacking any transitional arrangements for young adults (i.e exit shelter strategy, transitional housing, material or other support) minors reaching adulthood face housing insecurity and a risk of socio-economic marginalization, despite early protective interventions within the shelter system.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Common experiences of unaccompanied minors sheltered in Athens appear to be among others persistent social and interpersonal discrimination in the community, hostility and intimidation by police authorities, a lack of adequate inter cultural mediator support throughout public local services, (schools, hospitals, youth centres,) anxiety for future employability and living conditions.

In contrast to a general experience of institutional neglect, bureaucracy and complexity of procedures - at the national and local level - civil society professionals effectively provide all the support and services required.

In light of the above the research concludes with recommendation to strengthen local coordination and institutional clarity, - ensure inclusive access to education and employment pathways pursuant to wishes and preferences of the child, - simplify administrative procedures and accessibility of services, - promote participation and empowerment mechanisms - foster community awareness and social cohesion, - secure state accountability for child rights violations from authorities, - extend protection and socioeconomic, vocational and psychosocial support to young adults (18+) to promote autonomy

INTRODUCTION OF THE LOCAL REPORT

The POWER2UAMs project aims to ensure equal access, participation, and voice for unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in the asylum system and in transit, in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The project begins local-level research to identify the unmet needs of UAMs and to assess local social policies and services in Athens, Piraeus, Brussels, Gent, Liège, and Calais, through the work of partners in Greece (GCR), Belgium (NADOE and Caritas Belgium), and France (ECPAT).

The research methodology includes desk research, literature review, stakeholder mapping, and interviews with UAMs and stakeholders. The research is coordinated by TARKI Social Research Institute, including the development of the research methodology, overseeing local reports, and elaborating a synthesis report based on the findings of the local reports.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology includes desk research consisting of the review of available legislation, statistical information and inputs at local, regional and national level indicative academic, policy and project. publications and reports of International and European human rights bodies, Independent Authorities, (i.e Greek Ombudsman) national and international Non-Governmental Organisations. The jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights concerning Greece child rights protection issues was also reviewed .^[1]

The present desk research though not exhaustive is thorough, precise and attempts to comprehensively map the institutional and services landscape in the city of Athens, indicating well or not well-functioning services and gaps in the establishment of UAM's rights in the municipality^[2].

For the second part of the present local report^[3] a mixed method approach was applied combining quantitative (questionnaire survey) and qualitative (interview) research methods. Every minor was interviewed in a face-to-face, child-friendly manner, with parallel interpretation in the minor's spoken language. The written consent of the children's guardians was obtained prior to the interview after thorough information about the aim of the interviews and our project. Consent was refused the recording of the interviews and thus a written copy of the questionnaire was provided. No harm policy was applied; the interviews were conducted upon the principle of non-re-traumatization and confidentiality.

Stakeholders interviews were conducted in a written form (questionnaire answered in writing by professionals) after their wish to proceed in the particular manner since their work schedule did not allow for an appointment and preferred to respond on their own time, remaining in direct communication with the interviewer for clarifications and additional comments. The questionnaires provided were modified to fit into a written interview, giving them the ability to share their opinions and elaborate on their insights in a direct and extensive manner.

[1] See citation in the relevant chapter

[2] See Annexes, Table 2.

[3] Chapter 5. & 6

4. DESK RESEARCH

4.1 Admission Procedures of an Unaccompanied Minor into the System-Institutional channel mapping

General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection (GSVP) established with article 6(1) of P.D. 77/2023 (A' 130/ 27.6.2023) and falling under the competency of the Deputy Minister of Migration and Asylum^[4] is the competent authority for all matters concerning unaccompanied minors in the country. Its strategic objective is the design, implementation, and supervision of the National Strategy for the protection of unaccompanied minors. Its responsibilities regarding unaccompanied minors include the following:

- Management of accommodation and relocation requests for unaccompanied minors.
- Supervision and evaluation of shelters and supervised apartments.
- Issues of social integration and support of unaccompanied minors in the search for family members and family reunification, integration in the country, voluntary repatriation, and relocation to a third country, in cooperation with the competent authorities, international organizations, and certified non-governmental entities within and outside Greece.
- Institutional protection of unaccompanied minors.

The National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM)[5], initially designed by the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors (now the General Secretariat for Vulnerable Citizens and Institutional Protection) and UNHCR in 2020, was implemented in Greece in 2021 and institutionalized in 2022[6]. Its primary goal is to identify and provide immediate housing in emergency accommodation structures for unaccompanied minors living in homelessness or precarious conditions. NERM is dedicated to the protection and integration of unaccompanied minors in Greece and has recently expanded its services to vulnerable adults[7]. The goals of NERM are a) accommodation and relocation management, b) evaluation of hosting facilities, c) social integration support, and d) institutional protection.^[8]

[4]MoMA, General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons & Institutional Protection, available at: <https://migration.gov.gr/en/grammateies/geniki-grammateia-evaloton-politon-kai-thesmikis-prostasias/>

[5] Interreg Europe, National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) in Greece, 16 November 2023.

[6]NERM is supported by UNHCR (expert support), EUAA, IOM and the European Commission Its operation on the ground is carried out through NGOs Arsis, METAdrasi and the Network for Children's Rights.

[7]The Mechanism also includes a 24/7 telephone hotline for identifying and tracing children in need, which is available in six languages. The hotline provides guidance to children, citizens, local and public authorities on steps and actions to be taken from the point of identification of an unaccompanied child until their timely inclusion in emergency accommodation

[8]See European Commission: Greece: National Emergency Response Mechanism | European Website on Integration, also, UNHCR, Greece launches national tracing and protection mechanism for unaccompanied children in precarious conditions, 6 April 2021

4. DESK RESEARCH

When an unaccompanied minor enters Greece, the General Secretariat for Vulnerable Citizens & Institutional Protection of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, as well as the competent Public Prosecutor, are immediately notified by authorities locating the child (which might be i.e Border Police officers, Reception and Identification Services, or the Asylum Service) so that a guardian will be appointed). During the initial registration at the Reception and Identification Service (R.I.S.), when the minor declares his/her age, a medical, psychological, and social assessment is carried out. If there is doubt about the age, an official age assessment procedure is initiated. This procedure is carried out by the Reception and Identification Centres (R.I.C.) and the Closed Controlled Access Centers (C.C.A.C.s) existing in the country. Specifically, in Greece, there are the C.C.A.S. of Leros, Kos, Lesbos, Chios and Samos; the R.I.C. of Fylakio, Malakasa, and Diavata.

In the R.I.C.s and C.C.A.S.s, unaccompanied minors are accommodated in designated areas called “safe zones.” Subsequently, unaccompanied minors are transferred in reception facilities (shelters for minors) in the mainland and are further on referred to the competent Asylum Office (Regional Asylum Offices (R.A.O) or Independent Asylum Unit) .

4.1.1 developments ON AGE ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

In August 2025, the procedure was reformed by the Joint Ministerial Decision 147627/22-8-2025 by the Ministries of Migration & Asylum and Health. The JMD establishes a streamlined process for determining the age of applicants of international protection when doubts arise regarding their age. Competent authorities—including the Reception and Identification Service, the Asylum Service, and child protection agencies—initiate the procedure. It is conducted in a single session including a medical examination of physical development, a psychosocial assessment by a qualified specialist, and a wrist/hand X-ray for bone age estimation. In case of conflicting results, radiological findings prevail. Written consent from the individual or their guardian is mandatory; refusal results in a presumption of adulthood without affecting the asylum claim. The process requires all steps to be completed within the same day. With a joint letter to the Minister of Migration and Asylum in October 2025, 25 organizations expressed serious concerns that the new Ministerial Decision (JMD) violates fundamental safeguards as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, EU law, and the European Convention on Human Rights. They point out that the procedure should prioritize non-medical methods as mandated by Regulation (EU) 2024/1348^[9].

