

# Input by civil society to the 2021 EASO Asylum Report

Dear Colleagues,

The production of the *EASO Asylum Report 2021* is currently underway. The annual [Asylum Report series](#) present a comprehensive overview of developments in the field of asylum at the regional and national levels.

The report includes information and perspectives from various stakeholders, including experts from EU+ countries, civil society organisations, UNHCR and researchers. To this end, we invite you, our partners from civil society, academia and research institutions, to share with us your reporting on developments in asylum law, policy or practice in 2020 (and early 2021) by topic as presented in the online survey.

Please note that the EASO Asylum Report does not seek to describe national systems in detail but rather to present key developments of the past year, including improvements and challenges which remain. Your input can cover practices of a specific EU+ country or the EU as a whole. You can complete all or only some of the sections.

All submissions are publicly accessible. For transparency, 2021 contributions will be published on the EASO webpage. Contributions to the 2020 EASO Asylum Report by civil society organisations can be accessed [here](#), under 'Acknowledgements'. All contributions should be appropriately referenced. You may include links to supporting material, such as analytical studies, articles, reports, websites, press releases or position papers. If your organisation does not produce any publications, please make reference to other published materials, such as joint statements issued with other organisations. Some sources of information may be in a language other than English. In this case, please cite the original language and, if possible, provide one to two sentences describing the key messages in English.

The content of the EASO Asylum Report is subject to terms of reference and volume limitations. Contributions from civil society organisations feed into EASO's work in multiple ways and inform reports and analyses beyond the Asylum Report.

Your input matters to us and will be much appreciated!

**Nina Gregori** -*EASO Executive Director*

\*Please complete the online survey and submit your contribution to the 2021 EASO Asylum Report by **Thursday, 25 February 2021**.\*

## Instructions

---

Before completing the survey, please review the list of topics and types of information that should be included in your submission.

For each response, only include the following type of information:

- ✓ New developments and improvements in 2020 and new or remaining challenges; and
- ✓ Changes in policies or practices, transposition of legislation or institutional changes during 2020.

Please ensure that your responses remain within the scope of each section. Do not include information that goes beyond the thematic focus of each section or is not related to recent developments

## Contributions by topic

---

### **1. Access to territory and access to asylum procedures (including first arrival to territory and registration, arrival at the border, application of the non-refoulement principle, the right to first response (shelter, food, medical treatment) and issues regarding border guards)**

On 1 March 2020, the Greek Governmental Council on Foreign Affairs and Defense (KYSEA) decided to suspend any new asylum applications for one month with the adoption of the Emergency Legislative Decree, which stipulates the suspension of the right to seek asylum for all people entering the country and their return without registration, to their countries of origin or transit. Applying such a regulatory provision is inhumane and illegal and violates the fundamental principle of non-refoulement. The decree was adopted in response to the risk of massive influx of individuals to Greece. Despite its intention to safeguard the asylum system and possibly the reception system in the country, the measures adopted by the decree appear to be contrary to several provisions of the ECHR and, according to UNHCR, to international and EU refugee law.

During 2020, there was a high number of reports on illegal pushbacks in the Greek and land borders, without any assessment of the individual circumstances, denying access to the territory and to asylum procedures, in violation of international law and the principle of non-refoulement.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused additional problems for the new arrivals, which are placed in a quarantine area for the required 14 days without any access to services, since the facility is exclusively supervised by the Hellenic Police, the Coast Guard, and the National Public Health Organization and no involvement of any NGOs or even the UN High Commission for Refugees. There have also been a number of reported incidents in which newly arrived persons were sent back to Turkey after their stay in the quarantine area.

## **2. Access to information and legal assistance (including counselling and representation)**

During 2020 new challenges emerged due to the new amendments of L. 4636/2019 on “International Protection and other provisions” that was published on the Greek Governmental Gazette on 1.11.2019 and entered into force in January 2020 and due to the new amendments of L. 4686/2020 on “Improvement of migration legislation” that has been adopted by the Parliament on 9 May 2020. The deadlines within which asylum seekers can exercise their rights have been extremely reduced and the fast-track procedures of application examinations limited the opportunity of the applicants to consult a lawyer before the examination of their application.

