



EXPLAINER:

Relocation of unaccompanied children from Greece

31 August 2020

Some 1,600 unaccompanied children living as asylum-seekers in harsh conditions in Greece are being relocated to 11 European Union countries. Here's how the process works.

Who is classed as an unaccompanied child?

Unaccompanied children 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. They are sometimes called Unaccompanied Minors, based on the legal definition of majority in a national context. Authorities in [Europe](#) seek to reunify such children with family through the Dublin III procedures.

What is known about the unaccompanied children in Greece?

As of 15 August, there were 4,511 unaccompanied refugee and migrant children in Greece in need of expedited registration, family tracing, reunification and/or relocation to a third country, according to [EKKA](#), Greece's National Centre for Social Solidarity. 93 per cent are boys with 7 per cent girls and 92 per cent of the total are 14-18 years old.

Of the total, 1,528 are in long term accommodation, 699 are in short term accommodation, 900 are housed

in reception and identification centers such as Moria on Lesbos island, 189 are in open reception facilities in the mainland and 205 in protective custody in police stations. Another 990 unaccompanied children are homeless or live in precarious conditions.

Afghanistan accounts for 41 percent of the unaccompanied children, 23 percent come from Pakistan and 11 percent from Syria. The rest come from other countries.

The unaccompanied children on the islands live in precarious conditions and face the risk of exploitation, violence and human trafficking.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has for years [called](#) for adequate care, protection and durable solutions to be found for unaccompanied children and other vulnerable groups. This can mean relocation to a third country in Europe, but alternatives could also include inclusion and integration with appropriate support within the national child protection system in Greece, reunification with family or in some cases return to the child's country of origin.



The unaccompanied children face the risk of exploitation, violence and human trafficking.

Zemar* was only 15 when he arrived from Afghanistan at the Moria reception centre on the Greek island of Lesbos. He had survived a string of traumatic experiences and just been separated from his parents and needed calm.

*Name changed for protection reasons

See: [Lone children face insecurity on Greek island](#)
See: [UNHCR calls for decisive action to end alarming conditions on Aegean islands](#)



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unaccompanied children have been relocated to other countries in the European Union as of 31 August 2020

What is the agreement made by the EU about UAC relocations from Greece?

Eleven EU countries are participating in the scheme to accept 3,300 vulnerable asylum-seekers, including 1,600 unaccompanied and separated children for relocation from Greece to other participating European states. As of 31 August, 237 unaccompanied children have been relocated to other countries in the European Union.

The European Commission coordinates this with the Office of the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors in Greece, engaging participating states and UN agencies including UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF. Joint Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been developed, including eligibility criteria to be followed for the exercise. Individual states may express particular criteria and prioritisation within this, in light of their reception capacity, services etc.

What is UNHCR's role in the recent relocations?

The Special Secretary together with authorities in Luxembourg and Germany asked UNHCR Greece in April to assist in the urgent ad hoc relocation schemes of unaccompanied children. This involved identifying the children, a Best Interest process and escorting them from the islands to the mainland prior to their departure for Luxembourg and Germany.

UNHCR was well placed to take this on having led in the Best Interest determination process for the Dubs' scheme to the UK, global

experience with resettlement, protection mandate and presence on the Greek islands and the Reception and Identification Centre in Evros (Fylakio).

In the regular relocation and under the overall coordination of the European Commission and the Special Secretary, UNHCR supports European Asylum Support Office with the best interest assessment process in the reception centers and for UAC in protective custody. UNHCR also coordinates and implements with child protection actors the Best Interest assessment process for UAC who are homeless and live in precarious conditions in cities. In addition, UNHCR has revived an interim guardianship programme called the Authorised Representatives for Minors and organises child escorts from the islands with its partners and EC funds.

How do the relocations work and what safeguards are provided?

UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund, have established standards to identify and prioritize the children for relocation.

The joint document, "Minimum Child Protection Standards for Identification of Unaccompanied and separated Children to be Relocated from Greece to other countries in the European Union", asserts that these standards must be rooted within international child rights legal frameworks, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 1951 Refugee Convention, which lays out the considerations under which international protection needs would be established.



