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We are grateful to the Oak Foundation for supporting this research and report.

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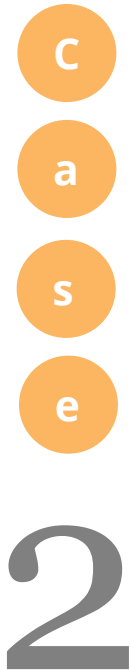
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Suggested citation: Bhabha, Jacqueline, et al. *Children on the Move: An Urgent Human Rights and Child Protection Priority*. Boston: Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, 2016.

IN TRANSIT

On and Through Lesbos, Greece



BACKGROUND

From the beginning of 2015 through mid-March 2016, more than one million refugees and migrants have crossed from Turkey, through the Aegean Sea, into Greece and other Balkan countries in search of asylum in Europe.¹ This flow arises from the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, with hundreds of thousands exposed to hardship and basic human rights violations and many European countries forced to act as transit or temporary reception sites for this massive influx of people. Children and youth make up a major and well-documented portion of those migrating, with 38 percent of arrivals, or approximately 382,725, believed to be minors.² By September 2015, the number of child asylum applications had reached 214,355,³ with the greatest number of applicants originating from the conflict countries of Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.⁴

Two categories of children can be found crossing the borders: those who travel with family members and those who travel unaccompanied, having either started the journey alone or becoming separated from their families during their journey.⁵ As of September 2015, approximately 1,200 unaccompanied minors were registered in in the small island of Lesbos (Lesbos) alone,⁶ with approximately 500 more registered in the remaining islands of the Aegean Sea. However, as of late November 2015, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (henceforth fYRoM) had registered 15,000 unaccompanied minors crossing the border from Greece,⁷ while for the whole of 2015, 88,245 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in all 28 European Union (EU) countries.⁸ As Lesbos is widely considered the main entry point for the over one million who have entered Europe thus far, the registration discrepancies reveal a significant challenge in the accurate identification and registration of unaccompanied minors. The statistical disparities also raise questions regarding the risks and dangers that these unaccompanied minors, unregistered and effectively unseen, are exposed to. Given the high mobility of refugee and migrant populations and the delays in the mechanisms in place to relocate unaccompanied minors, many minors actively avoid registration in an attempt to continue their journey without un-

due delay. Moreover, according to the Director of the First Reception Center in Moria, “If someone was presenting himself as a relative of a child [without proof or the proper documentation], he would be considered as the guardian of the child and would not be questioned further, even though this is against the law.[...] This [approach has] caused the loss of 3,000 to 5,000 unaccompanied minors from the system.” According to observations by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and local authorities, the number of unaccompanied girls and minors under the age of 12 continues to rise.

Recent developments in Eastern and Central Europe have had wide-ranging repercussions on the well-being of refugees and migrants travelling towards Europe, putting vulnerable populations at higher risk. The effective closure of the Balkan route, the increasing tightening of “Fortress Europe,” and the implementation of the March 2016 EU-Turkey agreement have forced Greece to implement new laws for the treatment of refugees, often leading to their prolonged detention.⁹ Ironically, Greece now finds itself implementing the very measures that it was called to change in 2010 when it was criticized for systemic deficiencies in the asylum system, measures that lead to the violation of the fundamental rights of those seeking international protection¹⁰ and the detention of asylum seekers.¹¹

The present report, focusing primarily on refugee children on the move, accompanied and unaccompanied, aims to establish an overview of the risks and dangers that these children face during their time in Greece and the challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that their rights are upheld and that they are protected. It also aims to survey the general legal and policy context which informs the strategies and mechanisms in

place to protect refugee children, highlighting, where applicable, good practices that have been adopted to strengthen the protection of children and their integration into society. Three main considerations have led to the delimitation of the scope of this report: firstly, the vulnerability of refugee minors due to their age and the trauma they have endured during their journey; secondly, the current developments in Europe that affect the mobility of the refugee and migrant population, introducing new and more severe risks to their well-being; and thirdly, the inability of Greece to manage this influx due to its economic crisis, a lack of support from Europe, and the sheer magnitude of the crisis itself.