The operation of the state-run legal aid through registry of lawyers has been gradually implemented since 2018. However, gaps in provision of legal aid remain in 2020 due to the low number and limited capacity of registry’s lawyers appointed at the islands of Lesbos, Chios and Kos and the absence of state-run legal aid in the islands of Samos and Leros. Legal aid capacity and expertise is seriously overstretched, in relation to the actual needs, in the Greek islands. As such, there are serious gaps with regards to the provision of free legal aid to applicants for the asylum procedures both at first and second instance.

Access to legal assistance is severely hampered after the covid-19 pandemic. Especially in Samos, Chios, and Lesbos islands, METAdrasi lawyers are facing problems accessing the RiCs as the administration authorities invoking the ministerial decision on restriction of movement for residents of “hotspot” in order to prevent the presence of lawyers inside “Hotspots”. The situation worsened when the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed among applicants residing inside RiCs. After May when the restrictive measures were lightened again, the presence of a lawyer if METAdrasi was still not possible in Samos, despite the fact that METAdrasi was included in the new Registry of Non-Governmental Organizations that have access to the camps. It is suggested that there be a permanent presence of lawyers in the camps in a specific designated area.

The fire in Moria has also posed significant obstacles to the applicants in accessing legal assistance. The entry of lawyers in the new camp was hindered, resulting the deprivation of asylum seekers to legal assistance. In addition, on October 8, 2020, the Regional Asylum Office of Lesbos started to conduct remote asylum interviews. However, the notifications of interview invitations are usually done on the day before the interview and often even on the same day, just a few hours before the interview. As a result, applicants are deprived of their right to legal assistance and to be prepared properly prior to the interview. Moreover, the conditions under which these interviews take place do not guarantee the principle of confidentiality, endanger the health of asylum seekers, lawyers, and Asylum Service employees, and have a detrimental effect on the quality of the process in general.

## **3. Provision of interpretation services (e.g. introduction of innovative methods for interpretation, increase/decrease in the number of languages available, change in qualifications required for interpreters)**

From the beginning of April, METAdrasi with the support of UNHCR and private donors launched a 24-hour interpretation telephone line, which could provide interpretation in 43

languages / dialects to all Public Bodies (Hospitals, EODY, Health centers, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, the Police), to CSOs, etc., with the aim of facilitating their communication with applicants of international protection. The line remained in operation until the end of May. This could be a very good practice to facilitate the access of asylum seekers and refugees in all public services (Hospitals, schools, police, etc.) and METAdrasi is in the process of finding resources so as to reoperate the line.

In addition, in the context of preventing the spread of covid-19 an effort was made to increase the use of the teleconferencing system operated solely by METAdrasi through tablet devices, which were allocated to METAdrasi's interpreters. METAdrasi's teleconference system has been operating since 2011 and is encoded in order to ensure the non-interception of conversations. Since 2014, it has been further strengthened by joining the Police network through the Police on Line (POL). During 2020, the decision of the Asylum Service to conduct interviews through Teams raised particular concerns on how to ensure the confidentiality of conversations, especially for asylum interviews.

Finally, in order to meet the growing needs in different languages, METAdrasi introduced new tools for interpretation and realized the training of new interpreters for the first time through an online seminar -rather than through in person presence- with great success.

Within this context it is to be noted that METAdrasi has been engaged since 2010 in the provision of interpretation and set up an integrated interpretation system that includes the training, examination, certification, evaluation and specific field supervision methodology of interpreters, so as to create a pool of high-quality trained interpreters, while respecting the code of ethics of interpretation and safeguarding their role in terms of impartiality and neutrality.

