Update on the context and situation of children

Greece hosts a population of two million children. The situation of children in recent years remains difficult: the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion slightly increased from 30.8% in 2020 to 32% in 2021. While the participation of children between four and six years old in two years of pre-school education reached 90% in 2021, it still falls short of the average EU target (95%). Youth unemployment (15-24 years) stands at 35.5% and is the highest among EU countries, while 17% of young people (15-29) are not employed, nor in education/training, representing the third highest rate in the EU. In addition, eliminating all forms of violence against children remained a priority highlighted by several serious cases of child abuse reported in 2022. Identifying adequate solutions for children without parental care is of paramount importance. This relates to the 3,356 children in residential care that includes 1,346 children residing in child protection institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) and 2,010 unaccompanied children (UAC) residing in shelters under the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA) (as of November 2022). Addressing childhood obesity remains a key health and political priority with Greece ranking in the bottom three EU member states, with almost 40 percent of children believed to be obese or overweight. Ensuring data generation and monitoring constitute also important aspects for the protection of children.

Important policy changes took place with UNICEF’s support. UNICEF views were largely reflected in policy and legal frameworks relating to children, such as the National Strategy on DI, the National Strategy for the Protection of UAC and the new Law on Guardianship, the National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee, the National Action Plan for the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, the legal framework on professional foster care and the pilot of Supported Independent Living (SIL) model of alternative care. The implementation of the National Action Plan on the Rights of the Child 2021-2023 coordinated by the Ministry of Justice is underway, while the process for its review for the period 2024-2027 has been initiated with the technical support of UNICEF. Under the Child Guarantee National Action Plan coordinated by the National Center for Social Solidarity, the Implementation of the Child Guarantee Recommendation for the period up to 2030 has been developed with the support of UNICEF’s expertise, including the development of a strong monitoring framework with national targets.

There are 117,495 Roma people constituting 1.13% of Greece’s population (data by MoLSA as of 2021). The majority (80%) live in settlements that often serve to perpetuate the socio-economic segregation from the broader community. The population of children up to 15 years is estimated at 40,000. Almost all are at risk of poverty (98%), while 87% are unable to enjoy basic goods and activities (FRA, 2021). The participation of Roma children up to 3 years to early childhood care is extremely low (9%), while the participation of children 4 to 15 years to compulsory education stands at 66%, with children residing in settlements having lower rate (64%) compared to children in scattered houses (73%). Segregation in education is a common phenomenon as 34% of children 6 to 15 years attend school where all or most pupils are Roma. Discriminatory practices persist as 20% of Roma felt discriminated when in contact with school authorities as a parent/guardian or student in the past 12 months from the survey.

In 2022, arrivals of refugees and migrants increased compared to 2021 by 88% with 15,290 reaching Greece by sea and land during January – November 2022. Among total arrivals in the country, 25% are children (32% by sea and 17% by land). By August 2022, a total 22,000 refugee and migrant children were present, of whom 17,000 are estimated to be of school age. At the end of 2022, there were 2,624 unaccompanied and separated children.
The majority of the refugee population lives on mainland Greece. There, asylum-seekers might need to wait for up to two years for a decision on their asylum claim, often under difficult conditions as many camps fall short of essential items and support services. Approximately 9,000 people, including 2,800 children are residing in open accommodation sites (compared to 20,000 persons, including 9,000 children in 2021). At the reception and identification centres on the islands, overcrowding – a persisting problem for many years – has eased with approximately 2,800 people, including 500 children housed there (compared to 4,500 including 1,300 children in 2021). The closure of ESTIA apartments program in 2022, hampers integration efforts and access to education as families, including vulnerable, are forced to leave urban communities and move to camps in remote areas. The end of the program may have also resulted in an increase in the number of self-accommodated people in Greece (14,000 are estimated to be children vs. 7,000 in 2021).

As of end December, 16,109 refugee and migrant children accessed FE (14,844, including 1,212 Ukrainian children) and NFE (1,265). This accounts for the 68% of the estimated number of refugee and migrant children in the country, including Ukrainians. Since the start of UNICEF’s All Children in Education (ACE) program 13,961 refugee and migrant children, including, 832 from Ukraine, benefitted from HCACs and support activities.

Following the war in Ukraine, Greece offered temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees. As of November 2022, a total of 21,025 Ukrainians – in their majority women – had received temporary protection, including 6,330 children. Most of them are 0-13 years old (81%) and half of them are girls (50%). At the end of November, a total of 211 people from Ukraine were residing in two camps managed by MoMA, while the rest are self-accommodated or live with friends and family. As of end 2022, nine children (0 to 17 years old) from institutions from Ukraine and three caregivers were accommodated in a shelter for UAC in Athens. At the end of 2022, 520 separated and three UAC had been referred to authorities for specialized care.

