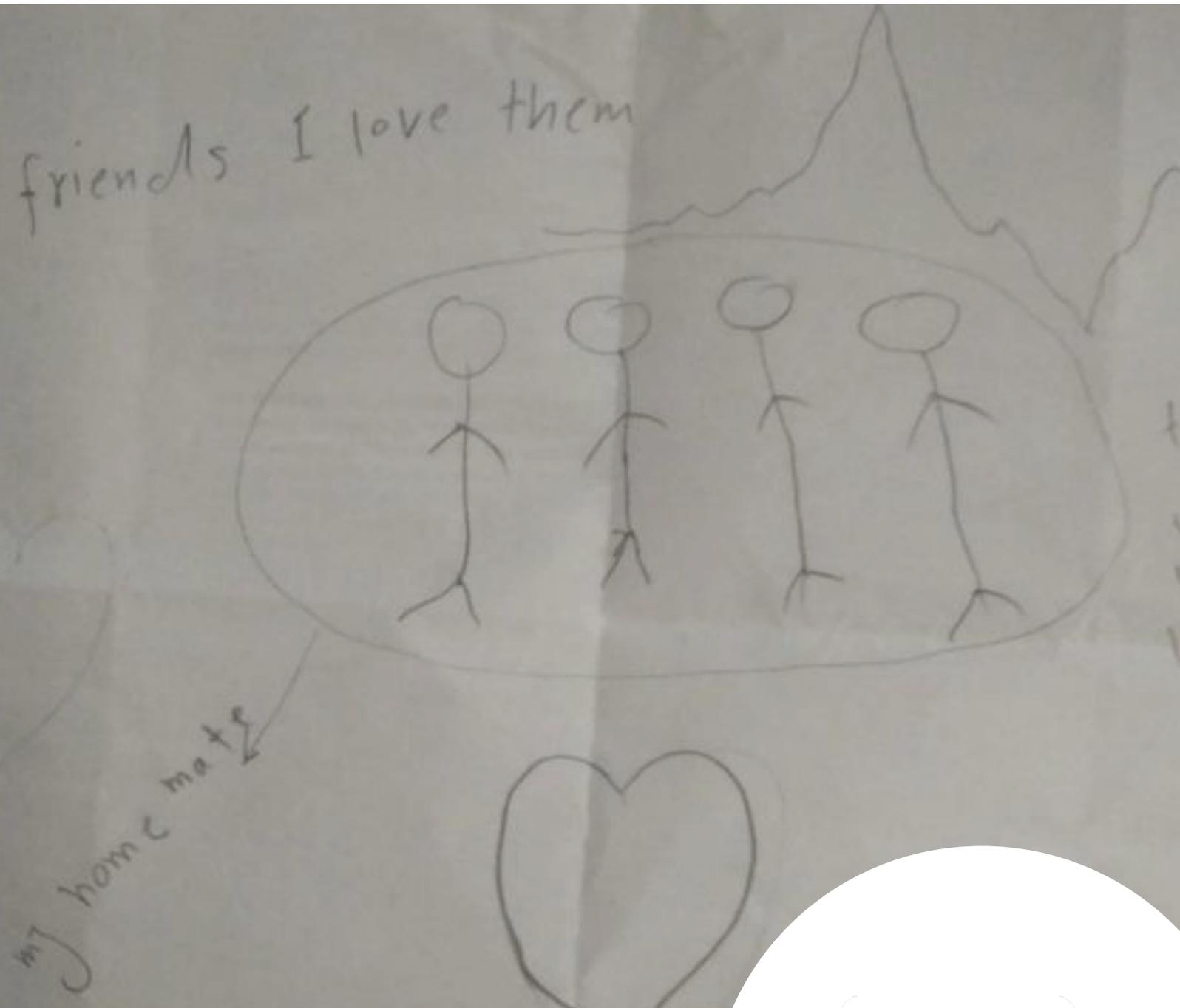


“The people who support us, they are like a mountain for me... high and strong.”

Integration of Unaccompanied Children in Greece: Opportunities, Challenges and Recommendations

2022



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Acknowledgements

This report presents the key findings of consultations conducted by METAdrasi- Action for Migration and Development, within the framework of the research project “Integration of children on the move between the Middle East and Europe” led by Family for Every Child. This research project includes consultations in Greece, Germany and Lebanon – key countries of transit and destination for unaccompanied and separated children. The findings of the report presented here allow for a better understanding of what works and what improvements are needed with regard to the integration of unaccompanied boys and girls living in Greece.

We are grateful to the Family for Every Child team – Joanna Wheeler, Anne-Marie Barry, Jonathan Blagbrough – for their guidance throughout the

process and their helpful comments on previous drafts of this report. Special thanks to Joanna Wheeler for her valuable insights throughout the Photovoice process and to Comic Relief for funding the project.

We would like to deeply thank METAdrasi’s staff in Athens for their time, support and participation in the project. Special thanks go to the foster parents for sharing their valuable experiences and to the key informants for their precious time and professional experience.

Our warmest and deepest gratitude is for the boys and girls who opened their houses, shared their time, experiences, concerns, dreams and hopes, and creatively participated in the Photovoice workshop.

List of acronyms

EKKA/NCSS	National Centre for Social Solidarity	UAM	Unaccompanied minor
FGDs	Focus group discussions	UASC	Unaccompanied and separated children
PV	Photovoice	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
SIL	Supported independent living		
SILA	Supported independent living for adults		

Glossary

Term	Definition
<i>Integration</i>	‘Integration’ is conceived here as the mutual process of a foreign-born child and his or her new hosting community learning to value and accept each other so that there is a sense of safety, sustainability and belonging. There are various conceptions and definitions of integration in the literature. This definition was formulated by Joanna Wheeler for the purposes of this study. It does not apply to children who are with their families and not separated.
<i>Transit country</i>	The place/country which is perceived as a temporary stage of the child’s journey until they reach their final destination.
<i>Supported Independent Living</i>	Care arrangements where children and young adults, in a small group, are encouraged to acquire – through the support of qualified staff – the necessary skills for autonomy in society (see Cantwell 2010).

Foster care

For the purposes of alternative care, “children are placed by a competent authority... in the domestic environment of a family other than the children’s own family that has been selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care” (see UN 2010 Article 29.c.ii).

Unaccompanied children/minors

Children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so (See [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action – 2019 edition](#), p.315).

Social cohesion

There is great ambiguity with this term in the literature. This report is largely in accordance with the definition employed by Jenson (1998) who has delineated five dimensions in his attempt to define social cohesion:

1. Affiliation/isolation (sharing of common values, feeling of belonging to the same community).
2. Insertion/exclusion (who has/does not have opportunities to participate in the economy).
3. Participation/passivity (involvement in management of public affairs, third sector).
4. Acceptance/rejection (pluralism in facts and also as a virtue, i.e., tolerance regarding differences).
5. Legitimacy/illegitimacy (maintenance of public and private institutions which act as mediators, i.e., how adequately the various institutions represent the people and their interests).

Abstract

The aim of this report is to present key findings and recommendations relating to the integration of children on the move- primarily from the Middle East to Europe- who are currently residing in Greece in alternative care arrangements, including foster care and supported independent living. Through this work we aim to contribute to better-targeted policymaking and practice on children's integration in Greece. Through qualitative research with 22

adult professionals and foster parents, and 22 unaccompanied children in alternative care, the study explores opportunities for integration as well as the challenges that remain to be addressed for these children. Findings and recommendations focus on both the successes of integration and the factors that hinder it, as well as actions to be implemented in order to foster the successful integration of unaccompanied children in the future.