Since 2018, private companies have been also providing interpretation services to the Asylum Service, without however meeting the necessary standards of quality and without respecting the code of ethics of interpreters. This has resulted in a number of reports by beneficiaries, which indicate the incapacity of the interpreters. In 2020 we had to submit to EASO a report concerning a particularly serious incident of the company's interpreter's behavior. Furthermore, this affects the proper assessment of the asylum claims, which depend on the provision of accurate and qualitative interpretation. Ultimately, this has also led to accusations regarding the provision of low quality of interpretation by various actors, targeting all interpreters indiscriminately of whether they are interpreters hired by private companies or METAdrasi.

#### **4. Dublin procedures (including the organisational framework, practical developments, suspension of transfers to selected countries, detention in the framework of Dublin procedures)**

A good practice that was implemented in 2020 was the initiative of Switzerland to speed up the Dublin procedure for all reunification cases of UAMs but also to accept requests for UAMs from Greece with extended family ties in Switzerland.

#### **5. Special procedures (including border procedures, procedures in transit zones, accelerated procedures, admissibility procedures, prioritised procedures or any special procedure for selected caseloads)**

Under recent legislation amendments by L. 4636/2019 and L. 4686/2020, safeguards of asylum seekers are curtailed and the deadlines for examination and submission of supported documentation by lawyers during border procedures applied in hotspots became even stricter and more difficult.

Given the fact that readmissions from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey statement have stopped since March 2020 - period longer than eight months -, challenges emerged mainly regarding the examination of Syrian nationals, whose applications for international protection are examined and, in most cases, they are still rejected as inadmissible on the grounds of “safe third country” or “first country of asylum” concept. As a result, Syrian nationals are being deprived of their rights as refugees, left for a long and indefinite period in a legal limbo. In line with article 38 par. 4 of EU Directive 2013/32/EU, the provision of article 86 par. 5 of L. 4636/2016 specifies that, where the third country does not allow the applicant to enter its territory, its application shall be examined on the merits by the competent Decision-Making Authorities. The competent decision-making Authorities, both at first and second-instance examination’ procedures, fail to consider the several-month suspension of return-operations, the Turkish side refusal to answer to the Greek requests and the said provisions of article 86 par. 5 of L. 4636/2019.

#### **6. Reception of applicants for international protection (including information on reception capacities – increase/decrease/stable, material reception conditions - housing, food, clothing and financial support, contingency planning in reception, access to the labour market and vocational training, medical care, schooling and education, residence and freedom of movement)**

Reception conditions for the residents in the RICs continued to be substandard and inhumane especially in Lesbos and Samos; the facilities were overcrowded with shortages in basic goods, food and potable water and extremely limited access to services. Thousands of persons were accommodated in makeshift camps and tents in unhygienic and dangerous, conditions that exacerbate their physical and mental health.

An attempt was made to transfer people to the mainland; however, the living conditions did not improve much, since the capacity of the mainland camps was insufficient an adequate number of people. Large numbers of recognized refugees remain on the islands. Furthermore, the exit of refugees from the ESTIA accommodation scheme in a period of pandemic created homeless recognized refugees but also overcrowded camps in the mainland.

Furthermore, in light of the developments around the COVID-19 situation, on 22/03/2020 a Ministerial Decision on restriction of movement for residents of “hotspot” was issued and continued to be under force after several successive extensions of the said Decision. The Decisions on extension of the restriction of movement seemed to be unjustified and they reduced further the already limited access of asylum seekers to basic services and medical care, when overcrowded conditions inside RICs makes social distancing impossible and asylum seekers still do not have access to enough water, sanitation, and hygiene products. The

situation worsened when the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed among applicants residing inside RiCs. In September, the RiCs in Lesvos, Samos and Leros were placed under sanitary blockade (quarantine) in conditions of overpopulation, without, taking appropriate protective measures for COVID-19 patients and for vulnerable persons who are residing confined inside the RiCs.