[9] Giving decisive weight to X-rays is considered scientifically questionable and raises ethical issues, while creating a rebuttable presumption of adulthood in cases of refusal to undergo examination conflicts with the principle of the child’s best interests. The organizations highlight also practical and procedural shortcomings: the requirement to complete the process “once and on the same day” is unrealistic; the number of actors authorized to initiate the procedure is reduced; there is no clear mechanism to correct erroneous registrations; and the deadline for appeals is shortened from 15 to just 5 days, making it impossible to secure legal assistance or appoint a guardian. Combined with additional bureaucratic requirements, these changes create a serious risk that minors will be registered as adults, undermining their protection and the presumption of minority.

4. DESK RESEARCH

4.1.2 available accommodation options for unaccompanied minors

Although national legislation strives to keep up with international child protection standards, in practice, despite legal provisions for a “family like” environment in foster care[10], relevant legislation remains unimplemented[11] Unaccompanied minors can only be housed in the following accommodation schemes:

Shelters for unaccompanied children: long-term accommodation facilities for unaccompanied children (shelters) are managed primarily by civil society entities, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and charities. A variety of services are provided for in shelters i.e legal and social support, referrals to other required services, medical, educational, with the collaboration of the appointed guardian.

Supported Independent Living (SIL): “Supported Independent Living for unaccompanied minors” is an alternative housing arrangement for unaccompanied children aged 16 to 18 launched in 2018. The programme includes housing and a series of services (education, health etc.) and aims to enable the smooth coming of age and integration to Greek society.^[12]

Emergency Accommodation Facilities: Emergency accommodation facilities are temporary accommodation places for unaccompanied children who are traced living homeless or in precarious living conditions, operating under the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) and run by International Organization for Migration (IOM). The Emergency Accommodation Facilities provide an immediate assessment of the best interest of UAMs and initial protection, including the provision of psychosocial, legal and medical support and the referral to long-term accommodation shelters^[13]. Three emergency accommodation facilities are operating in Attica (Piraeus, Aspropyrgos and Chalandri) close to but outside of the municipality of Athens.[14]:

[10] Law 4538/16.05.2018, Measures for the promotion of the Institutions of Fostering and Adoption and other measures (Gazette A’85/16.05.2018)

[11] Foster Care (and Guardianship) have met repeated legislation reforms over the years in Greece and still remain a challenging area affecting unaccompanied minors and children of Greek nationality equally.

^[12] Metadrasi, Supported Independent Living for unaccompanied minors, available at: <https://bit.ly/2tPEIjy>.

[13] MoMA / Special Secretariat for the Protection of UAMs, National Emergency Response Mechanism. A safety net for unaccompanied children identified in precarious living conditions, November 2022, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/2msh79hc>.

[14] The fourth is located in Central Macedonia.

4. DESK RESEARCH

As of 1 January 2025, at least 2.408 unaccompanied and separated children in Greece should have been placed in 1775 dedicated accommodation places in shelters and Semi-Independent Living (SILs) facilities, plus 155 places in urgent accommodation facilities.^[15] This indicates that in a total of 1930 available positions for minors in proper accommodation facilities, 478 minors remain automatically **out of the system of proper and safe accommodation**. Indeed, from the abovementioned estimated population, 1434 unaccompanied children were residing in Shelters, 215 in Semi Independent Living facilities (SILs) and 129 in urgent accommodation facilities. At the same time, there were a total of **448 unaccompanied minors residing in Reception and Identification Centres and Closed Controlled Access Centres of islands**, while **other 182 unaccompanied minors were in Controlled Accommodation Facilities for Asylum Seekers, having not received yet the proper reception treatment**. That indicates that 152 minors could be located in proper accommodation, but they were not timely placed; in contrast they were kept residing in improper conditions. In December 2024, the average waiting time for the placement of unaccompanied minors residing in island RICs to suitable accommodation places for UAMs was 8,88 days. Lastly, the average time for the placement of UAM in a shelter was 13.45 days.

^[15] MoMA / General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons & Institutional Protection, Situation Update Unaccompanied Children (UAC) in Greece, 1 January 2025.

DESK RESEARCH

4.1.3 Remaining at Reception Centres Before placement and transfer to long term accommodation facilities (shelters)

The survey identified several minors now residing in Athens, who referred in their interviews in the period they spent in the reception centres of Greek islands or safe zones before their placement in long term accommodation shelters as particularly traumatizing

The lack of appropriate care, failure to secure adequate conditions and protection for children, including access to basic services like proper accommodation, has been repeatedly raised over the years by NGOs[16], the Greek Ombudsman, domestic, UN and EU human rights bodies[17] the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights.^[18] Nonetheless, inadequate and harmful reception conditions persist, among others living conditions for minors in “Safe Zone” designated areas in camps[19], inadequacy of existing sheltering facilities and limited accommodation capacity.[20]

[16] “Children Cast Adrift. the exclusion and exploitation of Unaccompanied Minors (UAMs) , National Report : Greece” Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, HIAS Greece, Greek Council for Refugees and Steps (2019) https://rosalux.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/national_greece_en_final_1211web.pdf

“It does not feel like real life”: Children’s everyday life in Greek refugee camps” Greek Council for Refugees and Save the Children Europe – October 2024 <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Children-in-Greek-refugee-camp-report-online.pdf>

[17] Indicatively see: UNHCR, Lone children face insecurity on the Greek islands, 14 October 2019. In 2019, in the context of his visit to the Lesvos, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees stated he was ‘very worried about children, especially children travelling alone...[who] are the most exposed to violence and exploitation’, while Human Rights Watch inter alia noted that “the lack of prompt transfers [from the islands] put vulnerable people, including people with invisible disabilities and children, at higher risk of abuse and violation of their rights”, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined fourth to sixth reports of Greece, 28 June 2022, , and UN Human Rights Office, Council of Europe, New complaint registered concerning Greece, 21 December 2018. European Committee of Social Rights, Decision on admissibility and on immediate measures in the case International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) v. Greece, Complaint No. 173/2018, 23 May 2019.

^[18]Communication In accordance with Rule 9.2 of the Rules of the Committee of Ministers regarding the supervision of the execution of judgments and of terms of friendly settlements by the Advice on Individual Rights in Europe (The AIRE Centre) and the Greek Council for Refugees Concerning the supervision of the cases of: O.R. v. Greece, App No 24650/19 W.S. v. Greece (Application No. 65275/19); T.A. and Others v. Greece (Application No. 15293/20); T.S. and M.S. v. Greece (Application No. 15008/19); N.N. and Others v. Greece (Application No. 59319/19); A.I. and Others v. Greece (Application No. 11588/2 , submission to the DGI Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law Department for the Execution of Judgments of the ECHR (21/11/2025) AIRE Center & GCR <https://gcr.gr/wp-content/uploads/O.R.-v.-Greece-Rule-9.2-submission-AIRE-Centre-GCR-.pdf>

[19] Joint Press Release: Hundreds of Unaccompanied Children in Unsafe Zones – Urgent Need to Activate Relocation, available at <https://tdh.gr/en/hundreds-unaccompanied-children-unsafe-zones-need-immediate-activation-relocation>

[20]Regarding the Malakasa R.I.C., the Greek Ombudsman following a complaint by the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) concerning the stay of two unaccompanied minors in inadequate living conditions underlined in a (23/12/2024) the inappropriate living conditions. “Prolonged stay of UAMs in unsuitable conditions in Malakasa RIC.” Athens, 23/12/24 : “Regarding material conditions, the minors remain in the same clothes and underwear from their arrival, without having received clean or winter clothing. The facility where they reside presents serious deficiencies: there is no hot water, leaks are observed, and there are problems with the electricity, resulting in the air conditioning not functioning for heating and a lack of lighting. The space is limited. It is also reported that the space inside the unit is minimal, and in the first case, the minor was never provided with clean bedding. The amount of food is considered insufficient.”