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

To support social policy and child rights monitoring, the inclusion of measurable commitments on child rights in National Strategies and Action Plans progressed, including the inclusion of national CPD targets in the NAP on the implementation of the Child Guarantee Recommendation and the sectoral Strategy on social integration and poverty reduction. In addition, UNICEF started providing technical support to the Ministry of Justice that is coordinating the development of the new National Action Plan on Child Rights for the period 2024-2027.

UNICEF provided technical support to the office of the Secretary General for Social Solidarity and Fight against Poverty on Roma children and mothers-dedicated sections and relevant indicators of the Action Plan 2021-2030 of the National Strategy for Roma inclusion 2021-2030. UNICEF and the Secretary General hosted a South-Eastern Europe Roma Child Inclusion Consultation, bringing together UNICEF Representatives and Governmental partners from ten countries responsible for Roma children’s rights and inclusion, as well as representatives of Roma associations, CSOs, and academics.

UNICEF’s technical support in the development of the monitoring framework of the NAP on the implementation of the Child Guarantee Recommendation ensured the participation of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups of children and youth. This was also the entry point for a TSI/DG REFORM-funded project that will support the establishment of a governance operating model for the implementation of the NAP.

UNICEF maintains collaboration with the National Statistics Office (ELSTAT) in the framework of an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that, among others, resulted in making the necessary adjustments in the roll-out of the 2021 census that would allow to capture disadvantaged populations, such as Roma and refugee and migrants, and help inform evidence-based policies.
Five Municipalities (four urban and one island), which in 2021 had signed MoUs with UNICEF to become Child Friendly Cities, submitted Action Plans committing to systematic coordination, monitoring and delivery of social services for children and their families at the local level.

UNICEF provided inputs for the second Voluntary National Review (VNR) developed by Greece on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UNICEF supported the inclusion of refugee and migrant children in formal education by providing quality non-formal education (NFE), developing learning tools and building the capacity of teachers. This took place in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (MoERA), MoMA, MoLSA and various civil society organizations and academic institutions.

A common framework for the operation of NFE was created for the first time, based on consultation with the Government and CSO partners, resulting in a more harmonized and resourceful approach. This in turn led to the highest number and percentage of R/M students enrolled and attending schools yet achieved; and a significant improvement of quality NFE. Core innovations related to the harmonized approach included a) the integration of different components and modules of the ACE programme, under a common framework.; b) sharing and use of common learning material and tools, both for FE and NFE, including ALP and the Akelius e-course; c) the development of standards, roles and minimum qualifications for the operation of the NFE teams. UNICEF and its partners expanded NFE to include the entire refugee/migrant child population (4-17 years old) across various locations and accommodation facilities. The provision of NFE was based on a consolidated harmonized approach, establishing quality standards, and increasing effectiveness. All ACE partners were systematically trained in applying innovative teaching methodologies, increasing refugee and migrant children learning achievements and transferable skills, while, at the same time providing them with structured psychosocial support (PSS) and referral to specialized services.

In collaboration with the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) and academia, UNICEF implemented a 400-hour accredited capacity building programme for teachers. The programme reached 3,253 educators, school leaders and other staff engaged in the education of children with refugee and migrant background and involved more than 100 experts and mentors from different disciplines. An Accelerated Learning Programme was also piloted supporting secondary education refugee/migrant students, combined with targeted teachers’ training across the 39 schools participating in the pilot.

UNICEF expanded the dissemination of digital learning language courses (Akelius) for refugee/migrant students in both NFE and FE settings. Schools were supported also with teachers’ training and donations of digital devices. Together with partners, UNICEF developed a series of additional learning materials for host language teaching and the integration of Social-Emotional Learning in different learning subjects. In addition, in collaboration with MoMA, UNICEF produced a vocational orientation and employability guide for staff working with unaccompanied minors.

UNICEF coordinated the ESWG at national level, while supporting the regional ESWGs to promote information sharing, exchange of good practices, timely identification of challenges and barriers, and the development of a roadmap to improve refugee and migrant children access in education.

UNICEF also supported schools in their interaction with refugee and migrant communities and students with essential interpretation services.

