Update on the context and situation of children

There are over two million children in Greece today, equivalent to 19% of the population, with a nearly equal gender split – 51% boys and 49% girls. While the findings of UNICEF’s Situation Analysis carried out in 2020 remain valid, the GCO collected updated data in key areas reflecting the situation of children and youth in Greece. For example, the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion remained almost the same in 2020 compared to the previous year (31%). Meanwhile, the participation of children 4 to 6 years old in two years of pre-school education increased (85.6% in 2019 compared to 75% in 2018) but still remains low relative to the EU target (95%). Youth unemployment (15-24 years) at 38% and young people (15-29) neither in employment, nor in education and training (NEET) at 18.5% constitute the second and the third respectively highest rates in EU and do not differ dramatically in 2020 compared to 2019. Additional areas in need of improvement include monitoring and eliminating all forms of violence against children, identifying solutions for the 1,505 children living in institutions (as of December 2021), investing in and promoting healthy nutritional habits given that 37.5% of children 2 to 14 years old remain overweight or obese (according to the 2019 health survey), and empowering youth and adolescents to become full and active members of society.

Greece made progress on its child rights agenda through the development of a National Action Plan on the Rights of the Child 2021-2023 by the “National Mechanism on the Drafting, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Action Plans on the Rights of the Child” coordinated by the Ministry of Justice. UNICEF as a voting member of the National Mechanism is specifically mentioned in the National Action Plan that will support its monitoring and evaluation functions while the national CPD targets have been also included in the document.

The EU long term budget or MFF (2021-2027), supplemented by the NextGenerationEU supporting the recovery plan for Europe, form the largest stimulus package ever financed through the EU budget, of over €2.0 trillion, and aims to rebuild a post-pandemic Europe to be greener, more digital, and more resilient. Thus, there is great potential for strengthening public policies for children in Greece over the coming years through funding from the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the European Structural and Investment Funds included in this budget.

The Greece Country Office continued to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic during the year while the gradual rollout of vaccines helped ease restrictions by summer 2021. Yet, periods of national lockdown, school closures, limited population movement, and restricted travel persisted during the first half of the year and continued to affect children’s health, wellbeing and protection. Schools re-opened in April and have not closed thus far during the school year 2021-2022. At the end of the year, the total number of COVID-19 cases in Greece rose to 1,210,853 with the total number of deaths 20,790 since the start of the pandemic according to government sources.

Overall, the number of arrivals further decreased during 2021, despite periodical increases in certain locations. Based on official figures published by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, a total of 8,031 refugees and migrants have arrived in Greece from Jan-Nov 2021: more than half entering through land borders with Turkey, which highlights an increasing trend (10% up from last year) in arrivals via land borders. Figures available so far indicate an overall decrease (44% down) in arrivals in Greece compared with the same period (Jan-Nov) in 2020.

Available data on child arrivals for the period Jan-Oct 2021 show that children accounted for 31% (909) of the total sea arrivals in the country during 2021, compared to 18% (697) through land borders.
By summer of 2021 it was estimated that more than 31,000 refugee and migrant children (56% boys and 44% girls) remained in the country, while by the end of the year the number of UASC had dropped to 2,225 (91% boys). From Jan-Nov 2021, more than 14,000 refugees and migrants were transferred from the Greek islands to the mainland, significantly reducing (compared to the previous year) the number of refugee and migrants in reception facilities on the islands (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, Kos) to 3,216 people at the end of the year compared with to 14,265 including, at end of 2020. A key development during 2021 was the establishment of three new Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCAC) on the islands of Samos, Kos and Leros. The CCAC are a new type of highly secured reception facilities replacing Reception and Identification Centres (RICs).

The Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors (SSPUAM) in Greece continued efforts to transfer unaccompanied children (UAC) to EU Member States within the framework of the European Relocation scheme, supported by UN Agencies and civil society. A total of 1,179 UAC were relocated to other member states in addition to 1,924 children with their families by 31 December 2021. Additionally, following the abolishment of protective custody for UAC in 2020, the SSPUAM launched a national mechanism in 2021 for the emergency response to UAC living in insecure conditions, in cooperation with UN agencies, CSOs and state child protection actors. This 24-7 hotline supported communication concerning a total of 1,415 cases of children (as of Nov 2021), the majority of which were related to requests for accommodation/housing.

### Major contributions and drivers of results

**Greece Country Programme 2022-2026**

In early 2021, the UNICEF Greece Country Office (GCO) finalized its inaugural *Situation Analysis of Children and Youth in Greece*, culminating in a public launch to the wider Greek audience in April of the same year. The SitAn was the product of a consultative process involving government, independent authorities, CSOs, and children and youth. Building on these diverse stakeholder consultations and the key findings outlined in the SitAn, UNICEF further developed its *Country Programme 2022-2026* centred on four key pillars of work - Social Policy & Child Rights Monitoring, Youth Empowerment, Quality Inclusive Education and Child Protection – and aligned with regional and global strategies as well as various Greek national plans relating to children.

The GCO Country Programme Document, the first ever in a high income country, was successfully submitted to the Executive Board in September 2021, inclusive of national targets for children and with a planned budget of $127 million. The Country Programme is intended to be continually informed by an agreed evidence plan including 24 research initiatives to fill knowledge gaps on child rights in Greece, in collaboration with the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT).

Both the SitAn and the CPD development processes have opened doors to new areas of work and partnerships within the context of UNICEF’s broader mandate in Greece. Key achievements this year included:

- UNICEF’s inclusion as a full voting member of the National Mechanism on Child Rights chaired by the Ministry of Justice through the passing of law 4786/2021.
- Inclusion of the national CPD targets, as well as provisions for UNICEF’s role to strengthen national monitoring and evaluation functions, in the National Action Plan on Child Rights developed by the National Mechanism.
- **21 MoUs signed** with ministries (Health, Finance, Education and Religious Affairs, Migration and Asylum), government institutions, municipalities, and civil society.
Entry points into **new streams of work** in the areas of childcare reform, violence against children, childhood obesity, mental health, poverty, youth empowerment, and justice for children.

Specifically, the GCO completed a mapping of actors, initiatives and gaps on obesity and mental health, and drafted national approaches and multiannual workplans on both thematic areas for the first time. Additionally, a comprehensive **assessment of the child-friendliness of the justice system** with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) was launched for the first time, a partnership with the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking established, and GBV interventions, case management and community-based protection responses including in refugee sites were expanded.

In the context of the EU **Child Guarantee** (CG) pilot programme, the GCO concluded a deep dive and policy brief on child poverty and social exclusion in Greece (including risk factors, access barriers and unmet needs) and consolidated its role as technical advisor to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) to support a fully costed **European Child Guarantee Action Plan against child poverty and social exclusion**. The GCO also developed **guidelines and tools for care facilities on deinstitutionalization** (including models and practices specifically for children with disabilities living in institutions) and standardized safeguarding procedures for municipal social services, established a national foster care database, launched a **national foster care campaign** and developed methodologies to support foster carers, and continued roll-out of SIL framework with the MoLSA.

UNICEF continued to provide advisory services to the General Secretary for Social Solidarity and the Fight Against Poverty (MoLSA) including in support of the **national Roma strategy**. The office instigated knowledge exchange on Roma priority issues with nine other COs in Southern Eastern Europe while initiating downstream work with Roma communities through the development of peer to peer methodologies and support tools to address gender roles relevant to parenting including reinforcement of the father’s role, women’s health and reproductive health and nutrition needs of boys and girls in a community-informed manner.

The youth agenda was advanced during 2021 with the soft launch of **Generation Unlimited** and the GCO expanded its partnership with the Greek Employment Agency on skills development, job orientation and readiness, and initiated a labour market feasibility study on apprenticeships and entrepreneurship. The GCO also launched the Greek chapter of the **Child Friendly Cities Initiative**, signing agreements with six candidate cities including Athens, with several others already in the pipeline for 2022.