DESK RESEARCH

During 2024 in the case of T.K. v. Greece the European Court of Human Rights held that there has been a violation of articles 3 and 8 of the Convention in the case of an unaccompanied child on Samos, whose wrong registration as an adult and the failure to correct his age violated his right to respect for private and family life (article 8 ECHR). Moreover, according to the Court, the living conditions of the applicant amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment, in violation of article 3 of the ECHR.^[21] Later on that same year the Court convicted Greece in the case of T.S. and M.S v Greece for violation of Articles 3 (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) , 5 and 1 (right to liberty and security) and 5 and 4 (right to apply to a court) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), for the violations suffered in 2019 by two unaccompanied minor sisters who were found, despite their apparent vulnerability homeless and subsequently detained^[22]. The Court, inter alia, stressed that the Greek authorities had failed to take prompt action to accommodate them emphasizing that the large number of pending applications for accommodation of unaccompanied minors does not relieve the authorities of their positive obligations to protect them. Furthermore, specifically regarding the placement of minors in "protective custody", the Court accepted the minors' arguments that this constituted an unlawful deprivation of their liberty.

During 2025 critical gaps in child protection are repeatedly noted. According to Save the Children and GCR [23]"especially in overcrowded and under-resourced "safe zones," where unaccompanied children face de facto detention, poor living conditions, and limited access to medical care, legal aid, and education. A failing guardianship system and reduced reception capacity further heighten children's vulnerability. The report calls for urgent EU and national action, including immediate relocation mechanisms, a shift toward community-based accommodation, and guaranteed access to education and child-appropriate services".

On February 5th, 2025, the European Court of Human Rights Court granted interim measures – once again- for the horrific living conditions in the Safe Zone of the Samos CCAC where unaccompanied minors were residing[24]. The Court agreed that the 4 minors were at imminent risk of irreparable harm if they remain in the CCAC and ordered the Greek government to provide with adequate food, water, clothing and medical care, to ensure their protection from ill-treatment and ensure their speedy relocation to a shelter for minors[25].

[21] I Have Rights, European Court of Human Rights Condemns Greece's Treatment of an Unaccompanied Child on Samos, 18 January 2024, T.K. v. Greece (Application No. 16112/20), represented by Refugee Law Clinic Berlin (Germany) and supported by "I Have Rights" (Samos),

[22] ECtHR case of T.S. and M.S. v. Greece, judgement of 3 October 2024, application no. 15008/19. The unaccompanied minors were represented before the Court by the Legal Unit of the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR).

[23] Children on the Move in Greece: January – April 2025 https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/2025-Save-GCR-Joint-Briefing_Q1_ENGLISH.pdf

[24] Human Rights Legal Projects'(HRLP)s represented 4 applicants unlawfully detained inside the CCAC's safe area for up to 4 months. In the request the abovementioned organization emphasized that more than 400 minors were detained in the same inhuman and degrading conditions at the Samos CCAC's "safe" zone, and that the ill-treatment they were subjected to exposed all of them to imminent risk of irreparable harm.

[25] ECtHR, O.A. and Others v. Greece, application no.2570/25.

DESK RESEARCH

4.1.4. Guardianship

The legislation regulating the guardianship of unaccompanied minors in Greece is primarily based on Law 4554/2018 and Law 4636/2019. Additionally, Circular 7/2025 is applied, which concerns the uniform implementation of guardianship within the framework of foster care and adoption procedures[1]. Furthermore, relevant provisions are included in Articles 66A and 66KD of Law 4939/2022, as well as in Law 4960/2022. Nonetheless significant gaps in the application of the provisions have been noted and criticized since the institution does not work yet in a unified manner for all children located in Greece. [2]Two non-governmental organizations appointed by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum implement the programme. NGO Metadrasi and PRAKSIS. These organizations occupy staff acting as Appointee Guardians, representing the actual Guardian - being the head of each organization. In the present research appointee guardians are among the stakeholders participating in the interviews. Their insights are valuable for the unmet needs of UAMs in Athens.

[26] Relevant provisions on foster care and adoption remain unimplemented in practise, the two Institution appear extremely problematic in the Greek context for unaccompanied minors third country nationals and minors of Greek nationality alike.

[27] According to Save and Children and GCR (2025) , despite the establishment of a national guardianship scheme critical gaps persist, leaving many UASC without legal representation and support. As of early 2025, there are only 128 mandated guardians nationwide¹⁶, falling short of the target of 170 (or up to 180 if needed)— a figure still far below what is required to meet actual needs. The guardianship programme is hampered by severe bureaucratic delays (e.g. in the Public Prosecutors' offices) and structural weaknesses. Fluctuations in arrivals strain an already overstretched system, while high turnover rates and excessive caseloads undermine effective support. In some cases, children in CCACs/RICs are not being assigned a mandated guardian, delaying access to critical legal support and essential services such as healthcare, psychosocial support, clothing, and other basic needs. Children on the move January 2025 - April 2025. https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/2025-Save-GCR-Joint-Briefing_Q1_ENGLISH.pdf

DESK RESEARCH

4. 2 Service Channel Mapping: System of local organizations, NGO s, service providers to UAMs in Athens

4.2.1 Accommodation services, including the majority of the necessary child protection provision services.

NGO's that run the Long term accommodation facilities (Centres of Hospitality of Unaccompanied Minors/shelters) are responsible for a variety of service provision to the children, such as the assessment of best interests and collection of social history, psychosocial support and legal counseling and representation, informal education, material provision and support, social services, daily health care, cash distribution, food, activities enrollment, referral system for social skills development, individual plan of action, social and community life of the children in the shelter etc.in collaboration with the appointee guardian . This reality indicates the absence of state 's capacity to provide direct, specialized and public services to UAMs.

NGOs remain in strong collaboration with the appointee guardians while they must obtain the guardian's consent for any action they undertake affecting the best interest of the child. Moreover, the overlap among service providers and excessive bureaucracy overwhelms professionals during duties, deprive the children from spending time with their social assistant or guardian due to the structure of the system.[28] These NGOs are supervised and controlled by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, which determines their mandate, budget and staff positions and carries out inspections and checks.

4.2.2. Service Providers in Athens - NGOs and actors of specific services

After placement in a long-term accommodation facility, UAMS are appointed a reference person within to facilitate the minor in everyday life adjusting to the life of the accommodation facility and surrounding environment, usually a social worker and /or the guardian. Minors can benefit from additional services from NGOs located in the region of Athens for supplementing services provided within the accommodation facility.

Civil society professionals provide a variety of services very much required i.e legal counselling, support in international protection proceedings, family-reunification assistance, supplementary language courses (Greek/English), remedial education, life-skills training (familiarization with budgeting, tenancy, additional vocational skills), trauma counselling, participatory workshops (arts, sports), employment liaison programmes, CV workshops. These kind of services are provided through short term occasional projects and programmes having neither the funding stability and continuance over time nor the capacity to include all minors in the region, being rather ad hoc initiatives from NGOs and/or private entities then part of a national or local strategy providing services for all. [29].

[28] See below

[29] For the relevant NGO's and their programmes see Annex Table 2, for the assessment of the service provision by stakeholders in Athens see Annex table 3. Also, below section 6.

DESK RESEARCH

4.2.3. Educational Services

Greek administration had struggled over the years to fulfill its obligation to ensure that all children are promptly enrolled in school and receive a quality education throughout the country regardless of legal status and nationality. Barriers in education for UAMs have been reported over the years^[30]. In an extensive report published in 2022^[31] six key indicators / also indicative key barriers were reported and persist until today, namely access to enrollment, attendance, access to inclusive education, transportation to schools, adequate staffing and timely scheduling and action to end community hostility and xenophobia.