Minimum Child Protection Standards for Identification of Unaccompanied Children to be Relocated from Greece to other countries in the European Union

See: [Joint document by UNHCR, IOM and UNICEF](#)



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The relocation process from Greece varies from country to country. What follows is a summary of the stages followed during the recent relocations:

Stages followed during the recent relocations

Preparatory phase

The list of identified unaccompanied children is shared by the Special Secretary's office with the Greek Asylum Service to check on each child's asylum status and whether they have family links that could allow transfer under the Dublin regulation. (See below.)

The list is then passed onto EASO for scheduling of the Best Interest assessment. Guardians will be appointed for the children by the Public Prosecutor to support information provision and oversight of their best interests throughout the process.

Best Interest process

Best Interest assessments are conducted for children identified as eligible and willing to participate in relocation. The Best Interest assessment is led by EASO with support of UNHCR and its child protection partners such as METAdrasi and PRAKSIS, substantially involved in the preparation, review and submission of reports documenting whether it would be in the best interests of the child to be relocated or not. In the case of unaccompanied children who are homeless and live in precarious conditions, UNHCR together with child protection actors (ARSIS, PRAKSIS, METAdrasi, Network for Children's Rights), who work with the specific group of children in the urban settings of Athens and Thessaloniki, organize and implement the best interest assessment process documenting whether it would be or not in the best interests of the child to be relocated. Reports and supporting documentation are submitted to the Greek authorities who will conduct a matching process to identify the most suitable member state for relocation.

The Reception and Identification Service as well as the Greek Asylum Service provide documents including those on medical and other specific needs.

Unaccompanied children are interviewed. If they consent to relocation, EASO, UNHCR and partners interview the children, complete and review the Best Interest reports. The best interest assessments are all compiled by EASO, UNHCR and Child Protection partners PRAKSIS, METAdrasi.

EASO submits the reports and supporting documentation to Greek authorities and receiving countries. The documentation includes a child's form, an asylum card, a Best Interest Determination report, medical and social reports, and, where available, an age assessment document.

Relocation

The child is transferred from the islands to Athens under the supervision of METAdrasi and UNHCR. The International Organization for Migration oversees accommodation in Athens, medical checks and other pre-departure procedures.

The children are then flown to the destination country under the supervision of the International Organization for Migration where they are welcomed by authorities.

Authorities in Europe seek to reunify such children with family through the Dublin III procedures.

What is Dublin III?

The [Dublin III](#) Regulation provides a mechanism for determining which country is responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the member states by a third country national or a stateless person.

Family reunification is also provided for under Article 8 of Dublin III in certain circumstances.

“Where the applicant is an unaccompanied minor who has a relative who is legally present in another Member State and where it is established, based on an individual examination, that the relative can take care of him or her, that Member State shall unite the minor with his or her relative and shall be the Member State responsible, provided that it is in the best interests of the minor,” the Article says.

The regulation applies to the 27 EU member states plus Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and, until the end of 2020, the UK.

What happens next?

As of 4 August, 11 EU countries have agreed to accept 3,300 vulnerable asylum-seekers, including unaccompanied and separated children for relocation from Greece to other participating European states.

Relocations are set to continue, subject to pledges and criteria set by individual countries coordinated by the European Commission and by limitations imposed due to the COVID19 pandemic.

At the same time, the children who have been relocated are going through health-appropriate arrangements due to the threat of coronavirus and are starting the process of integrating into their new host countries.



Eleven EU countries have so far committed to participate in the scheme to accept 3,300 vulnerable asylum-seekers

Ahmad*, a boy from Afghanistan, has no hesitation in summing up how relocation from a squalid camp on a Greek island to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg has affected him and the other unaccompanied children relocated to Luxembourg.

“Up until now our lives were a question mark,” he said. “Now we have stability. I want my life to work now. I am free.”

*Name changed for protection reasons

See: [“You could see the happiness in their faces”](#)



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The Relocation programme is led by the Government of Greece with participating EU member states and is coordinated by the European Commission. UNHCR is working closely with our UN partners the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to support all aspects of the relocation process in close cooperation with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and other partners.