Executive Summary

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups, especially those children who cross borders by force or voluntarily – be they migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. Children who cross borders without being accompanied by parents, relatives or adults who are responsible for their care by law or by custom are known as ‘unaccompanied minors (UAMs)’ or ‘unaccompanied children’.¹ These children are particularly exposed to risks such as exploitation and violence at various stages of their journey. With their arrival at frontline EU countries, such as Greece, one of the most pressing challenges is their protection and integration into the host society, their recognition and social participation.²

As of December 2021, 2,225 UAMs were residing in Greece, of which 1,650 in shelters, 305 in supported independent living (SIL) and the rest in other accommodation facilities. The vast majority of them are boys (91%), aged between 14–18 years old, mainly from Afghanistan (25%), Pakistan (25%) and Syria (11%). The rest mostly came from

African countries such as Somalia and Eritrea.³ Since January 2016, 38,105 children on the move have arrived in Greece, highlighting the need to safeguard their rights and needs within the context of integration in the host society. Although Greece is currently shifting its approach from being an “emergency” receiving country of asylum-seeking children to becoming a more long-term “host”, many children who arrive in the country still perceive it as “the doorstep of Europe”,⁴ in other words, a transit country.

This research project was conducted by METAdrasi's team, in collaboration with and under the guidance of Family for Every Child, as part of a project funded by Comic Relief. It provides an overview of the opportunities that children have for successful integration into Greece and the factors that constrain this integration, both at an individual and structural level.

¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) General Comment 6: Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin.

² Eide, K. (2007) Recognition and social integration: The interpretation of children on the move. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 7.2: 122–132.

³ NCSS (2021) GR EKKA dashboard 2021. Situation update: Unaccompanied children in Greece. 31 December 2021.

⁴ Cabot, H. (2014) *On the doorstep of Europe: Asylum and citizenship in Greece*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

METAdrasi has been implementing programmes for the reception and integration of refugees and migrants in Greece since 2009 and has been providing specialised services aiming at filling the existing gaps in the field of protection and care of UAMs and

responding to their needs. Such initiatives are the supported independent living (SIL) and supported independent living for adults (SILA) programmes, and the foster care scheme.

Programme	Age	Operational framework	Other info
SIL	16-18	UAMs are housed in apartments, with each hosting up to four young people. An interdisciplinary professional team facilitates their access to education, health and other necessary services, and supports their development, gradual autonomy and self-sufficiency. Project beneficiaries receive cash assistance of €150 per month, and support to manage this.	First launched in Greece by METAdrasi in January 2018 as a pilot, best-practice model, with the support of UNICEF, the Public Prosecutor for Minors, and the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA). ⁵ In 2019 the programme was scaled up significantly, with other organisations opening apartments, and in early 2020 a regulatory framework was introduced by the government. As of 2021, METAdrasi is operating 14 apartments and has hosted 173 beneficiaries since 2018.
SILA	18+	Young adults, who are former SIL residents, are hosted in apartments until they secure the minimum skills needed to live a fully independent life. They have access to psychosocial support, education and vocational training, job counselling and other services according to their needs.	The UAMs who have been granted asylum in Greece do not receive support, whether housing or financial assistance, from the day they come of age at 18. It is this institutional gap in the provision of protection and housing for young adults that METAdrasi aims to cover with the SILA programme. The first apartment began operating in 2018, and METAdrasi now operates three apartments for boys and one for girls, in Athens and Kalamata, and has hosted 163 beneficiaries since then.

⁵ European Website on Integration (2018) 'For the first time in Greece, supported independent living for refugee girls', 24 November.

Foster care	Until 18	Initially set up to provide a family environment until the child's reunification with their family, the large number of rejected reunification applications led to an expansion of the programme in 2017, through long-term fostering with adoption perspectives.	It became known in the refugee field through METAdrasi in 2016. The programme constitutes an international model of alternative care for minors and is implemented in accordance with the national law and the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child, and in collaboration with the Prosecutor's Office and all relevant authorities.
			Until today 109 children have been hosted in foster families.

The purpose of this study is to generate recommendations for the integration in host countries of children who move across borders, primarily through the Middle East to Europe corridor. It provides an overview of the existing integration pathways for UAMs living in alternative care in Greece, and of their transition to independence. It provides evidence on the factors that both facilitate and constrain the process of social inclusion and participation in society and aims to contribute to better-targeted policymaking and practice on the integration of UAMs. To achieve these recommendations, it has been necessary to involve those with lived experience on the issue, as well as practitioners and professionals who can provide evidence from their experience of working on issues related to children's integration.

The main objectives of the research have been to identify issues regarding UAM's integration, through answering the following three questions:

- a) What are the successes of locally integrating UAMs in Greece?
- b) What are the challenges of locally integrating UAMs in Greece?
- c) What improvements to policy and practice are needed?

All of these questions were addressed through consultations with the project's participants, which took place between March and November 2021 with children and young adults aged 16 –18. The innovation of this research project lies in the Photovoice workshop—a participatory approach where the participants express their thoughts, ideas and concerns through active engagement and photography.

The methodological framework is qualitative, incorporating participatory action research methodology, focus group discussions and individual interviews. The report draws on the findings from the perspectives of children and their caregivers at the supported independent living (SIL) apartments as well as the supported independent living apartments for young adults (SILA) and those within foster care. Data was collected through four focus group discussions with 16 unaccompanied children and young adults (the three young adults had recently turned 18); three Photovoice sessions with eight unaccompanied children (two of these participants took part in both the focus group discussions and Photovoice) - all of whom were residents of SIL and SILA. There were also three focus groups with 12 SIL support workers, and one focus group discussion with six foster

Legal status

This plays a crucial role in integration, which in some instances is additionally affected by individual motives (e.g. unaccompanied children who are not entitled to asylum in Greece may try harder to learn the language and find a job to increase the likelihood of staying). Delays in the asylum examination process, along with complex and incomprehensible administrative procedures seriously affect children's psychology, access to education and employment.

Age

Most unaccompanied children arrive in Greece at 16–17 years old and have little time before their adulthood, and thus their obligatory moving out of the SIL. This transition affects their efforts in social participation, language learning, school attendance, their opportunities to acquire professional skills, and the establishment of relationships.

parents. The report also incorporates findings from interviews conducted with four key informants who are involved in the provision of care to UAMs.

During Photovoice sessions, the eight children actively discussed their concerns via the use of photography, raised community issues via group discussions, and brought up points to reach policy makers and achieve social change on matters that affect their well-being.⁶ While a summary of findings from the Photovoice project is included in this report, the full findings and details about the methodology can be found in a separate report.

The key findings on the integration of UAMs are outlined below.

Relationships

Formal and informal relationships with adults and peers including supportive staff are essential in the social inclusion of unaccompanied minors, especially in supporting them to navigate through the challenges of their current lives. In particular, the role of the social worker in alternative care settings and the role of the educator in schools is crucial, according to UAMs. Trusted relationships and support seem to play an important role in the establishment of these networks.