I. Formal Education

National legislation provides for the mandatory enrollment and attendance of unaccompanied minors in primary and lower secondary school under the same conditions as children of Greek/EU nationality benefit from the in the public education system. For the better integration of the minor, the creation of Reception Classes (R.C.) in schools is provided for, which offer support to students with a different cultural and language background. In practice, unaccompanied minors in Athens face serious difficulties, not only during the school enrollment process but also in attending classes. Very often, especially in certain areas, schools lack appropriate structures or/and reception classes, resulting in many minors deprived of Greek language lessons in a formal public educational scheme and thus being effectively excluded from the education system, . From the perspective of the children themselves, many show insecurity, reluctance, or even refusal to integrate into the school environment. The reasons vary. In some cases, these are children awaiting departure from the country, either through a relocation programme or through family reunification procedures. Other times, ignorance about what they will encounter at school or feelings of insecurity increases their reluctance—particularly for children who are illiterate or have never previously attended an educational setting.

Additionally, many minors consider school unnecessary for achieving their personal goals perceiving themselves as in transit to another destination within the EU or in immediate need to secure income. The psychological effects of uprooting and uncertainty about their future critically influence their perception of the need of education.

Another important lack in the educational scheme for UAMs in Athens ^[32]is the lack of flexible educational programmes fitting to the needs of UAMs, such as vocational training, continuity of education during adulthood, motivation for participation in formal education and placing positive measures to ensure equal treatment of UAMs with their Greek peers in school and educational environment are required . Having in mind that the city of Athens is geographically wide, it is often the enrollment of a minor to a very distant school from his/her residence that affects negatively the willingness to attend school.

[30] Children Cast Adrift. The Exclusion and exploitation of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) National Report: Greece. Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, HIAS Greece, Greek Council for Refugees and Steps (2019)

[31] Report "Must do Better: Grading the Greek government's efforts on education for refugee children "(2022) Greek Council for Refugees, Save the Children, Terre des hommes, https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Greece-Education-Scorecard-Report_3.pdf

[32] See Relevant Chapter below

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II. Non-formal education

Non-formal education refers to education that arises from planned activities, not always precisely designed as formal learning. Is a voluntary and flexible learning process that takes place outside the formal school system, it can take place in museums, summer schools, clubs, camps, etc. Non-formal education refers also to language courses (Greek/English etc.) that are provided by organizations of civil society and NGOs outside the public schools of Athens where children often cannot benefit from adequate Greek language courses in an official school environment due to the above-mentioned structural gaps in public schools. It includes also supplementary teaching after the local school's lessons for the support of the learning procedure. Non-formal education plays a crucial role in the smooth integration of children into the school environment. It not only provides appropriate preparation for the start of their schooling but also serves as a consistent form of support throughout their education.

Through participation in Greek language lessons, as well as in various activities and non-formal learning programmes, children enhance their cognitive skills while simultaneously developing the social skills necessary for their socialization and integration into the school community.

Athens being the capital of Greece has the advantage to host many NGO's and thus many chances for non-formal education exist and relevant initiatives in the community occur more often in comparison with other Greek cities.

4.2.4. Municipal Authorities (City of Athens / Immigrant Integration Centre):

The Immigrant Integration Centre of Athens Municipality, is a local authority and thus has limited involvement to the supporting mechanism for UAMs remaining under Central administration- The assistance provided for by the Athens Municipal authority to minors is the facilitation of referrals of UAMs to specific service providers depending on the minors needs, as well as provision of access to Municipal spaces dedicated to cultural, sports, and art events of the Municipality. The local authority of the city has limited competence over the relevant matters compared to national state actors. This national policy choice could decrease the chance of a more active participation, inclusion, and integration of minors in the city's life. Sometimes the local authorities can be more effective in the realization of integration policies, based on the direct management of the city's social, cultural, and educational life. The Immigrant Integration Centre could have a more determining and specific role^[33] with relevant programmes for the inclusion and support of UAMs residing in the city.

[33] See Annex table 2. P.26. See also policy recommendations

5. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF UAMS INTERVIEWS

5.1 Basic Information of UAMs Interviewed

The respondents included ten unaccompanied minors, eight males and two females, originating predominantly from Egypt, with additional representation from Afghanistan and Somalia. Their ages ranged from approximately thirteen to eighteen years, corresponding to mid- to late adolescence. Most had arrived in Greece within the past year and were residing in Athens at the time of the interviews. Nine were accommodated in shelters operated by specialized organizations, while one, having recently reached adulthood, was temporarily hosted by an acquaintance. These living arrangements ensured a minimum degree of safety and access to essential services, though the duration and stability of accommodation varied across individuals.

Educational backgrounds were heterogeneous. Several respondents had attended school in their countries of origin but experienced prolonged interruptions in their studies, while others reported limited exposure to formal education. Despite these differences, most expressed a strong motivation to continue studying or to enroll in vocational training, particularly in technical fields such as carpentry or refrigeration. Education was commonly viewed as a means of achieving self-reliance and social inclusion, while a smaller number regarded immediate employment as a necessary and pragmatic option. Such perspectives often reflected an underlying anxiety about future livelihood and the challenges associated with transitioning to independent adulthood.

The decision to come to or remain in Greece was shaped more by circumstance than by deliberate choice. Several minors referred to pre-existing family or community networks in the country, particularly in Athens, which provided a sense of familiarity and initial support. Others described Greece as a “beautiful” place or one offering educational and vocational prospects, indicating an aspirational dimension to their accounts. However, a comparable number noted that Greece simply constituted the first accessible or affordable point of entry into Europe, underscoring the limited agency involved in their migration journey. Overall, the participants’ narratives suggest that their presence in Greece reflects a convergence of social ties, perceived opportunities, and structural constraints, rather than a planned destination choice.

Most respondents described their physical health as satisfactory, with only minor conditions reported, including vision or respiratory issues that were being appropriately managed. Nevertheless, several conveyed feelings of uncertainty, stress, and concern about their prospects, particularly regarding work opportunities and long-term stability. Although these were not formally diagnosed as psychological difficulties, they indicate an emerging sense of vulnerability linked to their impending transition from care to autonomy. Overall, the group reflects a relatively coherent demographic profile characterized by resilience, educational aspirations, and an expressed need for structured support to facilitate their integration and autonomy within the Greek context.

5. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF UAMS INTERVIEWS

5.2. Children's Assessment of Provided Services in Athens

The responses collected from unaccompanied minors living in shelters across Athens reflect a relatively structured yet uneven system of care and integration services. The data suggest that the NGO sector, particularly organizations such as Arsis and Zeuxis, continues to play a central role in service provision, compensating for the limited outreach and fragmented coordination of state mechanisms.

Municipality authorities are not involved in any kind of service and support provision, as they are not officially or unofficially introduced to the SOPs about unaccompanied minors or the official state structure for the minor's rights protection and their smooth integration. This indicates that the national mechanism for unaccompanied minors presents a centralization that makes Ministry for Asylum and Migration the main and only regulator. Through the Ministry the mandate of services provision is delegated to NGOs to provide for the provision of accommodation, social support, legal aid, nutrition, health care, informal education to every child that resides in the NGO-run facilities. This centralization comes to be so excessive in a degree that may create adverse impact, on one hand to minor's chances for a more active participation in the social life of the city, their gradual integration and the development of their social skills and on the other hand to the work overload of shelter's staff that may effects the quality of services provision.

The advantage of the main service provision in the place of accommodation is the easy way to access the services and meet the needs of the minors, although at the same time this appear to promote institutionalization and the minors are in danger of being segregated from the social and educative life of the city.

Legal support, often delivered through shelter staff or NGO legal teams, was the most positively evaluated service, with most minors acknowledging timely assistance in documentation and residence permit procedures^[34].

Similarly, **education and Greek language instruction** were viewed as effective channels of inclusion, offering both stability and a sense of progress. Children attending public schools or participating in informal educational activities within shelters expressed high satisfaction, which underlines the importance of educational continuity as a protective factor in their integration trajectory.