Moreover, challenges emerged in September in Lesvos because of the fires that devastated Moria Reception and Identification Centre resulting in the homelessness of a huge number of asylum seekers, former residents of Moria Camp. The asylum seekers were transferred in a new emergency facility, which is still under ongoing construction and the conditions seems not to meet the minimum standards of dignified living, as there was not adequate sanitary services and facilities and there was no access to health care. This also proves the absence of any contingency planning in emergencies. In the light of the emergency, METAdrasi offered the Educational Centre and premises in Lesvos to temporarily host vulnerable single women at risk, victims of trafficking and SGBV for 2 months, who were referred by UNHCR. In this context, METAdrasi lawyers in Lesvos contributed to the temporary shelter of 48 vulnerable single women. They took over their cases and even continue to support them now that they are transferred to the new site. METAdrasi also undertook advocacy efforts in Belgium which was interested in relocating vulnerable women unfortunately to no avail.

Unaccompanied children above 16 years old cannot access the labour market legally and are not able to attend vocational training programs due to the inability to issue Tax Identification Number. Although the Independent Authority for Public Revenue (IAPR) issued a decision (Αριθ. Πρωτ.: Α.1270, ΦΕΚ: 5508 Β'/14.12.2020) that regulates the procedure for issuing the Tax Identification number to unaccompanied children in order to solve the issue, up to date it has not been implemented. An important problem is the connection of the guardian's personal Tax Identification Number with the Tax Identification Number of that a child under 15.

Access to education has been problematic for refugee and migrant children, since there are longstanding problems: delays in the recruitment of teachers and commencement of classes, transportation of children to schools, insufficient number of classes, lack of training of teachers and insufficient number of reception classes, especially for children in the urban area.

Covid 19 restrictive measures has constrained access to education for refugee and migrant children residing in open accommodation centres and in reception and identification centres. In some centers, EODY prohibited the transfer of children to schools due to a covid case, without the camp being under covid restrictions. In addition, children were unable to participate in tele-education during quarantine and there was no provision for the justification of absences made by the children while the accommodation structures were under Covid-19 restrictions. Nevertheless, in February 2021 METADRASI managed with the consent of the Ministry to start for the first time the daily transport and education of children outside the camp of Moria.

L. 4636/2019 regulates access to public healthcare for asylums seekers through the 'Temporary number for insurance and healthcare for third-country nationals' (P.A.A.Y.P.A). P.A.A.Y.P.A numbers are provided with the issuance (or renewal) of asylum seekers' cards, therefore only asylum seekers who have a valid card have PAAYPA. This left a number of applicants, who had not yet completed their registration or whose cards were

expired and were unable to get a new card due to covid19 restrictions without PAAYPA and access to medical care. The situation was even more acute during the pandemic, for asylum seekers who were holders of an asylum seeker card that had expired, but was legally extended.

Access to the labour market was exacerbated by covid 19 measures, since applicants could not issue the necessary documentation on account of the limited-service provision by the competent public authorities.

**7. Detention of applicants for international protection (including detention capacity – increase /decrease/stable, practices regarding detention, grounds for detention, alternatives to detention, time limit for detention)**

**8. Procedures at first instance (including relevant changes in: the authority in charge, organisation of the process, interviews, evidence assessment, determination of international protection status, decision-making, timeframes, case management - including backlog management)**

Developments following the adoption of L. 4636/2019 & 4686/2020 introduced several procedural limitations:

A new provision stipulates the rejection of the application for international protection on the substance “upon complete examination” even if there has not been examined on the substance, in case that the competent authority finds out that there is a reasonable cause to believe that the applicant has implicitly withdrawn their application even in cases where the personal interview of the applicant has not taken place and subsequently the applicant did not have the opportunity to explain the reasons for which they are seeking international protection.

The new provisions regarding the notification of international protection decisions are not ensuring that all measures are taken for the applicant to have real knowledge of the content of decisions that concern him/her (e.g. a decision is considered as notified 48 hours from sending an electronic mail or three days after the Manager of the Reception and Identification Center receives the decision by the Asylum Service).