Family

Close communication and bonds with families back home is crucial and fundamental for the well-being of unaccompanied minors. They seek regular contact with their parents, who reassure and encourage their “doing well” in the host country.

Education

Enrolment in public schools and vocational training plays an important role in unaccompanied minors' integration in the host society.

⁶ Wang, C. and Burris, M.A. (1997) Photovoice: Concept, methodology and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behaviour*, 24: 369–387.

Work

Unemployment and difficulties in accessing the job market cause anxiety and frustration for children who perceive a job and income as essential to settling in the host country and becoming integrated. Precarious labour opportunities or working with compatriots are often alternatives that do not foster their integration and feeling of belonging.

Alternative care models

Foster care is a positive alternative care model with beneficial outcomes, especially for younger children, whereas both SIL and SILA care models are particularly helpful in enhancing independence and autonomy for older children and young people.

Discrimination

Hostile attitudes and racism from locals in the job market, education, social services and healthcare in the host community hinder integration and create a feeling of hostility towards unaccompanied minors.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and background

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups, especially those children who cross borders by force or voluntarily – be they migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. Children who cross borders without being accompanied by parents, relatives or adults who are responsible for their care by law or by custom are known as ‘unaccompanied minors (UAM)’ or ‘unaccompanied children’.⁷ These children are particularly exposed to risks such as exploitation and violence in various stages of their movement. With their arrival in frontline EU countries, such as Greece, one of the most pressing challenges is their protection and integration in the host society, their recognition and their social participation.⁸

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, children comprise almost half of all forcibly displaced people.⁹ It is estimated that in 2019, 202,945 children sought asylum in Europe,¹⁰ almost one-third of all the new asylum seekers in Europe. This number includes children who were accompanied by adults as well as unaccompanied and separated children who have intentionally fled their home countries or were forced to leave. The increasing numbers of children who cross borders have challenged governments to comply with global frameworks for children’s safeguarding and well-being.

Unaccompanied minors (UAMs) are children affected by forced or voluntary migration, who arrive in an EU Member State without an adult responsible for them by the law or the custom of the EU Member State concerned. The causes of UAMs’ migration are diverse, and are often associated with political upheaval in the countries of origin, war, violent and

oppressive regimes, poverty and hardship. With their arrival in frontline EU countries such as Greece, these children face numerous challenges in regards to their reception, settling in and integration. Their thoughts, actions, relationships and feelings are very much affected by the current social and legal structures that impact their rights, in areas such as social support and care, learning and education, healthcare, asylum and social participation.

Despite almost all countries- including Greece- having signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) over 30 years ago – thus acknowledging the importance of the recognition and promotion of children’s rights – significant action has only been taken within the last two decades.¹¹ Still, very little is known about what works for children on the move in receiving countries and whether professionals and policy makers support children’s real needs or what is deemed in their best interests, under the existing policy and legal frameworks.

The increased arrivals of asylum-seeking people in Greece in 2015 and 2016, together with additional political developments such as the closure of the borders by the Balkan countries and the EU-Turkey agreement in the spring of 2016, resulted in thousands of trapped asylum seekers and migrants – among them many unaccompanied children- who had no choice but to seek asylum in Greece, turning Greece into a ‘host’ country.

Since January 2016, 38,105 children on the move have arrived in Greece.¹² The presence of UAMs in Greece who need protection has highlighted the existing shortcomings in the protection system and has put pressure on the government and policy makers to address these issues and introduce new

⁷ Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) General Comment 6: Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin

⁸ Eide, K. (2007) Recognition and social integration: The interpretation of children on the move. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 7.2: 122–132.

⁹ UNHCR (2017) Global trends – Forced displacement in 2017. Geneva: UN Refugee Agency.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Odysseus Academic Network (2009) Unaccompanied minors’ rights within the European Union: Is the EU asylum and immigration legislation in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child? Bruxelles: OAN.

¹² NCSS (2021) GR EKKA dashboard 2021. Situation update: Unaccompanied children in Greece. 15 January 2021

protection schemes, in line with the international frameworks for safeguarding the rights of children. The critical lack of suitable accommodation facilities has prevented UAMs from enjoying appropriate reception conditions on the islands and has meant that many children have had to live in insecure or/and precarious conditions with unknown adults.¹³ As of 15 January 2020, there were 4,048 UAMs in Greece but only 1,715 places available in long-term dedicated accommodation facilities.¹⁴ As of December 2021, 2,225 UAMs were residing in Greece, of which 1,650 in shelters, 305 in SIL and the rest in other accommodation facilities. The vast majority of them are boys (91%), aged between 14–18 years old (92%), mainly from Afghanistan (25%), Pakistan (25%) and Syria (11%). The rest mostly came from African countries such as Somalia and Eritrea.¹⁵

The actions eventually taken, especially since 2017, to protect these children from experiencing homelessness, exploitation, violence and abuse resulted in improvements in the protection system. These involved the relocation programme, the ratification of legislation on alternative care models such as foster care and supported independent living (SIL) and supported independent living for adults (SILA), guardianship and the abolition of protective custody in 2021. These are reflected in the following quotation:

“We have done many steps forward for the protection system the last three years. Together, in cooperation with the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, we managed to relocate two children in EU countries who eventually became more than a hundred. We managed to convince the ministry to implement the SIL program – very important for the minors to have a safe home and work on their integration... So... yes, we have made progress in this respect.”

(KII 2, Child protection expert, working in UNHCR)

The alternative care models and the relocation programme have been positively received by many professionals in the field of the protection of UAMs.

Although significant steps have been taken in order to shift from temporary reception policies into a more long-term system for the care and support of UAMs and to include integration strategies, the shift towards long-term integration policies has yet to be fully implemented. This is also reflected in the following quotation of a key informant who shared:

“There are some efforts to integrate unaccompanied minors who arrive in Greece, but in reality, we keep on thinking this is a temporary issue and not a permanent one that we should provide long-term solutions [for]. We think of the refugee issue as being a flu that will eventually go away in the short term. We keep on thinking in terms of an ‘emergency’ and this is reflected in the way we treat these children.”

(KII 1, secretariat for unaccompanied minors’ unit, Reception and Identification Center of Lesbos)

The challenges in shifting to long-term solutions and towards an inclusive approach are evident in a number of areas such as the social, cultural, political, economic and legal outcomes that may be attained at different times and to varying degrees. The aim of this research is to provide an overview of the existing integration pathways of UAMs who reside in alternative care models in Greece. Specifically, the research aims to provide evidence on the factors that impact the integration of UAMs, and that either facilitate or constrain the process of social inclusion and participation in society.

The research examines five areas of interest: i) social and cultural aspects of integration, ii) education, iii) employment pathways, iv) legal aspects of integration, and v) aspects of social cohesion.

The findings presented aim to provide recommendations to Greek institutions, policy makers and civil society organisations (CSOs) to increase the opportunities for these children to reach their full potential as active members of society while transitioning to adulthood.

¹³ For instance, see UNHCR (2019) ‘Lone children face insecurity on the Greek islands’, 14 October.

¹⁴ Source: AIDA & ECRE (2020) Overview of the main changes since the previous report update, 10 June 2020.

¹⁵ NCSS (2021) GR EKKA dashboard 2021. Situation update: Unaccompanied children in Greece. 15 January 2021

1.2. The work of METAdrasi

METAdrasi has been implementing programmes for the reception and integration of refugees and migrants in Greece since 2009 and has been providing specialised services aiming at filling the existing gaps

in the field of protection and care of unaccompanied minors and responding to their needs. Such initiatives are the supported independent living (SIL) and supported independent living for adults (SILA) programmes and the foster care scheme.