[34]The assessment of minors interviewed about legal representation is totally different from the assessment of stakeholders. We come to the conclusion that this is due to the fact that every minor we interviewed was either a recognized refugee or an asylum applicant without a completed asylum interview, so no one of the ten participants was undocumented at that time. At contrast stakeholders answered having in mind the majority of minors they work with and the wider situation of the administrative procedure for the recognition of international protection status of minors.

5. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF UAMS INTERVIEWS

Health care, mainly accessed through the public system, was also regarded as adequate when required, suggesting that basic medical access has largely been secured for this population.

However, the analysis also exposes systemic deficiencies and inconsistencies that hinder the overall effectiveness of service delivery in Athens. Financial support remains one of the weakest areas, with several minors describing the assistance received as minimal, irregular, or dependent on external donors. This lack of economic stability reinforces dependency on institutional care and restricts the development of autonomy. Material support—such as clothing and food—was often criticized for poor quality or limited choice, indicating insufficient responsiveness to individual needs and preferences.

In addition, social support and employability services appear fragmented. While some minors reported close relationships with social workers, others experienced sporadic or impersonal support, reflecting staff shortages and the absence of standardized case management approaches. Opportunities for vocational training or employment preparation were virtually non-existent, despite being crucial for adolescents nearing adulthood and transition from care.

A recurring concern in the children's responses was the uneven distribution of services among shelters, which points to a broader issue of lack of coordination between NGOs and public authorities. This fragmentation produces unequal access to opportunities and creates disparities in living conditions among minors under similar protection statuses.

In sum, the findings from Athens reveal a dual reality: while the city provides a relatively safe and structured environment through NGO shelters and access to education and health care, the current framework remains reactive rather than developmental. The predominance of short-term, protection-oriented services limits the promotion of social inclusion, employability, and independent living—key dimensions of durable solutions for unaccompanied minors. Strengthening institutional coordination, ensuring adequate and predictable financial support, and integrating vocational pathways into the existing service network are essential steps toward a more sustainable and equitable system of protection and care for minors in Athens.

5. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF UAMS INTERVIEWS

5.3. Interactions with Law Enforcement and Border Police - Athens Context

The testimonies of unaccompanied minors living in Athens reveal mixed and often troubling experiences in their encounters with law enforcement authorities. While a few respondents stated that they had no direct contact with police, the majority of those who had interactions—either at the Greek borders or within Athens itself—described these encounters as negative, intimidating, or abusive.

Several minors who crossed through border regions reported being mistreated by police, including physical violence and verbal aggression, particularly towards younger-looking children. One participant referred to severe beatings and imprisonment by police in Turkey prior to arrival in Greece, emphasizing a pattern of vulnerability during border transit. However, notably, reports of mistreatment did not end at the border. Children residing in Athens shelters described experiences of harassment and intimidation by local police officers, even while clearly identified as minors under protection. Some recounted being stopped without cause, searched in public, or threatened with weapons, which they interpreted as acts of criminalization. These encounters generated feelings of shame, fear, and insecurity, reinforcing their perception of being stigmatized rather than protected by law enforcement.

Although isolated incidents of brief police checks were mentioned, no accounts of supportive or trust-building interactions were provided. The overall pattern suggests a lack of child-sensitive policing practices and inconsistent implementation of protection protocols for minors under care in Athens.

From an analytical perspective, these findings point to systemic deficiencies in institutional awareness and training among police regarding the rights and needs of unaccompanied minors. They also reveal a broader trust deficit between children and law enforcement, which undermines efforts toward social integration and protection. Addressing these gaps requires the establishment of clear accountability mechanisms, the training of police personnel on child protection standards.

5.4. Findings on Discrimination and Violence - Unaccompanied Minors in Athens

Overview

Interviews conducted with unaccompanied minors now residing in Athens, having been prior accommodated in reception centres on the islands reveal distinct yet interrelated patterns of discrimination and institutional neglect. A clear distinction emerges between **shelters** in Athens, where minors live under NGO care, and **reception centres on the islands**, which are under the national reception system and often marked by overcrowding and poor conditions. The minors who now are residing in Athens—in many cases—had prior traumatizing experiences during their **accommodation in reception centres on the islands**. The interviews underline the psychological impact of those experiences in minor's lives and soul, coming repeatedly during our interviews even if their current life in Athens does not include the same conditions.

While several minors reported no personal experiences of violence or discrimination, a significant number described instances of racism, intimidation, and institutional disregard—both in the broader public sphere and within reception frameworks.

5. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF UAMS INTERVIEWS

These experiences reveal that even when physical violence is absent, **psychological distress and social marginalization remain prevalent.**

The minors' accounts indicate partial compliance with Greece's International and European obligations^[1]. The described conditions in reception centres and policing behavior in Athens suggest gaps in implementation and oversight, particularly regarding anti-discrimination measures, complaint procedures, and the monitoring of reception facilities. While shelters in Athens generally provide safer environments compared to reception centres on the islands, both settings reflect systemic shortcomings in upholding the dignity and rights of unaccompanied children. The findings emphasize:

- Persistent social discrimination and stigmatization in urban life;
- Inadequate intercultural support and mediation in shelters;
- Institutional neglect in island camps;
- And intimidating encounters with law enforcement that undermine children's sense of protection.

Together, these accounts demonstrate that despite progress in child protection structures in Athens, unaccompanied minors continue to face layers of vulnerability — social, institutional, and systemic — that hinder their full inclusion and recovery.

5.5. Housing and Homelessness – Insights from Interviews with Unaccompanied Minors in Athens

The majority of unaccompanied minors interviewed reported not having experienced homelessness since their arrival in Athens. Most had been accommodated in shelters or NGO-supported facilities, suggesting that the city's existing child protection network has provided a degree of immediate stability upon arrival. However, their narratives also revealed important gaps in transitional and long-term housing support, particularly at the point when minors exit the formal care system.

Several interviewees described facing severe uncertainty upon leaving shelters, with no interim accommodation or structured reintegration assistance. One minor explained that, after leaving the shelter, they would temporarily stay with a family acquaintance for a month before having to “get back on [their] feet” alone. Such testimonies highlight the absence of a sustainable transition framework between childhood protection and adult integration mechanisms. The reliance on informal networks, such as friends or distant relatives, exposes these young people to significant housing precarity and social vulnerability.

[36] The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 2, 19, 20, 22), ensuring protection from discrimination, abuse, and neglect; EU Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU), which guarantees adequate living standards and safety for asylum-seeking minors.

5. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF UAMS INTERVIEWS

Accounts from minors who first arrived on the Aegean islands or in reception centres depict a different but related dimension of housing insecurity. A few reported having slept outside police stations or in overcrowded, inadequate facilities prior to being transferred to shelters for minors.

While these experiences occurred before arriving in Athens, they point to a continuum of unstable living conditions across different stages of the asylum and reception process. These early experiences of homelessness often reinforced feelings of mistrust toward institutional systems and contributed to a heightened sense of insecurity even after relocation to the mainland.

Taken together, these findings indicate that housing stability for unaccompanied minors remains conditional and time limited. Once minors turn 18 or leave the protection system, they often face abrupt exclusion from housing schemes, without sufficient preparation for independent living. The pathway from institutional care to independent living appears fragmented and heavily reliant on informal networks, rather than on structured, state-supported mechanisms. This lack of continuity not only undermines the long-term integration of unaccompanied minors but also heightens their risk of marginalization and exposure to homelessness upon reaching adulthood.

This reveals a critical policy gap in ensuring continuity of care and social protection during the transition to adulthood.

From a policy perspective, there is a clear need to:

- Develop structured transitional housing programmes for minors approaching adulthood, ensuring continuity between child protection and adult integration services.
- Strengthen coordination between shelters, municipal services, and NGOs to prevent temporary homelessness during or after transitions.
- Integrate vocational training, rent assistance, and psychosocial support into exit planning to promote sustainable autonomy.

Without these measures, unaccompanied minors remain at risk of homelessness and marginalization, despite early protective interventions within the shelter system.

6. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS

6.1 Basic Information of stakeholders Interviewed

The stakeholder interviews conducted in Athens involved ten professionals representing a diverse spectrum of organizations and authorities engaged in the protection and support of unaccompanied minors. The majority were affiliated with non-governmental organizations managing shelters or community-based programmes, while others represented municipal departments responsible for social migrant integration and coordination with national mechanisms. Their professional experience ranged from three to over fifteen years, with academic qualifications primarily in social work, psychology, pedagogy, law, European and international studies, and related social sciences. This multidisciplinary composition reflects a well-established network of practitioners combining direct care responsibilities with administrative and advocacy functions across Athens.

Stakeholders collectively reported working with a considerable number of unaccompanied minors, both within formal accommodation structures and through municipal or outreach services addressing those outside the protection system.

The number of unaccompanied minors reached through these institutions ranged from small, closely supervised residential units hosting between 13 and 30 children to larger-scale community or programmes serving several hundred or even thousands of minors annually. Most stakeholders described working predominantly with boys aged between 15 and 18 years, originating mainly from Egypt, with smaller groups from Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Palestine, Sudan, and Cameroon. Girls represented a minority of beneficiaries and were most often of Somali or Syrian origin. The respondents consistently noted that economic hardship, family pressure, and the need to secure employment were the primary reasons for departure among male minors, while flight from conflict and insecurity predominated in the narratives of girls. In several accounts, professionals also referred to minors who had survived shipwrecks or endured physical abuse and neglect during transit, particularly in Libya.

6.2 Main Challenges of Unaccompanied Minors as Identified by Stakeholders

Stakeholders across various organizations in Athens consistently highlighted the multifaceted vulnerabilities and **main systemic challenges faced by unaccompanied minors**. A predominant concern refers to the **limited access to stable accommodation and the transition from shelters to independent living**, which often occurs without sufficient preparatory support or follow-up services. Professionals noted that once minors turn eighteen, they frequently find themselves exposed to homelessness or precarious housing situations, lacking both institutional and social safety nets. This transition gap was described as one of the most pressing and structurally unaddressed issues within the current protection framework.

6. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS

Municipal social services acknowledged their limited capacity to host young adults who exit the child protection framework, stressing the absence of transitional support structures. This gap prevents the real integration of minors into society and simultaneously their development and progress, slowing down the improvement of their adult lives.

Another central theme emerging from all interviews is the precarious legal situation of UAMs. Professionals consistently reported that rejection of asylum applications and delays in the appointment of guardians are pervasive, leaving minors without legal security or representation. Municipal representatives confirmed that bureaucratic fragmentation and overlapping responsibilities among state and regional authorities often hinder timely legal and administrative support.

Another key theme relates to mental health and psychosocial well-being. Many stakeholders observed elevated levels of anxiety, insecurity, and emotional distress among minors, often linked to prolonged asylum procedures, traumatic past experiences, and uncertainty regarding their future legal status. The shortage of specialized psychological support, language barriers, and cultural mediation were seen as aggravating factors, leading to insufficient emotional stabilization and difficulties in building trust-based relationships with professionals.

In terms of employability and social inclusion, respondents underlined the scarcity of long-term educational planning and vocational opportunities. Several organizations mentioned that while minors express a strong willingness to study and work, their progress is hindered by bureaucratic obstacles, insufficient language acquisition programme and the limited availability of job placements suitable for their age and background. Closely connected to the above, employment and economic survival constitute a dominant concern among UAMs. Stakeholders described a strong drive among adolescents—particularly boys from Egypt, Afghanistan, and Pakistan—to work and send remittances home. This pressure creates a situation where informal and exploitative labor in construction, agriculture, and catering is widespread among minors. Practitioners highlighted the psychological pressure many minors face from their families or lenders to find employment immediately upon arrival, which further reinforces risky and illegal work practices.

In addition, educational integration remains problematic. Stakeholders reported low school attendance, language barriers, and a mismatch between the minors' needs and the educational opportunities available. Some mentioned the absence of Reception Classes (TY) and insufficient interpretation services, while others noted that many minors prioritize work over education due to economic necessity.

Moreover, the lack of guardianship continuity^[37] and fragmented inter-agency coordination were frequently mentioned as systemic shortcomings, impeding individualized support and long-term integration planning.

[37]According to the national legislation the person of the appointee guardian changes depending on the whereabouts of the child.

6. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Finally, some professionals, particularly those working in legal and advocacy services, emphasized structural deficiencies in the protection system. They referred to institutional fragmentation, underfunding, and high staff turnover, as well as limited access to interpretation and legal assistance. The justice-related organizations highlighted the punitive approach of the criminal justice system towards minors in conflict with the law, combined with the absence of restorative and reintegration programmes.

Overall, the interviews revealed a consensus that unaccompanied minors in Athens face intertwined challenges of legal uncertainty, emotional fragility, and socio-economic exclusion, calling for a more coherent and sustainable integration approach.

6.3. Services for UAMs in Athens: types and adequacy assessment from stakeholders^[38]

Athens hosts a multifaceted but fragmented ecosystem of services, involving specialized NGOs, service providers operating child-protection units and mobile outreach teams, religious institutions and municipal structures. These services cover a broad continuum — from emergency shelter and psychosocial care to education, vocational guidance, and recreational inclusion — yet vary significantly in accessibility, coordination, and sustainability.

While basic needs and emergency accommodation are largely met through NGO-led shelters and protection programmes, chronic shortages limit long-term stability. Legal assistance, guardianship, and specialized mental-health support emerge as the least adequate domains, with recurrent bottlenecks in case management, interpretation, and follow-up beyond the age of 18. The municipality's contribution is indirect and very limited. Municipal services facilitate access to cultural, sports, and recreational facilities and make referrals to specialized actors in case they identify an unaccompanied minor.

Conversely, non-formal education, recreational, and community-inclusion programmes were generally evaluated as positive but often short-lived or project-dependent. Overall, the service landscape demonstrates professional capacity and local commitment but remains under strain due to systemic fragmentation, temporary financing, and insufficient institutionalization of protective functions. Addressing these gaps requires resource strengthening, clarified inter-agency roles, and sustainable models for legal protection, mental health care, and transitional support.

6.4. Institutional and Policy Challenges in the Service Provision for UAMs

Stakeholder insights reveal that institutional and policy challenges in the protection and inclusion of unaccompanied minors in Athens stem primarily from systemic fragmentation, insufficient inter-agency coordination, and structural gaps in the national child protection and asylum frameworks. Despite the significant expertise and commitment demonstrated by frontline professionals, the system continues to operate under persistent administrative, legislative, and operational constraints that undermine its effectiveness and sustainability.

[38] The adequacy assessment from stakeholders is pictured in Table 3 (Annexes).

6. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

A key issue identified is the lack of a comprehensive, integrated national framework for UAM protection that bridges child welfare, asylum, and migration management. Stakeholders pointed to the coexistence of overlapping laws and the frequent introduction of new regulations without adequate implementation guidance, resulting in confusion, delays, and inconsistent practice. This institutional complexity extends to the determination of minority status, where the absence of standardized procedures, interpretation services, and temporary accommodation during the assessment phase leaves many children unprotected.

Furthermore, housing inadequacy remains a pressing structural problem. The shortage of reception and long-term accommodation facilities, particularly for minors transitioning into adulthood, creates discontinuity in care and exposes young people to homelessness and re-trafficking risks. Professionals highlighted the absence of post-18 housing and integration programmes, noting that no structured support exists for those whose asylum claims are rejected or pending.

Equally critical is the deficit in human resources and specialization. Stakeholders across sectors—social workers, psychologists, and legal advisors—stressed that staff shortages, high caseloads, and lack of continuous training impede effective case management. The excessive number of children per professional makes the establishment of stable, therapeutic relationships nearly impossible, while the lack of interpreters further compromises communication and trust-building.