**9. Procedures at second instance (including organisation of the process, hearings, written procedures, timeframes, case management - including backlogmanagement)**

Following the adoption of L. 4636/2019, the automatic suspensive effect of the appeal against the first instance decision is abolished for several groups of asylum seekers, exposing them to the risk of being returned to countries where they risk of being ill-treated, before the asylum procedure is completed, in direct violation of EU legislation. In particular, the provisions of article 104 L. 4636/2019 introduced an exemption of the automatic suspensive effect of the appeal for expanded categories of applicants. For these categories, the provision stipulates the right of the applicant to submit an application, before the Appeals Committees, with which they request to stay in the country until the second-instance appeal decision is issued. However, considering the lack of an adequate system for the provision of free legal aid, the

applicants who are exempted from the right to stay in the country will not be actually able to submit the relevant request.

Procedural and substantial obstacles prevent applicants from exercising the right to an effective remedy; among others, the applicant is required to cite specific reasons for appealing, a requirement that cannot be fulfilled without the provision of legal support. Thus, in conjunction with the operational deficiencies of Registry of lawyers by the Asylum Service for the provision of free legal aid to asylum seekers at the second instance, the majority of applicants are under the risk of being returned, without their international protection application being examined on the merits at second instance, since their asylum claims are possible to be dismissed at the second instance due to the systemic deficiencies of the Greek asylum system.

Furthermore, the new legislation developments (both Laws 4636/2019 and 4686/2020) are describing the obligation of the applicant to personally appear before the Independent Appeals Committee at the day of the examination of their appeal even if they have not been called for an oral hearing. Particularly for those applicants who live in Reception and Identification Centers, a confirmation or “proof of their residence” by the Director of (Reception and Identification Centers) RiC is required instead of the obligation of “in-person appear”, and for those cases that have received restrictions on their movement or are obliged to stay in a specific location, the applicant is required to submit confirmation by the competent Police station or Citizens Service Centre (KEP). Moreover, Law 4686/2020 sets also another one necessary condition, and in particular, the date of the “proof of residence” should not be more than three (3) days (2 days in some cases) from the hearing of the appeal. On this basis, a number of Appeal Committees - in infringement of the right to an effective remedy - have rejected appeals as “manifestly unfounded” without examining on the substance the respective appeals.

Lastly, the applicants in Lesbos island are still deprived from their right to appeal against the first instance negative decisions as RAO Lesbos has suspended temporary the administrative services to the public and does not accept appeals’ submissions. However, no Ministerial Decision or official announcement has been issued regarding the suspension of the appeals’ submission tough deadlines. As a result, several applicants residing in Lesbos run the risk their appeals to be considered unjustified out of time-submitted and thus to be rejected by Appeals’ Committees.

**10. Availability and use of country of origin information (including organisation, methodology, products, databases, fact-finding missions, cooperation between stakeholders)**

**11. Vulnerable applicants (including definitions, special reception facilities, identification mechanisms/referrals, procedural standards, provision of information, age assessment, legal guardianship and foster care for unaccompanied and separated children)**