METHODOLOGY

The current research was conducted in May of 2016 after the implementation of the agreement between the EU and Turkey. The agreement stranded 54,496 refugees and migrants in Greece, about 40 percent of whom, or close to 22,000, are minors.¹² The research focused on two critical areas along the refugees and migrants route as they moved within Greece. The first area is Lesbos (called henceforth by its Greek name, Lesvos), an island of 86,000 inhabitants which received the bulk of refugees and migrants. According to the authorities, 597,027 refugees and migrants arrived between the beginning of 2015 and mid-May 2016.¹³ Lesvos is also home to the first so-called EU “hotspot,” Moria camp. Moria became the first detention center in Greece as a result of the EU-Turkey agreement. Research on Lesvos focused on the Moria hotspot, the two second-line reception facilities of Kara Tepe and PIKPA which host vulnerable populations, and the third-line transit accommodation facilities for unaccompanied refugee minors. The sec-

ond area of focus is the makeshift camp in Idomeni, located on the border with fYRoM, along with smaller, informal camps close by, where 14,251 refugees and migrants settled in the hopes of one day being able to cross the border into fYRoM. These areas are informal sites, completely unsuitable for living; at the time of this research in early May, approximately 6,412 refugee children were settled there.¹⁴

Given its limited geographic scope, the current report does not exhaustively represent the range of risks that refugee minors face nor does it analyze all the practices implemented in camps throughout Greece. The areas studied were chosen specifically for their large concentration of refugee minors and for their central role in the main migration route used by refugees and migrants throughout their journey.

The findings of this report are based on a thorough desk review and on data collected during field research. Information was collected from, and interviews were conducted with the director of the First Reception Center in Moria, the director of Kara Tepe Camp, the International Relations Senior Advisor at the Mayor's Office of the Municipality of Mytilene, pediatricians in the local Hospital of Mytilene, two lawyers with expertise on refugees and unaccompanied minors, UNHCR staff, a member of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), two coastguards, as well as members of the NGOs Hliaxtida,¹⁵ Arc of the World,¹⁶ Samaritan's Purse, Lesvos Solidarity,¹⁷ Eurorelief, and other NGOs.¹⁸

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON THE TREATMENT OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

First-line reception facilities: Moria Hotspot

Upon arrival, all refugees and migrants are expected to register at first-line reception centers, also known as “hotspots.” Hotspots are areas located at key arrival points in Greece and Italy and are designed to manage migration by ensuring the proper identification and registration of all migrant arrivals.¹⁹ The European authorities describe hotspots thus: “Hotspots were conceived as an emergency policy response to the crisis and their location within frontline states is simply a reflection of the geographical reality and the need to establish some degree of orderly migration management.”²⁰

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO), EU Border Agency (Frontex), and EU Police Cooperation Agency (Europol) work in tandem, along with country authorities on the identification and fingerprinting of migrants to ascertain their status in an effort to identify those eligible for asylum and relocation, while also creating an effective method for returning those who are not in need of international protection.²¹ In early February 2016, serious identification and registration process deficiencies were identified, largely due to infrastructure shortcomings, forcing Greece to implement additional actions. In early May 2016, significant progress had been made in terms of the registration process of migrants at the hotspots; however, deficiencies still remained and need to be addressed.²²

Prior to the EU-Turkey agreement, the average length of stay in reception centers was seven days, with refugees and migrants receiving the necessary papers to continue their travel within Greece towards other parts of Europe. After the new agreement, however, arrivals are forced to remain within the hotspots while their applications are processed, depriving many of their liberty through detention for prolonged periods of time. Given the increased number of refugees and migrants and a shortfall in the number of trained staff, the average length of stay has increased dramatically, leading to overcrowding and seriously impeding the ability of authorities to meet the basic needs of those forced to wait.

Risks for all refugee children

Housing

As of mid-May 2016, at the Moria hotspot, 4,207 people (including families and unaccompanied children) were detained and held under police guard.²³ The facility is surrounded by a thick concrete wall around its perimeter and a double barbed-wire fence, while the entrance is under constant 24-hour police guard. According to the testimonies of volunteers working inside the camp, the majority of detainees have been held for more than two months, an unacceptably lengthy detention in a facility that was not designed for even short-term detention. Unfortunately, only 900 parents and children in Moria have the benefit of being housed in a protected area specifically designed to accommodate families. Surrounded by metal bars and fences, this area offers families a sense of safety as no one is allowed to enter without proper identification during the night. The remaining families, however, have no choice but to live outside of this protected area in tents where children are commingled with unrelat-

ed adults, with the potential threat of physical or sexual abuse to children, especially during the night.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

Sanitation facilities are poor and severely limited in number. Even though there are separate toilets for men, and women and children, privacy is not guaranteed. The shower facility is routinely out of order and its location near other tents raises concerns about the safety of vulnerable populations while using the facility. According to volunteers, women and children hesitate to use sanitation facilities out of a concern for their safety and fear of sexual harassment or abuse. Concerns about poor drinking water have been raised by pediatricians in the local hospital, as many cases of dehydration have been documented. Many parents complain to doctors that the water quality in the camp is poor and that they do not have access to bottled water.