Administrative inefficiencies and delays in Ministry payments were also mentioned as factors undermining the operational stability of child protection facilities and discouraging qualified professionals from remaining in the sector. In parallel, xenophobic rhetoric and negative media narratives were seen to exacerbate social exclusion and indirectly influence restrictive policy choices, particularly concerning asylum rejections and family reunification procedures, which remain time-consuming and inconsistently applied.

From an institutional perspective, stakeholders emphasized the limited role of local authorities. While municipalities formally hold responsibilities in child protection, they lack the institutional framework, resources, and specialized personnel to engage substantively in the protection of UAMs.

Overall, these institutional and policy gaps reflect a system still oriented toward emergency management rather than durable integration. Stakeholders stress the need for sustainable governance, stable funding, and the institutional embedding of child protection mechanisms at the local level, in alignment with international child-rights standards.

6.5. Good Practices in the Social Care of Unaccompanied Minors

Although the institutional framework remains fragmented, a few good practices have been identified contributing to varying degrees, to the integration of unaccompanied minors and the realization of their fundamental rights.

6. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

A positive example concerns the networking of civil society organizations through joint events, workshops, and exchange meetings. These initiatives facilitate the dissemination of information on available services and foster cooperation among actors involved in child protection. While they enhance visibility and coordination, their continuity and impact largely depend on individual initiative rather than on systematic institutional support.

Another noteworthy practice is the participation of minors in cultural and educational activities, such as intercultural and theatre education programmes organized by local cultural centres. These initiatives promote children's empowerment, social participation, and self-expression — key dimensions of the right to development and inclusion. However, they remain sporadic and would benefit from being institutionally embedded and expanded to reach a wider group of minors.

The operation of Supported Independent Living (SIL) programmes also represents an important step towards both integration and autonomy. By combining housing with life-skills training and psychosocial support, these schemes strengthen minors' capacity to transition to adulthood and exercise their rights to education, participation, and an adequate standard of living. Nevertheless, their availability is limited, and long-term sustainability depends on stable funding and policy commitment.

Overall, while these initiatives illustrate valuable approaches to child protection and integration, they remain isolated practices rather than systemic policies. Strengthening and scaling them up—through institutional cooperation, municipal engagement, and child-rights-based planning—would significantly advance the effective protection and social inclusion of unaccompanied minors.

6.6. Findings on Discrimination, Violence and Interaction with Law Enforcement and Border Police: Stakeholders' Insights

Stakeholder feedback highlights systemic weaknesses in the protection of unaccompanied minors during interactions with law enforcement, border authorities, and service providers. While some respondents reported no direct experience of abuse or discrimination, others described practices that undermine fundamental rights and perpetuate vulnerability.

The identification process, frequently involves prolonged administrative detention under conditions that raise serious concerns. Minors have been confined in locked cells during this process, and reports indicate cases of physical violence, verbal abuse, and deprivation of food and water by certain police departments. Threats of imprisonment for minor infractions and dismissive attitudes toward minors were also noted, alongside claims of insufficient resources to provide necessities.

Discriminatory treatment extends beyond law enforcement. Incidents include refusal of healthcare services when minors were unaccompanied, barriers to school enrollment, and neglect in overcrowded reception centres where living conditions violate basic standards. Subtle discriminatory behaviors in public services and transportation further reinforce exclusion. These patterns reveal systemic bias and a lack of accountability, with minors' access to essential services often contingent on the presence of intermediaries.

6. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUMMARIES OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Violence and abuse remain critical concerns. Accounts describe physical assaults during arrest or detention and deliberate measures to conceal injuries. Reports of minors being denied food and water during detention underscore the severity of these violations. Although some respondents indicated no awareness of such incidents, the recurrence of these allegations points to significant protection gaps and inadequate oversight.

These practices not only breach legal and ethical obligations but also obstruct pathways to integration and inclusion. When minors encounter hostility, neglect, and violence from institutions meant to protect them, trust erodes, and opportunities for education, health, and social participation diminish. In Athens, where unaccompanied minors seek safety and a chance to rebuild their lives, systemic failures perpetuate marginalization and hinder their ability to become active members of the community. Addressing these issues requires urgent reforms: robust accountability mechanisms, mandatory training on child rights and anti-discrimination for police authorities and public servants, and investment in reception conditions and social services. Without these measures, efforts toward integration risk being undermined by practices that isolate and stigmatize the very children they aim to protect.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an urgent need for a coordinated and sustainable approach to improve the protection, transition to adulthood, and integration of unaccompanied minors. In the below, key recommendations are presented based on the gaps identified in the research and in the literature review.

1. **Strengthen local coordination and institutional clarity.** The fragmentation between national, municipal, and NGO actors limits service effectiveness. There is a strong need for a local coordination mechanism to connect education, health, social services, and civil society, ensuring continuity of support.

2. **Extend protection and support beyond the age of 18.** It is important to ensure continuity of support beyond the age of 18 for young adults formerly in care. The transition to adulthood remains a critical vulnerability point, and aftercare programmes for young adults should provide continued access to housing, education, and psychosocial support, as well as, where appropriate, supported pathways towards employment, until sustainable independence is achieved. This would align local practices with international child rights standards and prevent exclusion once adulthood is reached.

3. **Ensure equal access to inclusive education.** Unaccompanied children should have unconditional access to mainstream, non-segregated education, with language support and other necessary measures provided within schools rather than through segregated classes or parallel systems.

4. **Simplify administrative procedures and enhance accessibility.** Complex bureaucratic requirements often exclude minors from healthcare, education, and welfare. There is a need for child-friendly administrative processes, more use of interpreters, and systematic information sharing to facilitate equal access to services.

5. **Promote participation and empowerment of minors.** While participation initiatives exist, they remain limited. It is necessary to establish and develop structured participation mechanisms, such as youth advisory groups and consultation spaces within municipal services. Strengthening minors' agency and representation would support accountability and rights protection.

6. **Foster community awareness and social cohesion.** Integration requires supportive local environments. It is necessary to develop community engagement and anti-discrimination initiatives involving schools, residents, and youth groups to counter prejudice and build mutual understanding.

7. **Ensure unaccompanied children have access to the mainstream child protection system, with access to foster care.** It is essential to ensure that unaccompanied children are fully included in the mainstream child protection system on an equal basis with all children deprived of parental care, including access to quality, family-based care such as foster care. This requires strengthening and adequately resourcing child protection and foster care systems, expanding foster services, and ensuring individualized access to services based on identified needs of each child. It also necessitates the systematic recruitment, training, and ongoing support of foster parents, with specific attention to the particular experiences, vulnerabilities, and protection needs of unaccompanied children.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Ensure access to housing during the transition to adulthood. Structured and planned housing pathways for unaccompanied children approaching adulthood should be developed to ensure continuity of care and integration upon turning 18. Accommodation and housing support should be extended beyond the age of 18, enabling young adults to transition gradually to independent living without interruption of support. Effective coordination between child protection services, housing authorities, municipalities, and civil society organizations is essential to prevent homelessness during and after the transition to adulthood, and to move away from emergency or shelter-based responses towards rights-based housing solutions.

9. Ensure access to justice. Unaccompanied minors should have access to justice to ensure that fundamental rights violations are addressed. This should include access to legal aid, with the support of guardians, as well as capacity building of legal professionals and counselling services to better understand the needs and challenges faced by unaccompanied children.

10. Develop long term integration strategies. Long-term integration strategies should be developed to ensure continuity of support and respect for fundamental rights of unaccompanied children and young adults. These strategies should combine access to information, community-based support and participation mechanisms, and may include, inter alia:

- accessible, multilingual information tools on housing, education, healthcare and rights;
- community mentorship or accompaniment schemes to support administrative navigation and social inclusion;
- outreach mechanisms to ensure timely access to information and services,
- opportunities for participation, including consultative or advisory bodies enabling unaccompanied children and young adults to contribute to the design of integration measures;
- initiatives to promote social inclusion and combat discrimination
- access to legal information and assistance on residence, documentation and rights.
- for young adults aged 18 and above, supported and voluntary pathways towards employment, embedded within transition-to-adulthood and aftercare measures, and aligned with education priorities.