General observation: L. 4636/2019 that entered into force in January 2020 brought a radical change in the handling of vulnerable groups, namely the persons in need of special procedural guarantees. Apart from the limitation of the vulnerable group categories, which excludes people who suffer from post-traumatic disorder and the survivors of shipwreck, the provisions place the members of vulnerable groups in the category of accelerated examination procedure of their applications. Furthermore, they are not exempted from the border procedure or the accelerated border procedure (including unaccompanied children above 15 years old, under certain conditions). According to Law 4636/2019, art. 83 par. 10 «Applications for unaccompanied minors under the age of fifteen (15) years old, as well as of minors who are victims of human trafficking, torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence are always examined in accordance with the normal procedure. Applications for international protection of unaccompanied minors shall be examined under the accelerated procedure only if: (a) the unaccompanied minor comes from a country which is included in the list of safe countries of origin, or (b) the unaccompanied minor has submitted a subsequent application and the preliminary examination, has not revealed new substantial elements (c) the unaccompanied minor is considered, for serious reasons, a danger to the national security or public order or has been forcibly expelled for serious reasons of public security or public order» and art. 90, par. 4 Applications for international protection of unaccompanied minors shall be considered in accordance with the border procedure only if: (a) the unaccompanied minor comes from a country which is included in the list of safe countries of origin, or (b) the unaccompanied minor has made a subsequent application, or (c) the unaccompanied minor may, for serious reasons, be considered a danger to the national security or public order or has been forcibly expelled for serious reasons of national security or public order; or (d) there are reasonable grounds for a country to be considered a safe third country for the unaccompanied minor under the specific circumstances in which he or she finds himself or herself, provided that this is in the best interests of the minor; or (e) when the unaccompanied minor has misled the authorities by presenting false documents; or in bad faith, the applicant has destroyed or disposed of an identity or travel document that would have helped establish his or her identity or nationality, in order to avoid a negative decision against him, provided that he/she and the guardian or the person exercising a particular guardianship act is given full opportunity to provide sufficient reasons for these actions.»

#### Unaccompanied children

The Special Secretariat for the Protection of the Unaccompanied Minors (SSPUM) was established in March 2020 (It is established under paragraph 3 of the first article of the Presidential Degree 18/2020 and operates according to Articles 35 and 42 of the Law 4622/2019 and art. 60, L. 4636/2019 as amended by art. 4 law 4686/2019 and reports directly to the Minister of Migration and Asylum) and set as a top strategic priority that unaccompanied minors have access to age-appropriate accommodation –and specifically that they are not detained or living in precarious conditions– by undertaking a number of initiatives. More specifically, the Secretariat has made efforts to increase places in long-term accommodation structures for the immediate improvement of living conditions.

Nevertheless, reception capacities for unaccompanied children continue to be insufficient; as of 31st of January 2021, 932 unaccompanied children live in informal/insecure housing conditions such as living temporarily in apartments with others, living in squats or being homeless. In addition, despite the recent abolition of protective custody (art. 43 L. 4760/2020), 17 children were under protective custody (i.e. detention), 1080 remain in

temporary accommodation structures (safe zones and hostels), 156 in open accommodation sites and 80 in reception and identification centres. After the fire in Moria, all unaccompanied children were evacuated from the Greek islands, with the coordination of the Special Secretariat. METAdrasi accompanied the majority of these children from all the islands to the mainland.

In addition, the lack of accommodation for unaccompanied children turning 18 is another problem. Within this context METAdrasi has with own funds set up some apartments to host some of the beneficiaries.

### Guardianship

In 2018 the Law on Guardianship was voted, which would (finally) enter into force in the 1st of March 2020. According to L. 4554/2018 Law 4554/2018 on “Provisions on Social Security and Pension, tackling of undeclared work, strengthening of workers’ protection, guardianship of unaccompanied minors plus other provisions”, (OGG A' 130/18.07.2018) on Guardianship, it was decided that the State would assume responsibility for the guardianship needs of all unaccompanied and separated minors in Greece. However, the national centre for social solidarity, who is the responsible guardianship authority was not ready to implement the law. In the context of the operationalization of the Guardianship system, a tripartite agreement had been signed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Ministry of labour and social affairs and METAdrasi for the implementation of a “transitional guardianship scheme” as of 1 January 2019, with the participation of NCSS. The transitional program was completed in December 2019. After the expiration of the tripartite agreement, the European Commission stopped funding. The result was that METAdrasi, which was left with thousands of children in charge, financed guardianship with its own resources without undertaking new cases in order to gradually close the cases it had with a corresponding reduction in the number of its guardians. Until March 2020, it kept few guardians on the islands. Due to the relocation program, the European Commission decided to fund guardianship through the UNHCR in order to increase the number of guardians so that children can be represented in the relocation process (see below). Therefore, from March to November, the gap for all the other children was huge and the requests for representation of these children from various bodies to METAdrasi (mainly from the asylum service) were many. METADRASI covered on a voluntary basis only very urgent request. In November 2020, the national centre for social solidarity published a tender for the provision of «representation services to unaccompanied minors». After a long effort of six years, during which the key need of children to have “their person” emerged, the state assigned, through a programme co-financed by the European Commission, and after the relevant tender process, the representation of unaccompanied children to METAdrasi with the signing of the relevant agreement with the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) in December 2020.