Programme	Age	Operational framework	Other info
SIL	16-18	UAMs are housed in apartments, with each hosting up to four young people. An interdisciplinary professional team facilitates their access to education, health and other necessary services, and supports their development, gradual autonomy and self-sufficiency. Project beneficiaries receive cash assistance of €150 per month, and support to manage this.	First launched in Greece by METAdrasi in January 2018 as a pilot, best-practice model, with the support of UNICEF, the Public Prosecutor for Minors, and the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA). ⁵ In 2019 the programme was scaled up significantly, with other organisations opening apartments, and in early 2020 a regulatory framework was introduced by the government. As of 2021, METAdrasi is operating 14 apartments and has hosted 173 beneficiaries since 2018.
SILA	18+	Young adults, who are former SIL residents, are hosted in apartments until they secure the minimum skills needed to live a fully independent life. They have access to psychosocial support, education and vocational training, job counselling and other services according to their needs.	The UAMs who have been granted asylum in Greece do not receive support, whether housing or financial assistance, from the day they come of age at 18. It is this institutional gap in the provision of protection and housing for young adults that METAdrasi aims to cover with the SILA programme. The first apartment began operating in 2018, and METAdrasi now operates three apartments for boys and one for girls, in Athens and Kalamata, and has hosted 163 beneficiaries since then.

Foster care	Until 18	Initially set up to provide a family environment until the child's reunification with their family, the large number of rejected reunification applications led to an expansion of the programme in 2017, through long-term fostering with adoption perspectives.	It became known in the refugee field through METAdrasi in 2016. The programme constitutes an international model of alternative care for minors and is implemented in accordance with the national law and the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child, and in collaboration with the Prosecutor's Office and all relevant authorities. Until today 109 children have been hosted in foster families.
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2. Research methodology and tools

2.1. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to generate recommendations for the integration in host countries of children who move across borders, primarily through the Middle East to the Europe corridor. It provides an overview of the existing integration pathways of unaccompanied minors living in alternative care in Greece, and of their transition to independence. It provides evidence on the factors that either facilitate or constrain the process of social inclusion and participation in society of these children, and aims to contribute to better-targeted policymaking and practice for their integration. To achieve these recommendations, it has been necessary to involve those with lived experience on the issue, as well as practitioners and professionals who can provide evidence from their experience of working on issues of integration of children.

2.2. Objectives

The main objectives of the research have been to identify issues regarding the integration of unaccompanied minors, through answering the following three questions:

- a) What are the successes of locally integrating UAMs in Greece?**
- b) What are the challenges of locally integrating UAMs in Greece?**
- c) What improvements to policy and practice are needed?**

2.3. Consultation activities

Focus group discussions with children and young adults: the purpose of the FGDs was to understand more about both the challenges faced by unaccompanied minors and young adults, and the opportunities available for their integration, from their own perspective. These group discussions also examined the availability of services, the way in

which children and young adults experienced them, and the existing gaps. We conducted a total of **four FGDs with 16 young people** aged between 16 and 18. Of these four FGDs, three were conducted with participants living in METAdrasi's SIL facilities, and one FGD was conducted with young adult participants living in METAdrasi's SILA and who had previously resided in METAdrasi's SIL.

Gender distribution

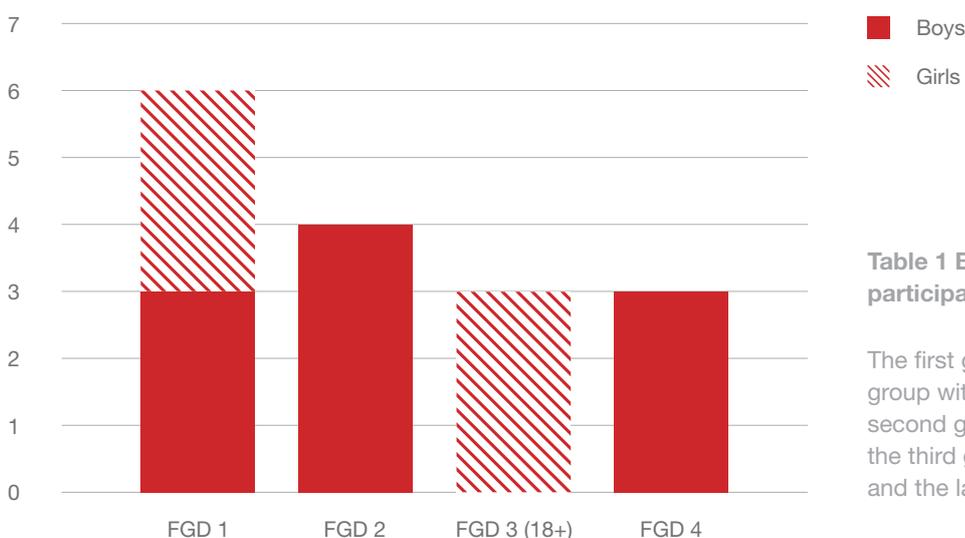


Table 1 Breakdown of young participants by gender

The first group was a mixed-gender group with three boys and three girls, the second group comprised of four boys, the third group involved three adult girls and the last group involved three boys.

The majority of the young people who participated in FGDs spoke in their native languages, with professional interpreters employed by METAdrasi to translate their words. In a few cases, the children participated in English, as they were fluent in a way that did not affect their ability to share their experiences and feelings. Consultations were conducted face-to-face as a means to establish more solid relationships and create a safe and secure

environment for the children to open up and freely express their views on sensitive issues. All necessary hygiene measures were followed according to the national guidelines (wearing protective facial masks, keeping appropriate distance, keeping windows open, and using hand sanitizers). All of the sessions were conducted face-to-face, at the shared apartments of SIL and SILA.