8. CONCLUSION

The research conducted in Athens reveals a complex reality for unaccompanied minors (UAMs): while significant progress has been made in providing immediate protection through NGO-led shelters and basic services, systemic gaps persist that undermine long-term integration and rights realization. Furthermore, discriminatory attitudes, policing practices, and bureaucratic obstacles continue to erode trust and impede inclusion.

Interviews with minors underscore the importance of safety, education, and psychosocial support as stabilizing factors, yet their narratives also reflect recurring troubling issues: a) While shelters provide relative stability during childhood, the absence of structured transitional support exposes minors to housing insecurity and socio-economic vulnerability upon reaching adulthood. b) Additionally, educational access is inconsistent. Despite legal provisions for school enrollment, practical barriers impede participation. Non-formal education initiatives partially compensate for these gaps but are project-based and lack continuity. c) vocational training and employability pathways are virtually absent, despite their critical role in fostering autonomy.

Stakeholder consultations confirm these findings, pointing to structural deficiencies in housing continuity, guardianship, and vocational opportunities, as well as the absence of coordinated mechanisms bridging child protection and migration management. Despite the existence of good practice, these remain isolated and project-dependent, lacking institutional embedding and sustainability.

There is an urgent need for systemic reform with positive measures strengthening local coordination, ensuring continuity of care beyond the age of 18, and embedding education and employability pathways into the protection framework. These measures must be complemented by child-sensitive administrative procedures, robust accountability mechanisms, and community-based initiatives to counter prejudice and foster social cohesion.

ANNEXES

Number and % of foreign-born pop, pop. with refugee / migrant background - local level	20.897 asylum applicants (0,6%)		2.429 asylum applicants(0,06 %)	3.903 asylum applicants(0,10%)	3.012 asylum applicants				
<i>4.2 Unaccompanied minors</i>									
TOTAL UAMs. - country ³⁹			2573	1987	2414	89%M, 11% F	15%<15 YEARS OLD	45% Egypt, 16% SYRIA, 16% SOMALIA,10% AFGHANISTAN, 9 %OTHER, 3%PAKISTAN	61% ARABIC, 16% SOMALI, 10% FARSI, 3%URDU, 9% OTHER
TOTAL UAM - locality			>1404	>960	>1119				

**Table 2:
Language,
institutional,
service
and
recruitment
channel
mapping**

Mapping	
Language mapping: list the main languages of refugees and UAMs in the locality. Please add prevalence/frequency and put them in order	
1 Arabic 2 Somali 3 Farsi 4 Urdu 5 Other	
Institutional and service mapping	
Relevant national, regional and local level policies and legal framework relevant for UAMs.	1 The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 2 Law 4554/2018, law 4636/2019, Circular 7/2025 3 EU Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU) 4 Law 4939/2022, law 4960/2022 5 European Convention on Human Rights
Relevant national, regional, but mostly [40]local administration units, stakeholders, NGOs, etc. responsible for supporting UAMs. The list should provide information on each organization's area of expertise, services, responsibilities, target groups etc. and contact information and the linkages between various organizations. Add these information below the table, if more space needed.	1 Athens Juvenile Prosecutor's Office 2 ARSIS provides shelter for UAMs in Athens, with a holistic approach including legal, educational and psychosocial services. 3 Home project provides shelter for UAMs in Athens, with a holistic approach including legal, educational and psychosocial services 4 Hellenic Social Welfare Assistance Unit provides shelter for UAMs in Athens, with a holistic approach including legal, educational and psychosocial services 5 Zeuxis NGO runs accommodation centres such as "OIKOS" (for girls) 6. INTERSOS Hellas together with the Network for Children's Rights implements the "Protection for All Minors" programme providing mobile outreach, legal-psychosocial accompaniment and safe living options for UAMs in precarious situations 7. Metadrasl runs the Guardianship project with Praksis, operates SILs, provides interpretation, operates centre of learning for UAMs 8. Apostoli provides shelter for UAMs in Athens, with a holistic approach including legal, educational and psychosocial services 9. FAROS, provides shelter for UAMs in Athens, with a holistic approach including legal, educational and psychosocial services 10. KEAN a social youth association provides shelter and SILs in Athens. 11. Child Protection Unit -operates a dedicated Info Desk and Mobile Units under the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) for UAMs in precarious or homeless situations in Athens. 12. Athens Coordination Center for Refugee & Migrant issues – ACCMR 13. Network for the Rights of the Child, member of NERM and stable actor of UAMs protection 14. Terre des Hommes Greece, Children and Youth Advisory Committees, educational activities regarding their rights, skills acquisition activities (such as active listening, mediation) and awareness-raising activities. Adventure Therapy, outdoor activities such as hiking, climbing, and cycling. 15. Pyxida, GCR: Day Centre for activities, education and integration

[40] This list attempts to make an indicative and not exhaustive registration of the main national and particularly local authorities and stakeholders supporting UAMs in Athens. Due to often changes in UAMs supporting projects the registration cannot be exhaustive.

<p>Recruitment channel mapping: of relevant local institutions (including social services providers, reception centers, hotspots, schools), NGOs, localities (e.g. popular meeting or leisure time spots in the city), channels and methods to recruit potential respondent UAMs for quantitative and qualitative research.</p>	
<p>UAMs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Centers of Hospitality of Unaccompanied Minors 2 Network of Guardianship of Unaccompanied Minors 3 4 5
<p>Stakeholders</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 National Mechanism for Unaccompanied Minors (Participation denied) 2 Emergency Accommodation Facilities for Unaccompanied Minors (participation denied-IOM) 3 Municipality of Athens-Immigrant Integration Center 4 Centers of Hospitality of Unaccompanied Minors (Arsis, KEAN, Apostoli) 5 Network For the Rights of the Child

Table 3. Service Domains, Key Providers, and Stakeholder Assessment of Adequacy (Athens)

Service Domain	Main Providers / Actors	Indicative Activities	Adequacy Assessment (1-5)	Qualitative Remarks
Accommodation & Basic Needs	NGO shelters, National Mechanism (via NGO partners), KFAA semi-independent housing	Emergency and long-term accommodation, food, clothing, daily care	3 – Partly adequate	Coverage improved but remains limited; transition to adulthood insufficiently planned
Legal Support & Guardianship	NGO lawyers, appointed guardians, specialised protection programs	Legal counselling, asylum registration, family reunification, representation	4 – Inadequate	Scarcity of guardians, legal bottlenecks in documentation, lack of legal aid programs only for minors (underfunded)
Psychosocial & Mental Health Support	NGO psychologists, shelter teams, adventure therapy initiatives	Counselling, trauma support, group activities	3 – Partly adequate	Services exist but continuity, trust-building and specialised trauma expertise remain weak
Education & Language Learning	NGO educators, public school integration classes	Career guidance, CV preparation, job search, employer liaison	4 – Inadequate	Few structured pathways Lack of vocational training
Recreation & Participation	NGOs, local community organisations, Municipality (facilitating role)	Sports, art, youth councils, community events	2 – Mostly adequate	Supports integration and well-being; sustainability project-dependent
Case Management & Outreach	Child Protection Units, Info Desks, Mobile Units	Street outreach, needs assessment, referral and accompaniment	3 – Partly adequate	High professional quality but coordination gaps between agencies
Interpretation & Mediation	NGO interpreters, cultural mediators	Support in asylum, medical, and educational settings	3 – Partly adequate	Essential but fragmented and underfunded
Municipal Coordination Functions	Municipality of Athens (Immigrant Integration Center)	Referral facilitation, access to municipal spaces	3 – Partly adequate (support role)	No direct child-protection or legal functions; complements NGO work through access and networking



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