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IOM provided accommodation and services to more than 1,000 unaccompanied children, since the beginning of 2020

Athens - The International Organization for Migration (IOM) with the support of the European Commission and upon coordination with the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) and the Special Secretary for the protection of Unaccompanied Minors (SSPUAM), has established two new Safe Zones exclusively for unaccompanied migrant children (UMC), in the open accommodation centers of Vagiochori and Filippiada, in Northern Greece

The new Safe Zones bring up the total number of Safe Zones in Greek mainland to 15 with 450 available accommodation places, where 1,048 unaccompanied children have found shelter and received targeted services since 2020. The majority of the children residing in the Safe Zones come from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Bangladesh and Syria. The Safe Zones, with a maximum capacity of 30 UMC each, are exclusively dedicated to the accommodation and protection of unaccompanied children, where staff offers targeted services on a 24/7 basis.

“The operation of Safe Zones is an integral part of the Site Management Support project as implemented by IOM with the funding from the European Commission, since 2018. It is a temporary transit accommodation solution for vulnerable children who came to Greece either alone or separated from their own families, seeking a better future. IOM along with partners and the Greek authorities, work actively to ensure that the children are offered a safe environment and the assistance they require in these temporary structures while waiting for their accommodation in more permanent structures”, said Gianluca Rocco, IOM Greece Chief of Mission.

IOM along with NGOs implementing partners, ARSIS, Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Terres des Hommes (TdH) and Zeuxis, are responsible for the provision of food and non-food items, such as clothes, shoes and linen. Moreover, professionals offer psychosocial and legal support services, interpretation and case management, while daily structured activities such as languages courses, recreational and sports activities are organized to promote children’s wellbeing and their integration into the local societies. To ensure unhindered access of the beneficiaries to public authorities for medical, psychosocial, legal, recreational, and educational purposes, the transportation and accompaniment of the children is also ensured whenever required.

According to latest data from the Greek authorities and up to end-January, approximately 4,000 unaccompanied children are residing in Greece. Operation of safe zones remains one of the elements of Greece’s response to the needs of unaccompanied children in vulnerability.



“In the safe zone we try to start creating a sense of belonging and instill hope to children who live under difficult conditions without their loved ones. Our work is challenging, and it requires patience, entails responsibility but it can be very rewarding” said Maria Karavalaki, IOM Greece Safe Zone Coordinator.

“I am in the safe zone 3 months now; I have my room, I have made some friends with whom we play football and I have started learning Greek because I want to become an interpreter and help other people” says Ali, 15-year-old from Afghanistan.

Among children residing in safe zones and up to December 2020, IOM and the Partners, under the leadership of the Special Secretariat for Unaccompanied minors, have supported 21 cases of family reunification through Dublin regulation, 64 children have been transferred to shelters, while 37 of them have been accommodated in apartments, under semi – independent living scheme, which supports children’s integration into the Greek society.

IOM in collaboration with ARSIS NGO, is assisting also with the identification and case management of UMC in land borders. Specifically, a child protection mobile multidisciplinary team, that is operating in the broader region of Evros, visits and supports UMCs in the local Reception and Identification Center (Fylakio) and under protective custody, providing psychosocial and legal support, as well as educational and recreational activities.

The 15 Safe Zones in the mainland operate with the support of the European Commission and the General Directorate for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME).

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