Country of Origin of UAMs and Young Adults participants

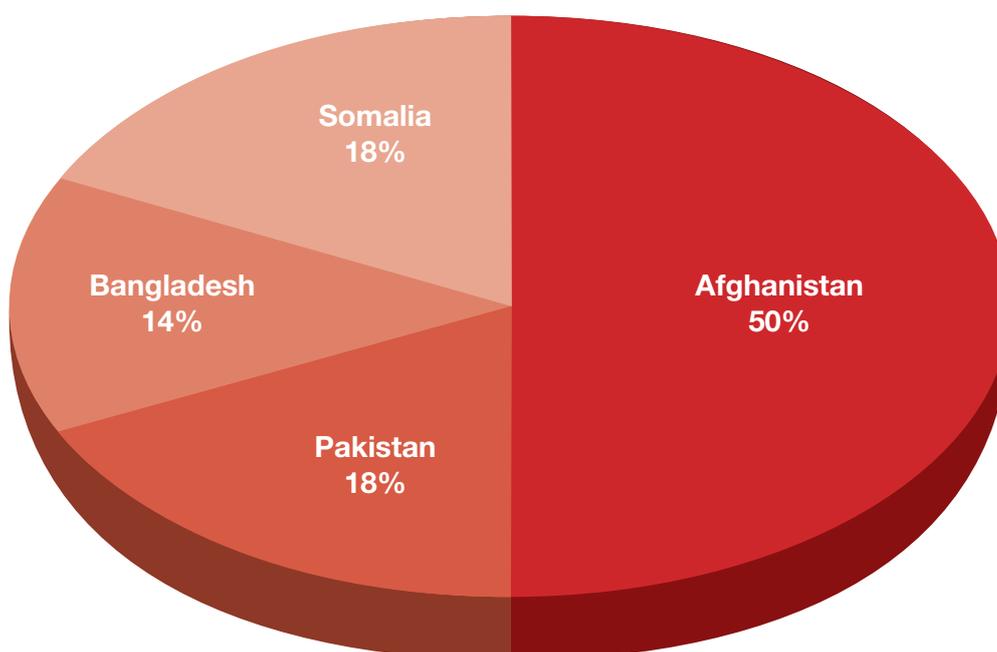


Table 2 Breakdown of young participants by country of origin

Focus group discussions with SIL support workers and foster parents of UAMs: the purpose of the FGDs with adult caregivers was to better understand both the challenges faced by unaccompanied minors and the opportunities available for their integration, from the perspectives of those directly involved in their care. Additionally, the focus of these group discussions was on family/care dynamics and experiences of the services available, and how these experiences influence the integration of children and young people. In total, we conducted four FGDs with adult carers. Of these four FGDs, three were conducted with SIL support workers and one with foster parents. Overall, 12 SIL

support workers and six foster parents participated in the FGDs. The groups were mixed-gender and the discussions were conducted online due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Interviews with key informants: these provided additional information on the issues that the study seeks to address. Four individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals who work for NGOs, the government or the UN, or hold policy roles. The interviews focused on policies and services related to integration. All interviews were conducted online.

2.4. Photovoice project

A Photovoice (PV) research project was planned and delivered by METAdrasi's team after online training from Family for Every Child. Photovoice is a participatory action research methodology and has been widely recognised as an influential approach with the potential to develop insights from people's lived experiences, "which in turn can challenge prevailing representations, promote dialogue and contribute to social change".¹⁷ It aims to empower and bring positive change to participants, who often belong to groups of people whose voices are marginalised or ignored. Participants use photography to advocate for issues they value and to improve their lives.

Photovoice was used to create a safe and creative space through which participants had the opportunity to document their concerns and strengths and act as "catalysts for change".¹⁸ It also stimulates interest about important topics that are related to the community and allows participants from diverse groups to break language and cultural barriers and communicate through the art of photography.

Participants in this project are seen as social actors in their own right and not simply as research 'objects'. They have the power to act as co-researchers, and highlight their strengths and concerns. They are actively engaged in every stage of the process by making decisions, documenting and analysing material, and also critically reflecting on their photographs and narratives. Hence, young participants can use Photovoice as an important tool and raise awareness around matters that are traditionally difficult to address.

The workshop was conducted in November 2021. An introductory session took place to familiarise the children with the concept, purpose and techniques of Photovoice. Out of 16 children who attended the

introductory session, eight Afghan boys, all residents of SIL, consented to participate in three core sessions at METAdrasi's educational centre. Consent forms and information sheets were handed out prior to the sessions, all translated into the participants' native languages and a PV trained interpreter was present to facilitate the sessions. The Photovoice workshops were participatory, enabling participants to get involved at all stages of the process, including the selection of the working topics and the analysis of the photos. The topics that the children chose to work with were a) the city of Athens and b) relationships with the community.

While a summary of findings from the Photovoice project is included in [this report](#), the full findings and details about the methodology can be found in a separate report on METAdrasi's website.

2.5. Ethics and safeguarding

An ethical protocol was developed by Family for Every Child and METAdrasi to ensure that the children were protected, that the proper documentation was completed and that consent was obtained from research participants. Consent documentation included formal and legal consent forms for adult participants, and the approval of the study by the public prosecutor responsible for all of the participants. The underage participants themselves either signed consent forms or gave oral consent, ensuring that they agreed to participate. Guidelines were also provided to the research team by the lead researcher of Family for Every Child at each stage of the research process, to ensure that all activities concerning the collection and processing of data were in line with the current legislation, as well as with METAdrasi's and Family's for Every Child's guidelines. At all stages of the research with children, METAdrasi's Child Safeguarding Policy was implemented.

¹⁷ Milne, E-J. & Muir, R. (2020) Photovoice: A critical introduction, Chapter 17. In L. Pauwels & D. Mannay (eds.), *The Sage handbook of visual research methods*: 284.

¹⁸ Wang, C. & Burris, M-A. (1997). 'Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment'. *Health, Education and Behaviour*, 24: 369–387: 369.

3. Findings

3.1. Social and cultural aspects of integration

Social and cultural aspects of integration refer to processes through which various ethnic groups are brought together while maintaining their identity. These are also indicators of the social and cultural services newcomers have access to, along with the relationships they build with others in the host society.

Various social and cultural factors interplay and shape the integration of unaccompanied children. We have defined key areas to allow us to listen and better understand how these young boys and girls and their caregivers perceive their involvement in social life and the possibilities they have for accessing education and training and the job market, and achieving independence.

3.1.1. Education

All school-age children, irrespective of legal status and including UAMs, are required to attend primary and secondary school in similar conditions to Greek children and to be enrolled in the public education system.¹⁹ Most of the participants in this research project referred to the crucial role of the school setting in integration. One support worker stated that UAMs' access to education is paramount in creating opportunities for active participation in society, and opening paths towards independence.

Support workers also agreed that intercultural schools²⁰ constrain opportunities for integration, as refugee and migrant children do not contact or relate to local children in the same way as they do at mainstream schools. Intercultural educational policy was introduced

in 1996 in Greece, in response to the high rates of migration and diversity, to address the specific needs of refugee and migrant children. This policy, and the intercultural schools created through it, have been highly criticised by educators and policy makers who think that intercultural education should be fully implemented within all public schools to promote integration.²¹ These concerns were echoed by the worries of the support workers and caregivers who took part in this study. Ordinary public schools, where refugee children can mix together with local children and follow the same educational plan, are widely perceived as being more effective for integration.

The majority of UAMs participating in the FGD and PV were enrolled in a school setting. Some of these young participants emphasised the role of education in their current lives:

“We were living in Afghanistan with no safety, no education, we escaped to Greece and came here and realised that we can educate ourselves and be safe. We started going to school and we want to live here.”

(16-year-old Afghan boy, resident of SIL)

It is notable that the UAMs who expressed positive perspectives on education and learning procedures had been settled for some years in Greece and had a good level of literacy in Greek.

At the same time, discrimination is clearly presented as a factor which restricts young people's opportunities to create links with their peers and teachers and with the wider community. This came out most significantly in group discussions. As one young participant shared his experience of school:

¹⁹ Article 51 - Law 4636/2019 - (Article 14 of Directive 2013/33/EU) Education of minors

²⁰ These are public schools with more than 40% of their student population consisted of foreign and/or repatriate students. Even though they follow the national curriculum guidelines, they adjust in a number of teaching approaches and techniques towards

the establishment of an intercultural and citizenship dimension in education. *Journal Plus Education*, Vol XIV (2016), No. 1. pp.357-374

²¹ Palaiologou, N. & Faas, D. (2012) How 'intercultural' is education in Greece? Insights from policymakers and educators. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 42.4: 563–584.