To foster inclusive education with a focus on children with disabilities, Roma children and those with a migrant/refugee background, UNICEF provided teachers training, systematic mentoring and supported the co-creation of action plans in 38 schools hosting children with disabilities, Roma children, and children with a refugee/migrant background. In addition, UNICEF together with the MoERA launched a national campaign on the inclusion of children with disabilities in schools, addressing social stereotypes related to disability and promoting the one-school-for all approach.
To reinforce child protection mechanisms and support efforts towards DI, and by strengthening family and community-based models for child care reform, UNICEF supported the Greek authorities to draft the necessary legislation on professional foster care along with foster care protocols and guidelines. UNICEF also strengthened prevention in order to avoid separation of children from their families by training more than 260 social workers in Attica on identification, assessment and intervention in cases of families and children at risk, and supported 97 foster (or potential foster) families and 104 children for placement. In addition, UNICEF supported the drafting of the secondary legislation for the establishment of SIL model of care and operated the first apartment for young adults who were previously living in institutional care. Furthermore, UNICEF supported the assessment of 10 child care institutions to collect and analyse children’s placement data along with the financial and human resources required in order to inform effective planning on DI.

The European Child Guarantee NAP was developed with UNICEF technical expertise under the leadership of ECG National Coordinator, ensuring that it is based on robust evidence and relies on the findings and recommendations of the Deep Dive analysis; and that child participation and sound monitoring and evaluation are ensured.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, UNICEF completed the assessment of the Child Friendliness of the Greek Justice System with a view to strengthening authorities on evidence-based planning and initiated the drafting of an Action Plan on Child Friendly Justice. UNICEF was invited to participate in the Steering Committee that oversees the development of training material on child friendly justice for professionals and, along with the Deputy Ombudswoman for Child Rights, developed a guide for children’s rights in contact with the law. Lastly, in order to facilitate the accessibility of refugee and migrant children to the services of the Juvenile Probation Officers, UNICEF provided interpretation services.

To help address violence against children and GBV, UNICEF supported State efforts to collect and analyse data on GBV, including reporting against the CoE Istanbul Convention and adapted the GBV pocket guide digital app to the Greek context.

UNICEF continued its emergency response for refugee and migrant children and their families by supporting the CP/GBV case management and prevention activities in the Lesvos Reception and Identification Centres and the operation of 12 Female Friendly Spaces in open accommodation sites. In the context of the Ukrainian refugee response, UNICEF ensured that women and children from Ukraine arriving in the Promachonas border point received accurate information and PSS. Furthermore, in order to address the psychosocial needs of Ukrainian women and their children living in Athens, Thessaloniki and Serres, UNICEF established MHPSS support programs and strengthened community support.

UNICEF also provided technical support to key line Ministries, including with the drafting of funding proposals for prioritized areas of work.

UNICEF, in collaboration with MoLSA, supported youth from marginalized communities to acquire skills and job experience to better manage the transition from childhood to adulthood. Through partnerships with the Public Employment Service (DYPA) and Junior Achievement Greece, UNICEF developed a system to analyze needs, bottlenecks and young people profiles, tools to match existing and under development skills with the labour market; upskilling (including foundational, transferable and vocational); job counselling, and experience acquisition; and social enterprises’ development, among other. 931 adolescents and young people were reached with job counselling, entrepreneurial skills’ development, and job shadowing, while 32 participated in internships of up to four months. More than 10 enterprises and 22 mentors were engaged in the job shadowing and mentoring programme.
In addition, the U-Report Greece platform was launched in six languages and eight polls were rolled out on a wide range of issues to amplify the voices of youth and empower them to be connected and engaged as active participants in their communities and society. UNICEF also delivered a series of offline and online workshops for adolescents and young people focusing on their right to be heard and participate in civic and political life.

UNICEF continued to work on increasing brand recognition and establishing the agency as the main child rights advocate in Greece through communications actions. Awareness raising campaigns, events and initiatives covered a wide range of topics in line with programmatic and advocacy priorities, and received wide media attention, adapting in a significantly volatile and evolving public dialogue on key issues related to child rights. UNICEF’s Goodwill Ambassador Programme and the launch of Youth Advocates Programme had significant impact to the overall results, including a series of major partnerships with the Greek Church, the Hellenic Basketball Federation, the Athens Democracy Forum and the Authentic Marathon of Athens. The above partnerships with high profile individuals as well as major establishments in Greece, strengthened UNICEF’s narrative and results in the country through significantly increased media coverage and engagement.

UNICEF social media platforms steadily built their followership throughout the year to reach more than 15,000 followers. Overall reach through social media channels exceeded the initial estimations surpassing 4,000,000. Under digital engagement, the launch of Bebbo App and U-report in Greece were highly successful with more than 12,000 app downloads, and more than 2,000 adolescents and youth engaged as U-Reporters within the second half of 2022.