The GCO progressed efforts on the promotion of inclusive education in Greece, agreeing and initiating key areas of cooperation with the **Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs** (MoERA) including children with disabilities, Roma education and child rights education. A campaign on inclusive education was successfully carried out and a bottleneck analysis on the implementation of the inclusive school model, with a focus on the inclusion of children with disabilities, in Greece was finalized. Additionally, in the area of **early childhood development**, the GCO worked closely with the MoLSA to agree on managing a pilot programme, budgeted under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, establishing standards for service quality in 100 nurseries.

The GCO invested significant resources in supporting the Greek state (Gender Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, Deputy Ombudsperson for Children’s Rights, Greek Manpower Organization, EKKA) to develop its **monitoring and evidence generation** capacity. The office also grew its ongoing partnership with ELSTAT in a number of key areas of work related to the new CPD such as: the inclusion of Roma and Refugee and Migrant children in the 2021 Census, supporting ELSTAT to lead the Global Data Alliance on Children on the Move, and generation of data under the National Health Survey analysis for children with disabilities. In addition, evidence generation and data sharing for child rights monitoring were incorporated in core areas of collaboration.
with new and existing government partners (MoH, MoF, MoERA, MoMA) and action plans including monitoring on the situation of children were developed with 5 municipalities. Finally, the GCO in close collaboration with the UNICEF Regional Office generated the first Gender Country Profile for Greece.

UNICEF continued its emergency response for refugee and migrant children and their families, improving access to services and quality of care through a combination of direct implementation through service delivery and provision of technical support/capacity building to state and CSO partners. Almost 27,000 refugee and migrant children and their caregivers were reached in various accommodation facilities (camps, RICs, urban centres) by UNICEF non-formal education, child protection, gender-based violence prevention/response and WASH programming in 2021. Of note, UNICEF assumed accountability for refugee education throughout the country with MoMA and MoERA through the creation of a €34 million, multi-year NFE programme providing a clear pathway to formal education for all refugee and migrant children in the country. This included the establishment of a new Working Group on monitoring, chaired by UNICEF, to ensure consistency among collected data, improve situational analysis information, identify bottlenecks and support evidence-based decision making in the implementation of the programme. UNICEF also became the lead actor, in partnership with state authorities, for WASH sector coordination in Lesvos through the construction and maintenance of water and sanitation infrastructure in the Mavrovouni RIC (funded through the first direct DG HOME grant to UNICEF for €9 million).

**Partnerships and Communications**

The volume of funds received and administered in 2021 totalled $28.5 million with a utilization rate of 100 per cent (IB, PFP, ORE, ORR). This amount corresponds to a 44 per cent increase compared to 2020 and places the GCO as the third-largest CO in the ECA region (in terms of funding) after Turkey and Ukraine.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the private donor landscape domestically and among the diaspora, over two hundred prospects within the corporate, philanthropic and high net worth individual (HNWI) community have been identified and negotiations are ongoing with over 40 at the end of 2021, of which nine have advanced to agreeing MoUs as a precursor to a financial relationship.

From a basis of 8,700 individual giving donors of the former Hellenic National Committee agreeing to initiate a relationship with UNICEF in Greece (less than 30 percent), one-time contributions and pledge giving has raised a total of $126,000 from IG in the first (partial) year of PSFR action.

**Communications** in 2021 saw significant progress in reach and impact, with followers on key social media platforms more than doubling compared to 2020 to almost 19,000 for a total reach of over three million people. Dedicated campaigns focused on foster care, prevention of child trafficking, and inclusive education, culminating in a major event celebrating UNICEF@75 on 11 December co-hosted with the President of Greece, greatly expanded the profile of the office and received overwhelmingly positive public response. In late 2021, the GCO signed its first Goodwill Ambassador, Elena Paparizou, a musical entertainer beloved across Greece, an initiative which alongside UNICEF@75 generated the most media interest of the year.