“I had the opportunity to go to school for two months before the lockdown, with some guys from Afghanistan and Pakistan. It was in the countryside and the locals did not want us to blend in with the Greek students. We were like aliens to them.”

(16-year-old Bangladeshi boy, resident of SIL)

Another factor that has a crucial role in enhancing the process of integration is related to the possibility of combining employment and school. The young residents of SIL/SILA underlined the significance of having an income without losing the opportunity to attend school. In particular, some children pointed out the inadequacy of the cash assistance they receive to cover their needs. Some of them also expressed their frustration towards and lack of interest in school attendance. In particular, they mentioned that they did not go to school, as they did not like it or because “school is boring”. Others expressed their preference for following a vocational pathway that will provide hands-on skills instead of being enrolled in ordinary public school. Additionally, children who had arrived a few months prior to the consultations were not enrolled in schools.

Foster families also noted that bureaucracy and administrative procedures for enrolling refugee children in schools have made it quite challenging to access public schools. The obstacles mainly seemed to be related to the attitudes and willingness of school administrative staff as well as the incomprehensible bureaucratic procedures. It is worth noting that a foster parent mentioned that he sought the intervention of a public prosecutor as this was deemed necessary for the enrolment of the child in school.

Hostile attitudes towards refugee and migrant children who reside in Greece have been well-documented.²² Recurring episodes of such behaviours may severely interrupt UAMs’ efforts and motivation to settle in the host society. When there is lack of recognition, there are increased possibilities for social alienation.²³ Hostility and xenophobia focus on

cultural characteristics (a focus on children’s ethnic and cultural background) and stereotypes are often linked to security issues (the idea that refugee/migrant people do not deserve the same rights or that they are dangerous). Discrimination and hostility may influence UAMs’ mental health and create anxiety around accessing the fundamental right of education and feeling equal members of society.

3.1.2. Employment pathways

As already stated, employment, along with education, is paramount for creating possibilities for integration. Both SIL and SILA residents expressed their concerns over the difficulty of finding work in Greece. Inevitably, this has been more obvious for the residents of SILA who had reached adulthood and could offer more tangible testimonies on their job-hunting experiences. For some UAMs, accessing the job market is even harder due to discrimination, and they are aware of this. Their confidence and self-esteem are undermined, and their feeling of security in their surrounding context is overshadowed by their struggle to access employment.

One young Somali woman expressed her disappointment following her efforts to find work in Athens. She said: **“When looking for a job, my faith and covering of my hair is always an obstacle. How can we overcome this?”**

Achieving financial independence is a great challenge and was mostly framed by anxiety, stress and insecurity for the SILA residents. Employment concerns them a lot and they expressed their disappointment, especially due to the discrimination they experience. Finding a job with someone from the same ethnicity constitutes an alternative option when facing difficulties entering the job market. This option was confirmed by the support workers. Particularly, they referred to cases of young people who sought work with compatriots in the formal or informal job market, expressing their concerns about the impact of this on their integration.

²² UNICEF (2001) Discrimination-racism-xenophobia in the Greek educational system.

²³ Eide, K. (2007) Recognition and social integration: The interpretation of children on the move. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 7.2: 122–132.

According to a NSCR study²⁴ the Greek labour market has always treated certain population groups, such as women and immigrants, unequally. Gender and nationality, among other factors, have been the most common structural factors that hinder equal participation in employment.²⁵ According to the same study, discrimination appears from the recruiting stage onwards and prevails especially among women and former UAMs. The limited job opportunities (no matter their skills and aspirations) further restrict their inclusion and hinder their integration, increasing stress and disappointment for these young people.

3.1.3. Alternative care (SIL/SILA and foster care)

The young participants shared positive insights about the SIL programme, with some expressing their gratitude for having a home, food and people they can trust, and for being able to seek solutions and support when they need it. As one of the girls living in SIL stated:

“We really appreciate the support we have from METAdrasi: it’s a big help for us to have a place to stay and all the support.”

(17-year-old Afghan girl, resident of SIL)

Such statements confirm the importance of programmes like SIL, as these offer an environment in which children can reside, access services and interact with peers and adults within a community setting. Similar views were expressed by young adult women living in SILA, underlying the value for them of feeling safe and secure in their current environment. In the same way, foster care is perceived as very beneficial, especially for younger children, in terms of their and the whole foster family’s well-being, including the biological children of the foster parents. A foster parent of a six-year-old boy said:

“We are impressed by how well he has adjusted to the family, and by the bonds that have been created with all the members of the family. It’s an experience that has enriched our lives.”

Caregivers compared the living conditions of children and young adults before and after entering SIL/SILA and foster care, suggesting that these models speed up the autonomy process, since they get the opportunities they need to develop necessary life skills (e.g. cooking, money management) and to engage with the local community. However, the past experiences of UAMs often constitute a challenge for the caregivers who face children’s ongoing trauma and their lack of motivation to act flexibly and to engage in new activities that would benefit their lives.

“Children who enter SIL are already exhausted and mentally affected due to their past experiences, journeys and reception conditions in Greece. This is a reality that we have to deal with.”

(FGD 1, SIL support worker)

The success of this alternative care model is significantly affected by the availability of resources and uninterrupted funding. In the absence of secure and sufficient funding, there are serious implications in developing long-term and sustainable approaches, with positive outcomes that boost independence, meaningfully move away from emergency-response care models, close gaps, and avoid institutionalisation methods, or other methods not suited to teenagers. This was raised as a major issue by the support workers who confirmed that interruptions in funding created problems in service delivery, especially regarding educational, recreational, sport and cultural activities for UAMs. As they explained, looking for emergency solutions such as involving volunteers in service delivery cannot be anything but a temporary solution; they also highlighted the need to address this issue in the context of providing long-term and permanent solutions.

Complementary factors/dynamics relating to alternative care models’ role in integration.

Age: the age at which UAMs enter alternative care was identified by support workers as having a significant impact throughout their efforts to support UAMs’ trajectories towards autonomy and social

²⁴ National Centre for Social Research (EKKE) (2014) Vulnerable social groups and discrimination in the labour market. EKKE.

²⁵ Ibid.

participation. Support workers underscored that children's integration is challenged by the fact that the majority of UAMs enter SIL at the age of 17 or older, a factor which adds stress and tension on both sides, due to the absence of time to work properly on integration aspects. The criteria for entering care arrangements seem to play a crucial role when considering what works and what does not work in alternative care facilities.

UAMs who had been in Greece for only a few months before their involvement in the research project demonstrated a lack of motivation for making efforts towards integration. However, UAMs who have been living in Greece for years perceived the possibility of staying in Greece more positively. Additionally, foster parents thought of integration for younger children entering foster care in a very optimistic way.

Ethnicity: There were mixed views concerning ethnicity and its impact on the integration process. One SIL support worker referred to ethnicity as an important factor that influences young people's motivation and goal setting for integration:

“What I have observed is that children from Pakistan, who have very few chances to receive asylum, try harder. They go to school or get a job to increase their chances of staying.”

(FGD 4, SIL support worker)

Afghan UAMs expressed interest in the possibility of establishing a life in Greece, referring to the importance of learning and of finding employment soon. On the contrary, UAMs from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Somalia felt that it is more difficult to stay in Greece.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions on whether ethnicity impacts on the processes of integration for UAMs in Greece; we can only make some remarks based on the views of the participants. However, it should be stated that ethnicity is a factor that interplays with other variants such as the age, background, personal history, migration status and expectations of each participant, and cannot stand on its own as a determinant factor towards integration.