A series of TV docuseries, informational shows, news segments and articles were published with UNICEF’s contribution, with UNICEF Specialists, GWA and Youth Advocates sharing drafted key messages and statements on national traditional media outlets including TV, radio and newspapers.

Programme effectiveness was efficiently monitored and coordinated to meet quality standards in achieving results for children. Following the commencement in March 2022 of the Greece Country Programme 2022-2026 focus was placed in strengthening existing partnerships and establishing new ones, operationalising time-bound workplans, and supporting the Government in programming and policy-making, as well as providing humanitarian support to refugees. The Office met its principal programmatic priorities under the Child Guarantee pilot, established models and tools to facilitate de-institutionalisation and supported the counterparts in the design of its country-wide scale up. 2022 also saw a continuation of the refugee and migrant response efforts, focusing primarily on the roll out of the ACE programme.

UNICEF worked towards improving governance and systems to support efficient programme implementation and operational effectiveness. The first CPD and CPMP (2022-2026) submissions were completed following office-wide consultations.

Stewardship of financial and human resources allowed the CO to carry operations without delays or interruption. All statutory commitments were met regularly and functioned as planned to address issues related to CO performance management, KPIs progress, quality assurance, staff issues, financial management, environment sustainability, programmes and people management.

CMT worked towards improving the effectiveness of management, monitoring and oversight mechanisms. Overall office performance indicators remained green in 2022 throughout the year.

The office administered 12 FT/TA recruitments, and 11 recruitments of Consultants and Individual Contractors. Contract extension transactions of 52 FT and TA were timely administered by HR despite the tight timelines due to the funding landscape constraints. The office established Learning & Development Committee and worked to create a flexible workplace culture aligned with CRITA
As of December 2022, public and private fundraising generated $32.4 million in total income (a 26 percent increase on 2021) from 18 total contributions (including seven public sector donors and five private sector donors), of which $25.7 million were EU grants. Utilization rates remained high with OR reaching 96% and IB 99%.

In addition, 21 proposals were finalized (DG Home, DG Reform, RRF/MoH). Private sector fundraising revenue reached $442,232, with the total number of active individual donors expanded by 100 percent and of pledge donors by 22 percent, in addition to one legacy income. The office pursued collaboration opportunities with more than 35 private donor prospects, signing 11 fundraising agreements and MoUs, delivering 18 tailored collaboration pitches to corporates and submitting 16 tailored proposals of $4.35 million in value, still under negotiation.

UNICEF focused on a core circle of allies and supporters (cash and pledge donors, digital audience and lead generation), prioritizing telemarketing and digital outreach to ensure good customer service. The results in the individual channel were successful, with emphasis on organic growth throughout the year. Four major fundraising campaigns took place during 2022, advancing programmatic priorities in child protection, early childhood development, inclusive and quality education and Ukraine refugee response. Direct Response TV (DRTV) was also launched for the first time in November. December 2022 was dedicated to the campaign against violence and abuse of children, with the contribution of the Greek Goodwill Ambassador and popular singer, George Perris.

To leverage private sector engagement, the Representative participated as a guest speaker in two high-profile business events organized by the UN Global Compact Greece Network and the Hellenic-American Chamber with extensive participation from the Greek corporate sector.

### UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In line with the CPD, the office engaged with Governmental counterparts and key Ministries, such as MoMA, MoLSA, MoERA, to consolidate partnerships in the areas of child care reform, inclusive education, youth skills and employability, child friendly justice and mental health, and explored options to ensure comprehensive data and evidence to guide future programming. The office also engaged with and coordinated activities with other UN agencies, as well as civil society organizations and academia.

In the context of the Child Friendly Cities Initiatives, partnerships with local authorities further expanded. UNICEF has now reached a total of 10 Municipalities to set up mechanisms to effectively coordinate, monitor and report on the delivery of social services for children and their families at the local level.

To bolster private sector partnerships, UNICEF signed two MoUs with the Retailers Business Association and the Passenger Shipping Association, while one with the Greek Chamber of Hoteliers is expected to be signed in January 2023 to develop joint communication activities and customer engagement schemes. Finally, the office secured an Advocacy Partnership Agreement with the Athens International Airport.

### Lessons Learned and Innovations

The war in Ukraine affected NFE implementation with UNICEF and its partners adjusting presence and activities to support newly arrived refugee children at points of entry, dedicated camps and through...
online modalities. While an overall figure on the number of refugee and migrant children enrolled to formal education schools across Greece has been made available by the Ministry of Education, disaggregated data, such as the number of boys and girls enrolled in formal education remained a gap. UNICEF offered technical expertise to authorities to monitor the access, attendance and retention to school of refugee and migrant children, as well as to identify bottlenecks and provide solutions, corrective actions and relevant data to all stakeholders. However, no funding was identified to support this provision and the office will continue working towards identifying the necessary resources.