### Age assessment

Ministerial Decision 9889/2020 was adopted recently so as to bring into conformity the procedures with the literature and international standards. However, it has not become operational throughout the country and therefore discrepant practices have been observed. A number of challenges have been identified during the undertaking of the age assessment process, such as the limitations of the methods in use concerning intrusiveness and accuracy, the primary use of medical methods, systematic recourse to medical exams, whereas sometimes non suitable exams are conducted, or the exams are conducted by non-specialized

doctors, age assessment is implemented as a routine practice and not on the basis of substantiated doubts as well as the absence of key safeguards in the process (i.e. the lack of guardian/representative or effective remedy). One of the major disadvantages of using a medical method is that they can only offer an estimate of the age and therefore there is a wide margin of error in the concluding results. Also, concerns arise regarding the impact of different cultural and ethnic/racial characteristics on the accuracy of the final assessment. In addition, the absence of qualified and properly trained interpreters and lack of appropriate methodological tools for conducting in-depth interviews required in the context of age assessment procedures are another limiting factor in drawing accurate conclusions.

#### Foster care

Throughout 2020, an effort was made to implement the new law on foster care that was voted in 2018. However, the tools that were made did not allow the inclusion of unaccompanied children in the system and METADRASI remained the only body that, in cooperation with the Prosecutor, and the social services placed unaccompanied children in families. From 2016 that METAdrasi started for the first time in Greece the alternative foster care program until now 107 unaccompanied children have been placed in 84 families, in the context of METAdrasi's activity "Foster care for unaccompanied minors" ..

#### Victims of torture

According to art. 61 L. 4636/2019 (which transposes Article 25 of Directive 2013/33 / EU) "Victims of torture, rape or other serious acts of violence shall be certified with a medical certificate by a public hospital, military hospital or suitably trained public health service providers, including medical examiners...". Nevertheless, public hospitals are not in the position to assume this responsibility, either due to lack of knowledge of the process or/and due to unwillingness.

Since 2010 METAdrasi has led the process of identifying and certifying survivors of torture within Greece. According to the law, one must be certified to receive the necessary care so those who cannot receive do not enjoy protection from deportation to their country of origin and do not receive the necessary care. Since 2011, an interdisciplinary team consisting of social workers, doctors, psychologists, and lawyers (many of whom are former members of MRCT, with over 30 years of experience in the field) examine all cases referred to the programme. METAdrasi bases its torture certification procedure on the Istanbul Protocol, a set of international guidelines which define the procedures necessary to conduct the effective investigation and documentation of torture allegations. However, during 2020, due to lack of resources, METAdrasi was able to accept for certification a small number of potential victims of torture. At the end of 2020, however, with the financing of the EEA grants for two years, apart from the increase in the capacity in the certification of a larger number of potential victims, the possibility of conducting seminars mainly for the staff of the RICs and the Asylum Service is foreseen.

It is also important to note that according to the Directive 2013/33/EU the bodies of certification must be independent and impartial.

## **12. Content of protection (including access to social security, social assistance, healthcare, housing and other basic services; integration into the labour market;**

**measures to enhance language skills; measures to improve attainment in schooling and/or the education system and/or vocational training)**

Access to social security and assistance as well as integration in the labour market can be hampered for those beneficiaries of international protection who cannot issue a bank account. According to our experience, some banks do not accept the residence permit granted to beneficiaries of international protection as a valid document of identification, although it is issued by the Greek authorities.