Health care

Efforts have been made to offer healthcare to children detained in Moria but these efforts are not always sufficient. The doctors located within Moria do not always have the expertise necessary to treat children, leading to incorrect diagnoses or to unnecessary referrals to an already crowded local hospital. “The doctors that work in the camps are not pediatricians. They are orthopedics, gynecologists... they do not have the proper expertise. [...] In some cases, they will send the minor to the hospital, even if the situation does not require it,” says a pediatrician at the local hospital.

According to hospital records, in 2015 and the first three months of 2016, 937 children were examined and 379 were hospitalized. The majority suffered from respiratory tract infections (ARTs), 73 from intestinal infections, 6 from Hepatitis A, and 2 from mening-

gitis.²⁴ During the summer months, doctors expect to diagnose many dermatological problems due to continuous exposure to the sun without proper clothing or sunscreen. Because of the limited healthcare offered inside the camps, minors are transferred to the local hospital in cases of emergency where they receive proper medical treatment. Pediatricians have also expressed concern about receiving accurate information, citing instances when they have been misinformed and at times misled by parents. One doctor states, “Many times, the parents present the situation of the child as worse than it is, or the child as younger than it is, in an attempt to be considered more vulnerable and moved outside of Moria to a better facility. [For example] a mother told me that her child was 10 when it was clear from the examination that the girl was at least 15. Many times there is no consistency between the information gathered during their official registration, the information given by the doctors in the camps and the information we get [from the parents] with the help of the translator.”

Furthermore, the provision of psychological care to minors and their families is limited, though critical given the trauma experienced through war or persecution in their countries of origin, through beatings during their journey, or as a result of the death of loved ones during the sea crossing. Previous reports highlight the impact of these traumatic experiences on the psychological well-being of children, with bedwetting, nightmares, fear, and attachment being some of the most common symptoms.²⁵ In addition to this already fragile psychological state of refugees, their exposure to prolonged detention and their complete uncertainty about the future makes psychological help essential, both for children and for their parents or other caretakers. The level of acute distress caused

by prolonged exposure to trauma has led to a range of serious child protection risks, including child abuse and other forms of aggression and mistreatment of children.

The form that health care provision takes is of critical importance in the extreme situations occurring in Lesvos. Disrespectful treatment, poor communication, or ignorance of important cultural characteristics has threatened the already dented self-confidence and dignity of refugee families, leading many to refrain from seeking or asking for help altogether.²⁶ Because of the overwhelming demand for care, doctors have tended to focus on immediate medical emergency responses, neglecting professional respect or compassion for patients. Furthermore, the lack of properly trained staff equipped to work with traumatized children and children from different cultural backgrounds, in combination with the lack of proper psychological education, has led to inappropriate treatments²⁷ and inadequate or misconceived responses to mental health needs, especially in cases where cultural issues are not factored into treatment.²⁸

Nutrition

Access to food has improved dramatically since the Hellenic Army began distributing food within Moria. Three free meals per day are distributed to those detained within Moria and efforts have been made to ensure that all have access to food, with volunteers providing additional cooking services and extra meals within the facility. However, despite these positive changes, volunteers working within the facility raised two main concerns. Firstly, because of the absence of an age-differentiated menu, it was not clear that the nutritional needs of all detainees were served, especially young children and babies. NGOs located inside the facility distributed milk formula to mothers, but there were concerns

about whether the quantity of formula given was sufficient for the nutritional needs of the babies.²⁹ Secondly, the manner in which food was distributed raised concerns. Because young, strong, and healthy detainees could stay in line for hours or rush to the front, they tended to get priority and benefit from the haphazard distribution method. Some parents used their children as a way of getting priority in the line: according to one Moria volunteer, “they always carry the children with them, especially if they are babies [and] use them as a leverage in order to get priority,”

Child-friendly area

A significant improvement was the creation of a child-friendly area. Led by NGOs responsible for child protection, these specially designed areas offer minors a safe place to engage in activities during the day and reflect an effort to offer traumatized children a respite from stress and uncertainty.³⁰ Additionally, because of the average length of stay, educational courses have been offered teaching English, German, and Greek languages to children in an attempt to better prepare them for future integration in their final destination country. However, because the detention center is a temporary transit center, no other form of education is offered to minors. Many had been out of school for as long as a year and a half, while some children had never attended school at all.³¹