A total of 24 implementing partners were engaged throughout 2021 with INGOs, NGOs and academic institutions, including 37 PCAs and three SSFAs with a total value of $25 million, in addition to ongoing direct collaboration with six municipalities and nine line ministries.

A total of 21 donor reports were submitted on time. Nine proposals have been developed and submitted, in addition to the Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal, including two to the EU (WASH for €9 million and ACE for €34 million), marking the first direct partnerships with DG Home
for UNICEF, and seven to various other partners including the Netherlands, Ireland, Their World, the Niarchos Foundation, and the Swedish and German Natcoms.

The HACT assurance plan was fully achieved, with 103 percent of programmatic visits realised, five times the planned number of spot checks completed, as well as four audits and two micro assessments. Zero percent of DCTs (by volume) exceeded the nine-month limit in 2021.

**Operational Effectiveness**

The GCO, and Operations Unit in particular, dedicated significant efforts during the second half of the year to establishing and strengthening sound governance and internal controls to ensure clarity and transparency in accountabilities.

In the context of implementing the 2020 PBR, a total of **16 TA and FT recruitments** were completed in 2021, as well as engagement of 19 consultants and individual contractors, the former realising a recruitment timeframe of 46 days. Additionally, four stretch assignments to the GCO were facilitated supporting **staff capacity development**, with a staff learning plan engaging 95 per cent of staff in a range of eight thematic areas.

The GCO successfully finalized 100 per cent of **PERs** for 2020 on time, along with PER plans for 2021 with all staff. With HR RO, a **strengths mapping exercise** was undertaken with all staff, as well as a three-day **staff retreat** focusing on collective accountability.

The first full year of **operating and maintaining office premises** was successfully undertaken in the context of an ongoing pandemic, with Tuesdays designated as the mandatory office day and other workdays managed flexibly through a model of self-regulation as part of a return-to-office decision in the latter part of the year.

The GCO ensured all **GSSC KPI targets were met** for general accounting, invoicing and HR cases, and all year-end closure activities and reporting deadlines were successfully met.

Within the context of its CPD submission to the Executive Board, the GCO collaboratively developed a **Country Programme Management Plan** with all staff in the latter part of 2021, inclusive of the second PBR submission for the year.

While a BCA is still not formalised and local bank accounts are not yet able to be opened, **relationships are well-established with MoFA** at multiple levels and workaround solutions on key operational issues such as tax exemption have been identified, with over 120 VAT-exemptions submitted to and approved by MoFA in 2021, and diplomatic plates now issued for the official UNICEF vehicle. Citibank remains the only financial services provider available to the GCO.

The GCO raised a total of $8.4 million in **supply and procurement** contracts in 2021, the second-largest volume in ECA, with 13 CRC meetings held to review submissions.

**UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships**

UNICEF continued its strong engagement with the UN community in Greece during the year. The GCO participates regularly in various working groups, chairing the national Education Sector Working Group and co-chairing the WASH Sector Working Group in Lesvos.

UNICEF’s close partnership with its sister agencies was particularly evident in the coordination and handover of NFE activities across the country under the new All Children in Education (ACE) programme established in September 2021. UNICEF’s UN to UN partnership agreement with IOM, under the DG HOME-funded SMS programme, supported the transfer of educational activities in 12 mainland sites to UNICEF within the context of the ACE programme. A Letter of Agreement was signed with UNHCR in 2021 outlining areas of joint cooperation for the next three years and included
the integration of NFE activities in 3 islands into the ACE programme. The GCO also prepared the first ever joint submission of the UN report (with UNHCR and IOM) for the Third Cycle Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council for Greece.

UNICEF co-chairs the recently established PSEA Working Group with IOM and UNHCR, including the roll-out of PSEA training modules in Greek delivered to frontline workers and authorities.