**13. Return of former applicants for international protection**

**14. Resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes (including EU Joint Resettlement Programme, national resettlement programme (UNHCR), National Humanitarian Admission Programme, private sponsorship programmes/schemes and ad hoc special programmes)**

**15. Relocation (ad hoc, emergency relocation; developments in activities organised under national schemes or on a bilateral basis)**

In March last year, when the European Commission urged member states to take unaccompanied minors due to the unsustainable situation in the overcrowded refugee camps, METAdrasi was assigned the task to assist in the best interest assessment (BIA) for the relocation purposes. This means that METAdrasi's team of guardians who are responsible to represent the minors, prepare them and inform them regarding the whole process and finally sign the recommendation (that explains why it is in the best interest of the minors to be relocated) and sign it. The Greek Government, along with the EU member state that wants to host unaccompanied minors, are responsible to decide which children are going to be relocated (depending on the criteria the hosting country has set). The more diverse the criteria, the more minors can be included in the selection process. METAdrasi was an integral part of this procedure with its guardians in order to guarantee the adequate representation of the best interest of the child.

Once the selection criteria have been established, the Greek authorities in close collaboration with UNHCR, EASO and 2 NGOs (METAdrasi and Praksis) that are active in the field, review and evaluate all minors' cases that fit the relocation criteria. Concerning the implementation arrangements of the Relocation scheme, all relevant requests for the arrangement of BIAs were made by the Special Secretariat for Unaccompanied children, and were communicated to METAdrasi by EASO or UNHCR. Until the end of 2020, METAdrasi supported 1.101 unaccompanied children on the islands and in the mainland by informing them of the

Voluntary relocation procedures, by participating in their BIAs (in cooperation with EASO and UNHCR caseworkers), by representing them in all additional procedures. In addition, once the minors were transferred in the mainland METAdrasi organized in a voluntary basis the provision of language courses (especially in Portuguese and French) in order to prepare a smooth integration in the destination country, with its activity "escorting minors to safe place)". Moreover, all the requests for the presence of guardians in asylum and/or security interviews (although these were not part of the SoPs, it was requested that the guardians participate in security and asylum interviews for the matched for relocation UAC in countries such as France, Lithuania, Finland and Germany, whose number increased since September and until the end of the year) were made by the authorities of the member-states, and were communicated to UNHCR and METAdrasi by the Special Secretariat for Unaccompanied minors.

Working closely with the Ministry of Migration's General Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Children, as well as with the staff of the RIC Centres, the Asylum Offices and UNHCR on the islands, all the necessary procedures and processes were completed in an extremely short timeframe, in order for the selected children to be accepted and be ready to travel. Relocation exercise is a good practice to ease the pressure from EU member states that are facing extreme reception conditions but there are many lessons learned that we should take in to account.

**16. National jurisprudence on international protection in 2020 (please include a link to the relevant case law and/or submit cases to the [EASO Case Law Database](#))**

**17. Other important developments in 2020**

## References and sources

---

**18. Please provide links to references and sources and/or upload the related material in PDF format**

<https://metadrasi.org/en/an-important-step-in-the-protection-of-the-most-vulnerable-children-the-unaccompanied-ones/>

<https://metadrasi.org/en/kathimerini-article-foster-care/>

<https://metadrasi.org/en/campaigns/certification-of-torture-victims/>

<https://metadrasi.org/en/pandemict-children-to-germany/>

<https://metadrasi.org/en/open-letter-by-85-organizations/>

**19. Feedback or suggestions about the process or format for submissions to the EASO AsylumReport**

## Contact details

---

**Name of Organisation: METAdrasi**

**Name and title of contact person: Lora Pappa, President**

**Email: [programme@metadrasi.org](mailto:programme@metadrasi.org)**

**I accept the provisions of the EASO [Legal and Privacy Statements](#)**