Growing frustration

Conditions in Moria have deteriorated rapidly due to overcrowding, fear, and frustration caused by delays in processing and cultural differences among inhabitants, at times leading to verbal and physical conflicts. After the EU-Turkey agreement with the resulting formal detention of refugees and migrants, many riots have broken out in Moria, requir-

ing the intervention of the police to put out fires or break up fights among inhabitants. This behavior is expected to continue, placing refugee minors in further physical and psychological danger. In an attempt to reduce the frustration associated with long detention, the government allows refugees and migrants detained for more than 25 days in Moria to leave the hotspot during the day and visit surrounding areas. Despite this concession, as noted by advocates from Human Rights Watch, the “blanket detention, unjustifiable on legal, humanitarian and practical grounds [...] constitutes arbitrary detention under international law.”³² This criticism was dismissed by a senior Greek police officer, according to whom Greek officials “are acting in line with the EU agreement and with Greek law which allows for pre-removal detention, which is an internationally established practice.”³³ The Framing Review at the outset of this report discusses in some detail the severe restrictions placed by international law on the detention of those not charged with criminal offences, and particularly highlights the unsuitability of detention in the case of children.

Criminal activity

Informal reports of refugees and migrants engaging in criminal activities within Moria have circulated. They relate to drug trafficking and prostitution, and may in some cases be motivated by an effort to gain money or protection. Reliable data on the economic circumstances of migrants residing in the hotspot are not available, as this information is not gathered or required during the registration process, but refugees’ testimonies indicate that the majority have borrowed money from family and friends in order to pay smugglers,³⁴ with many having spent most of their money during the journey to reach Greece. Even though within the hotspot refugees and

migrants do not have to pay for health care or food, uncertainty about the future prompts many to seek some form of financial security.

Concerns have been raised regarding the degree of coercion used to recruit participants in criminal activities, particularly as regards women and children. Several respondents reported instances of rape and the guilty silence surrounding the topic. There are reports of cases of sexual exploitation of refugee children in Greece,³⁵ raising serious concerns about the fate of children who continue to be locked up with adults. Respondents also discussed cases of bullying by young adults towards more vulnerable populations such as families, raising questions regarding their safety during the night. “The volunteers assign specific people to one tent and the next morning they find different people inside the tent,” noted a volunteer working inside Moria. However, the director of the facility rejected these claims, indicating that “the center is closed and protected. There is official supervision and control, and many NGOs are active in the center.” Local doctors report the allegations but have yet to document a case of rape. They do recall an instance of a young girl who was transferred to the hospital from Moria and whose behavior raised serious suspicions of potential sexual abuse.³⁶

Additional risks for unaccompanied refugee children

The exact number of unaccompanied children is unknown but has been estimated at 10 percent of the total child refugee and migrant population.³⁷ Between March 18 and mid-May 2016, approximately 150 unaccompanied refugee children age 12 to 17 years old were registered at the facility in Moria.³⁸ These children were placed in a separate area surrounded by barbed wire in an effort to separate them from the adult population.

This area was designed to host minors for only a short period of time, with the idea that placing them under administrative detention would guarantee their safety, an approach that is widely criticized (see Framing Review above).³⁹ Despite efforts to decrease the detention time of children, the new EU agreement with Turkey has resulted in increased detention periods, at times exceeding two months; this constitutes a de facto deprivation of freedom and a violation of Article 37 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).⁴⁰ The lack of an alternative to detention reveals a failure by the Greek authorities to uphold international standards regarding the detention of children,⁴¹ as well as a failure to provide an adequate number of facilities to deal with the problem. “There are only 420 available spots for unaccompanied refugee and migrant children throughout Greece; this is a drop in the ocean,” said the director of the reception facility in Moria. With a 530 percent increase in the number of unaccompanied children in 2016 alone, the number of currently available spots within existing permanent accommodation facilities for unaccompanied children is completely inadequate to meet current needs.⁴²

Special efforts have been made to improve the living conditions of detained minors by offering three meals per day, access to proper health care, and English courses and books for creative leisure. However, the detention of a large number of teenagers from different cultural backgrounds leads to rapidly deteriorating living conditions. In April 2016, a riot broke out in the facility as minors protested their detention, which they felt was punitive and unjust. The riot resulted in serious injuries. According to pathologists at the local hospital, 25 refugee minors were admitted and diagnosed with bone fractures. The frustration of minors may have been exacerbated