As previously mentioned, UNICEF’s new areas of work related to its upcoming Country Programme helped initiate and/or strengthen partnerships with government bodies at national and local level, independent entities, academia, and civil society. Private sector partnerships grew exponentially with over 40 bilateral meetings held with businesses, corporations, foundations, and high net worth individuals by the end of the year.

The GCO maintained close communication with key National Committees (Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, etc.) and initiated two new partnerships with the Governments of Ireland and the Netherlands, which have been instrumental in closing funding gaps during this transitional period. In addition, the office assisted in facilitating the first direct contribution agreement from DG HOME and participated in three regional projects on key thematic areas such as GBV (PRM), health (DG SANTE), and the Child Guarantee (DG EMPLOY).

Finally, the GCO continued or established 4 Humanitarian Programme Documents, 34 Programme Documents and 3 SSFAs, with a total value of 25 Million EUR, supporting a total of 24 implementing partners during 2021.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

One of the major impediments to full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Greece are insufficient budgetary allocations, coupled with inadequate monitoring mechanisms. In addition, there are multiple inter-related challenges affecting children in the country including persisting social and cultural norms and practices that ultimately inhibit access to and utilisation of services, the quality and relevance of public services that relate to children, and the overall below-average level of investment in those services.

Based on the GCO’s experiences during 2021, the future effectiveness of UNICEF programmes in Greece will be centered around shaping the new vision for the Country Programme, in close consultation with all related actors and will be supported by the ongoing change management process, restructuring and capacity building of the programme team to be able to respond to the new identified areas of work, while continuing the GCO work with refugee and migrant children. These efforts will be further supported by an integrated approach to planning through alignment of advocacy, fundraising and programme priorities.

In particular, efforts to take forward GCO’s objectives in evidence generation and child protection mainstreaming, which included following open calls addressed to CSOs and academia, revealed a limited local capacity and experience in research on child rights and in work on mainstream child protection, resulting in an increased need for support by UNICEF.

The implementation of the pilot project of Child Guarantee in Greece has proven to be a great opportunity to support government efforts on DI and the expansion of alternative community-based care models. However, it has also been challenging in terms of the institutional mindset of the latter and a reluctance to large scale reform. Linear implementation seems difficult when public authorities are ultimately accountable often resulting in significant delays. It is, therefore, critical to be flexible, to
achieve smaller-scale change, which albeit slow, can be more effective than attempting systematic reform all at once.

In spite of the challenges to establish and set up systems, tools and procedures of a new CO while operating in teleworking modality, UNICEF Greece CO successfully implemented a $28 million dollar programme including emergency programming. However, limited financial resources impact the ability of the office to adjust its structure to be sufficiently fit for purpose.

The first knowledge management strategy of the Greece Country Office was established with a two-year timeframe. A total of 11 actions aim to strengthen the exchange of information and knowledge internally, with an additional four actions engaging an external audience.

The ongoing effects of COVID-19 continue to impact the GCO at all levels and throughout the office structure. The prolonged locked down early in the year, administrative procedures imposed by the state and the subsequent operational environment resulted in unexpected delays that influenced the programming context and funds mobilization. Staff induction and assimilation process was highly challenging with teleworking modalities remaining the normal through most of the year. The refugee and migrant population were particularly affected by COVID-19 restrictions and UNICEF through its implementing partners continued to make use of remote modalities and digital technology to reach children and families in need.

The launch of the private sector business and corporate partnerships of the GCO and introductory discussions with potential donors revealed the need for sustained long-term engagement in order to realize results. In line with the UNICEF Business for Results (B4R) approach, the GCO needs to shift its perception of the private sector from solely financial contributors to shared value partnerships that will deliver even greater results for children. In Greece, the business sector has a granular grasp of the context with country-specific scientific and policy expertise as well as access to in-country resources and key players which make it an invaluable resource for the CO.

In addition, a more systematic effort is required to communicate UNICEF’s mandate in Greece. The GCO can use the private sector and big corporates to codesign communication campaigns that would raise brand awareness on the one hand but also convey key messages to the public around the shifting the agenda for children in Greece.