In child protection, the implementation of the pilot project of Child Guarantee in Greece remained an opportunity to support Government efforts on DI, reform of social services and the expansion of alternative family-based models of care. UNICEF’s future focus will be on scaling up implementation through advocacy, communication, and providing technical support to the State to bring upon all the required actions to reform the child protection system. In this effort, UNICEF should leverage resources from institutional and private funding streams and steer the public narrative towards this goal. In addition, CP/GBV programming for refugees and migrants was constraint due to lack of funding through HAC and EU funding mechanisms; UNICEF strived to strengthen prevention activities for the protection of children through the ACE.

The launch of U-Report Greece presents an opportunity for scale-up by engaging directly with and empowering youth across the country. Among the challenges encountered was the limited capacity and expertise of local partners on youth participation and empowerment, as well as the difficulty to reach large numbers of vulnerable youth from refugee and Roma communities. To address this, UNICEF increased face-to-face outreach to refugee youth and advocated for uptake of the U-Report by local and national authorities.

With regards to social policy and child rights monitoring, one major constraint is related to the limited capacity and expertise of local governments in monitoring, data collection and reporting, and the lack of existing child-focused municipal Action Plans. Local governments also lack effective internal coordination mechanisms and require detailed guidance and continuous, personalized support by UNICEF for them to coordinate and monitor social services locally. Significant efforts and resources need to be put into building the capacities of local staff to empower them to perform these functions and serve as catalyzers in their communities.

Clear programmatic priorities and initiatives need to be in place prior to reaching out to influential figures as most are keen to stand behind an existing programme/campaign. To promote a lasting cooperation, it is important to have internal capacity and dedicated time to build strong relationships with each key high profile individual in order to deliver a personalized and targeted plan for communications engagement. Two LTAs on media clippings and social media listening allowed the office to thoroughly monitor and evaluate communication and advocacy efforts.

Programme effectiveness is based on an alignment of advocacy, fundraising and programmatic priorities. Significant efforts were undertaken to boost resource mobilization through public partnerships under EU instruments funds channeled through the Government in order for UNICEF to play an active role in the implementation of interventions included in recent policy frameworks, such as the Child Guarantee NAP. Such efforts will need to be intensified to scale up of current initiatives, and for large-scale service delivery. Establishing governance and coordination structures under UNICEF’s flagship initiatives can address fragmentation, division of accountabilities and lack of synergies among actors, as well as, to encourage ownership of results and help advance the child rights agenda.

The office continued efforts to improve internal capacity to maximize operational effectiveness, transitioning from downstream to upstream work, implementing projects of high complexity and value, and administering EU grants with strict conditionalities while trying to build a self-funding model. Developing a self-funding model that will lead to financial stability requires strategic planning of
financial and human resources, which requires positioning of Operations’ role from transactional to a strategic partner in programme development and implementation.

**Public and private resource mobilization** for the Office took place against a difficult socioeconomic environment. The unstable economic situation of the country, exacerbated by a health and energy crisis, has affected the financial security of Greek citizens and businesses. In addition, the war in Ukraine has attracted the attention of media, donors and EU decision makers, while Greece is no longer grappling with an emergency.

Securing funding for projects that focus on system-strengthening, such as violence against children (VAC) and justice workplans, proved difficult as donors are more familiar with a project-based approach. Meanwhile, allegations of NGOs involved in child abuse and fraud affect the overall sentiment and trust towards the sector which, in turn, affects fundraising efforts. This may also present an opportunity for UNICEF to position itself as a transformational agency for the promotion of children rights and also help enhance resource mobilization efforts. A campaign on results can be the starting point to build the trust of individuals and private sector prospects in the Organization and its work, especially given the tainted legacy and image of the UNICEF brand caused by the closure of the former National Committee.

Finally, and most importantly, UNICEF invested significant resources in 2022 to support the Ministry of Health to develop two nationwide programs to be supported through funding from the National Managing Authority of the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF). However, institutional constraints pertaining to UNICEF’s regulatory framework in receiving and managing funds received from the Greek State will need to be addressed for these efforts to bear positive results. The resolution of these administrative and legal barriers preventing UNICEF from accessing fiscal resources of a range of EU financing instruments should be considered an existential challenge for the sustainability and viability of a Country Office in an EU member state.