3.2. Legal aspects of integration

Legislation, but more importantly the effort required to obtain a legal status, which often involves complex and incomprehensible obstacles when accessing public services, constitutes a real barrier to the lives of UAMs. Legal status in all cases is the major factor that positively or negatively impacts children and young people who are 25 in the process of social integration, whether they are residents of SIL, or have turned 18 and are looking for a job.

In one FGD, a boy talked about the slow legal process in Greece. For example, UAMs and young adults sometimes have to wait two years for an asylum interview, and the probability of being rejected is high. According to young participants' accounts, laws change constantly, completely altering the procedures from one day to another, while they have to cope with the psychological burden of insecurity about their future. Both boys and girls talked about stressful feelings stemming from the unclear outcomes of the legal procedures and referred to the psychological impact of this insecurity on their everyday lives. One girl shared:

“We think all the time about this and it brings a lot of stress; you can be rejected and you may have to leave and have no money.”

(18-year-old Afghan girl)

Another girl, who talked about the emotional impact of living with the insecurity, shared:

“We just survive, we don't live, we are mentally stressed and we get disappointed.”

(18-year-old Somali girl, SILA resident)

Research results from the FGDs with adults indicate that lack of legal documents, along with the complex bureaucratic procedures, generates anxiety, fear and frustration for children and young adults. “Being in a constant transition”, from the moment they arrive until their current residency in SIL/SILA, in some cases affects their motivation for getting on with their everyday lives and putting serious efforts towards

integration. The professionals also highlighted that even when UAMs and young adults are eligible for asylum, the situation does not significantly improve; on the contrary, it is just the beginning of another round of administrative procedures that stress their patience and impact their well-being.

Generally, the data coming out of FGDs with support workers revealed that the young people rarely have a positive perception about the outcome of their personal case in legal terms – for example, they might believe they have minimal chances of obtaining legal status in Greece, and this creates a lack of interest in integration. In this sense, legal status is perceived as an obstacle in the work of SIL support workers to help young people become autonomous and reach their full potential. This situation requires particular attention, such as the need to ensure the stability of UAMs' legal status. This is a necessary condition for any meaningful attempt towards their integration.

3.3. Aspects of social cohesion

Key aspects of social cohesion have been studied, exploring society's degree of acceptance of migration, from both sides – migrants' and refugees' attitudes compared to those of the native-born. Other research has shown that positive indicators of social cohesion are the extent to which migrants and refugees feel integrated, have a sense of belonging, and experience the overall life satisfaction of all citizens.²⁶

During Photovoice sessions, children shared photos through which they wanted to express the type of society they want. They spoke about the importance of diversity and respect in an open society, whose members have equal opportunities. In one of the sessions, a participant shared:

“We should be all together and live in respect with no arguments. Our society should be like this... in diversity and have respect for each other.”

(16-year-old Afghan boy)

3.3.1. Access to and quality of services

Generally, difficulties were mentioned by UAMs and young adults in relation to accessing social services to issue important documents, such as a social security number (AMKA and PAAYPA), and a tax registration number (AFM). Access to health care services was mentioned as particularly problematic. The participants shared that they did not receive quality healthcare whenever they went to public hospitals and that they had experienced hostile attitudes on the grounds of their race and ethnicity. Discrimination also worried them when they had to access social services for bureaucratic procedures and obtain documents.

They also referred to the indifferent behaviours of public servants when it came to serving them. For example, an 18-year-old Afghan girl shared:

“They don't pay attention to us in the public services; they are old people without the energy to work.”

Such attitudes seem to further exacerbate the existing administrative and bureaucratic obstacles. One boy who wanted to be enrolled in EPAS (vocational training school) expressed his frustration with not being issued with a tax number, an AFM. Without an AFM, he could not be enrolled in school. All of the above obstacles leave young people in limbo, anxious and uncertain of their future- a situation also observed by the support workers.

Although the above-mentioned hindrances have always been a challenge for UAMs and young adults, further restrictions as an outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic caused serious delays in accessing social, healthcare and asylum services, schools and community services, such as recreational, sport and educational activities, thus aggravating their burden. The support workers highlighted changes in the mental state of the UAMs, expressed concerns that they had fewer opportunities to engage in activities, and highlighted their extensive inactivity, especially

²⁶ Hadjiyani, A. (2010) On social cohesion in Greece. Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville, The 31.1: 7–40.

during the months when schools were closed due to lockdowns. Studying through online courses was a further challenge for the young people who did not always have access to equipment for attending classes, or who found themselves constantly dealing with problems raised by the rocky transition to virtual life. On the contrary, once activities resumed, children practicing sports stressed its major importance in their everyday life:

“Exercise is something that helps me, encourages me, makes me a stronger person to go every day and see a positive development in myself through it.”

(17-year-old Afghan boy, resident of SIL)

3.3.2. Networks of care/family dynamics

During FGDs, we asked the young participants to think of the most important networks of care in their lives and draw them on a piece of paper. Both girls and boys highlighted the vital role of their families and relatives in their lives. They underscored the need to maintain a relationship with their families and some shared that their family was a major support to them. In some instances, young people avoided providing more information about their relationships with their parents. A clear case was a boy, who mentioned:

“I drew a picture of me and my mother. I can’t talk about this – I get really emotional when I think of her. I was very attached to her back in Bangladesh and I really want to go and see her.”

(17-year-old Bangladeshi boy)

This boy chose to keep the picture for himself, as he became emotional and was not willing to share it with the group.

From a different angle, the SIL support workers highlighted the impact the family of origin had on the expectations of UAMs. Once in Greece, many children want to work and send money back home, prioritising this over working towards an integration pathway. They mentioned that these children and young people

often get disappointed when they realise that there are several steps they need to take before actually being able to find work in Greece, such as legal and citizenship procedures, learning the language, receiving education or vocational training. Some come to terms with this realisation and try to follow the recommended plan while others try to find alternative solutions, such as being involved in formal/informal jobs through the contacts they have with people of the same ethnicity.

UAMs and young adults also perceived friends and their families back home as an important network of care in their lives and valued their relationships with support workers and other METAdrasi staff, from whom they receive support and guidance. Most of them included support workers and caregivers as “important figures” in their lives. The following drawing by 17-year-old Afghan boy is quite revealing, as is his explanation of what he has drawn.

“First, I drew the guys – four of us – that we live here in the house; the guys are very nice and good. Out of the house, I drew other people like METAdrasi’s staff, who try to do their best, days and nights, they are trying to do their best, if we get sick, they are here, our lawyers and all. I put a heart because I love these people. Then, my parents and siblings, I just put a heart because I love them. Here, my sports, my volleyball and last is my friends, I know them, they are really good people and I love them.”





A 19-year-old girl who is currently living in SILA provided another perspective of what she perceives as “important” and helpful for her life. As reflected in the following drawing, she drew her family back home and her friends as being a part of the circle, and she also included within the circle inner peace, confidence, goals and problems. She further explained that having

inner peace and confidence, despite any obstacles and concerns, were important values that helped her pursue her personal goals. She mentioned that problems and concerns are also part of life and should be acknowledged as “lessons to learn from”, and embraced as such.

Formal and informal relationships play a key role in supporting their transition to independence. The entire network of relationships is fundamental in particular for children who are alone throughout their migration route and their settlement in a new environment. The establishment of formal relationships help unaccompanied children to obtain access to a wider network of services but, even more importantly, the establishment of informal relationships with peers (foreigners and Greeks) and friends, and of a family environment provide them with emotional support. These relationships are something positive they can carry with them on their path to adulthood.

4. Key findings of the Photovoice project

While a summary of findings from the Photovoice project is included in this report, the full findings and details about the methodology can be found in a separate report on [METAdrasi's website](#).

Three sessions took place, with a total of 8 Afghan boy participants, all residents of SIL. The first session explained the methodology of the workshop to the young participants via experiential exercises. They were encouraged to work collectively at many stages in the sessions, in smaller or larger groups. They took photos and analysed them, and they were informed about the ethical aspects of the workshop (i.e., what photos we may use without causing any harm, and what issues may be harmful during the project); they also decided on the group rules to respect during the sessions. In the second and third sessions, young participants decided collectively the themes they wanted to capture, discuss and analyse during each session.

Two main themes emerged:

- 1) **The city of Athens.**
- 2) **Relationships with the community.**

Voices of UAMs

Once the photographs were taken, participants were given time to separate them into two categories: the ones they felt comfortable discussing and the others that they wanted to remain private. Each participant's photo was analysed in the two-hour session. The boys gave a title and a caption to each of the photos. Prior to this process, participants were given the opportunity to comment on each other's photos, and express diverse views of the same image.

Several key messages emerged through the voices of the children who took part in the PV project. Most importantly, they emphasised the values that are significant for their well-being, in the context of their relationships with the community. They chose to convey messages through their photos about the importance of safety, peace and support, of being respected and living in a diverse society where equality prevails, of having fun and enjoying their youth with their friends and, finally, of being supported while they are transitioning to adulthood.

1. Supporting and protecting UAMs means providing them with opportunities to identify any risks they encounter, and to speak up about their worries and about what safety means for them. As one clearly stated: ***“It is important to help people learn the right things in life and become better people.”*** To this end, professionals, in collaboration with children, can develop preventive strategies and responses to anticipated risks.
2. Supporting UAMs’ transition to adulthood and their pathway to independence, in a range of ways (i.e., housing, education, employment, financial support) but most importantly in helping them to reach their full potential as active and equal members of society.
3. Strengthening anti-discrimination initiatives at the community level by paying specific attention to the promotion of cultural diversity through, for example, establishing youth centres and planning and implementing activities that bring together refugees with local teenagers to develop formal/informal relationships in the context of combating discrimination and xenophobia.
4. Promoting UAMs’ participation by encouraging their active involvement in society, defending their rights, and making their voices heard through access to decision making on policy.



Title: “People from different societies”

‘Respect’ is the key word in this photo, which was captured one evening at the viewpoint of the Acropolis. The young person who took the photo said: “Our modern society is depicted in this image where

we can see various nationalities all together. All live together in respect with no arguments. Our society should be like this: we should feel safe”.

5. Conclusion

Several factors facilitate and constrain the transition pathways to independence for unaccompanied minors in Greece. Alternative care models, such as SIL, SILA and foster care, provide tangible benefits in preparing and supporting children and young people towards their autonomy. Family-like environments provide a quality-of-care setting and offer a secure base through which UAMs can recover from past traumas and transition smoothly into inclusion.

The acquisition of legal status seems to have a major impact on the process of UAMs' integration and has a decisive role in affecting their motives and efforts. Insecurity and anxiety produced by the

long delays and complex procedures of the asylum process discourage efforts by children to integrate. Discrimination is evident in a number of social settings, such as schools, jobs, public spaces and social services and prevents these young boys and girls feeling respected as equal members of society. Finally, formal and informal relationships are fundamental in supporting UAMs' efforts towards inclusion. Their bonding with family, peers, friends and support workers and other METAdrasi staff plays a critical role in creating safe bridges between the past and the present, and in achieving positive pathways to a successful integration in Greece.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations can be applied in similar settings and programmes that aim at the integration of children on the move and the implementation of sustainable solutions in the best interest of the child.

6.1. For Policymakers

- **Coordinate the national and local authorities that are responsible for developing policies that impact on children**, such as integration policies, youth policies, social policies, policies for equal opportunities and justice, allowing for effective planning and coherent implementation of legislation and standards.
- **Put in place a clear national framework in the form of a pathway plan, to better protect and promote the rights of unaccompanied minors**

leaving care, according to their specific needs.

The needs of those young people should be addressed irrespective of their legal status.²⁷

The plan should include education, housing, health, leisure and other support services, with an emphasis on strengthening the cooperation between employment offices and the reception mechanisms and procedures. Such a plan could facilitate access to the labour market for UAMs who have turned 18, while also supporting them in terms of housing and cash assistance until they turn 21 and/or become financially independent.²⁸

- **Implement a gender-sensitive employment and educational framework**, taking into consideration the specific needs of young women before and after reaching adulthood (e.g., parenting responsibility), so that no woman is left out.

²⁷ Lane, P. and Tribe, R. (2006) Unequal care: an introduction to understanding UK policy and its impact on asylum-seeking children. *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care*, 2:2: 7– 14.

²⁸ Tsovilis (2021) Individual interview on the integration of children on the move between the Middle East and Europe, conducted by METAdrasi's team.

- **Facilitate and expand the procedures used to assess UAMs' professional skills, literacy and "soft skills" acquired in their country of origin,** including regular updates of those skills, based on individual guidance, and the motives, personal goals and desires of each young person.²⁹
- **Promote preventive interventions and information to UAMs on employment legislation in Greece and the risks linked to informal employment and illegal activity** (e.g., trafficking and sexual exploitation).
- **Create opportunities that would allow UAMs to combine studying/training with the learning of the Greek language, and employment or vocational courses.** Facilitate access to continuous learning and professional/vocational opportunities in the form of work grants, internships and apprenticeships.

6.2. For NGOs and Practitioners

- **Continue to foster and increase the opportunities to meet the needs of UAMs and former UAMs** by improving and expanding targeted alternative care and integration-focused accommodation initiatives and programmes, such as SIL/SILA and foster care.
- **Increase the opportunities for interaction and mutual learning between UAMs and former UAMs, their peers and the resident population**

in order to establish formal and informal relationships in the process of integration, and to combat xenophobia, discrimination and racism.

- **Promote and expand activities that increase the opportunities of UAMs and former UAMs to fully participate in society as equal and active members.**
- **Encourage initiatives that enhance young girls' participation in and contribution to society, the protection of their rights, and their ability to have their voices heard by influencing policy decisions that affect them.**
- **Streamline entrance in alternative care arrangements, such as SIL, as soon as UAMs turn 16,** so that support workers have adequate time to create relationships of trust and work towards integration of UAM.
- **Develop integration programmes within schools:** these were implemented a few years ago but were interrupted due to the lack of funding. According to this research, intercultural schools may hinder the integration of UAMs and efforts should be made for their enrolment in ordinary public schools.
- **Increase public awareness on foster care schemes as a path to integration** and provide guidelines and information to public services and schools, and aftercare psychosocial support to foster parents.

²⁹ Kouvara, E. (2021) Individual interview on the integration of children on the move between the Middle East and Europe, conducted by METAdrasi's team.

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