Case Table 2.1 Failures in Child Protection at First-line Reception

<p>Inefficient screening system for vulnerable populations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The registration center at the Moria hotspot fails to consistently screen new arrivals for vulnerabilities, leading to the detention of many families alongside adults.• Though significant improvements have occurred with families resettled to second-line facilities on the island, the continued detention of families in Moria and the under-utilization of vacancies available for resettling families in safe areas, such as Kara Tepe, constitute missed opportunities.
<p>Prolonged detention under poor living conditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cases of families and unaccompanied minors being held in detention for periods of over two months are rampant. This continuing situation reveals the failure of the Greek government to abide by its obligations under the CRC, according to which detention of minors is a measure of last resort, to be used only when no alternatives exist, for the shortest possible amount of time, and only when each individual case is justified.• Though alternatives to detention do exist, the significant delay in their implementation continues to deprive many families and minors of their freedom. While many unaccompanied minors have been transferred to transit accommodation facilities where living conditions are much improved and where workers have adopted a child-rights perspective, many families and unaccompanied children unjustifiably remain in detention.
<p>Lack of systematic information provision and long wait times</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Though the First Reception Center in Moria is tasked with providing information regarding the rights and obligations of refugees and migrants, the current relocation scheme, family reunification, and the asylum process in Greece, this information is not consistently or systematically provided.* This lack of detailed information, along with long wait times, increases frustration and anxiety and leads to tension and violent behavior.• Many NGOs have attempted to fill this gap but, as they lack systematic access to new arrivals, they are unable to ensure that everyone receives the necessary information. Only identified unaccompanied minors have systematic access to information concerning their rights and alternatives, access that continues when they are transferred to third-line transit accommodation facilities. The Greek authorities have an urgent obligation to address this failure to provide essential information. <p style="text-align: right;"><small>*Amnesty International, "Trapped in Greece: An avoidable refugee crisis"</small></p>
<p>Needs of accompanied refugee children are not always identified</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Even though special efforts have been made to ensure child-friendly spaces in first-line facilities, the special needs of minors living with families or other carers are not always identified.• The prolonged detention of families inside the Moria hotspot makes it difficult for parents to insure children's needs are met.

by the behavior of a small number of officials who treated them more as prisoners than as minors under protection. A pediatrician at the local hospital said, “I was in my office when two policemen from Moria Center informed me that they were bringing two prisoners for examination. When I asked them why they were bringing them [to the pediatric department], they asked me ‘to whom else should we take them?’ [..]. Then, one of them told me that the prisoners were minors [..].” Informal testimony confirms that prolonged detention of such a large number of minors of different ages and cultural backgrounds inevitably leads to increased tension,⁴³ sexual harassment, and abuse. Volunteers claim that it is well known that there are cases of sexual abuse among unaccompanied minors, though official sources reject these claims.

The authorities were criticized for the delay in implementing relatively simple measures to secure the safety and well-being of the vulnerable group of people within their custody, particularly since the UNHCR and other NGOs monitoring the situation closely, had been reporting on violations for months. “We were not prepared and we did not predict what would happen. We tried to follow the events and give solutions afterwards. We are never effective as reality is unpredictable,” said the director of the center in Moria. Eventually, under pressure and in response to developments following the EU/Turkey agreement, the Greek government — in cooperation with UNHCR, the Public Prosecutor for Minors, and NGOs — decided in early May to move the majority of the minors detained in Moria to temporary facilities while they await placement in special permanent reception centers in mainland Greece. The greatest number of minors (74) were moved to the Mandamados site, an area managed by Praksis, Save the Children, and MSF, and

specially designed as a temporary facility for unaccompanied children. In addition, 32 minors were transferred to temporary houses managed by Hliaxtida and 25 to a house run by Metadrasis. Arrangements also began to be made for the transfer of the remaining minors in detention in Moria. These efforts have been well received and reflect well on the ability of parties to cooperate and find solutions, though the delay in implementing them is regrettable.

Second-line reception facilities: Kara Tepe and PIKPA

The second-line reception facilities are transit camps that host the most vulnerable populations while they wait for their asylum claim to be determined. These facilities were initially meant to host refugees for no more than a week, and conditions were unsuitable for longer stays. However, the EU/Turkey agreement has led to urgently needed infrastructure improvements, with the result that both the Kara Tepe and PIKPA Centers have made substantial progress towards fulfilling the requirements and standards for refugee housing.

Kara Tepe is run by the municipality of Lesvos and hosts 1,100 vulnerable refugees, the majority of whom are single mothers with children, a separation that reflects the effort to segregate women and children from the adult refugee and migrant population. The management of the camp, with the help of NGOs, has provided families with prefabricated containers allowing for some measure of privacy. Three free meals per day are served to each of the families, brought by volunteers to each of the containers to avoid the chaotic situation caused by uncontrolled food distribution lines. There are sanitation facilities for men separate from those for women and children,

along with paved walkways for wheelchairs. People still have freedom of movement; they are free to visit the city of Mytilene by taxi, by bus, or on foot, with the only barrier to their mobility the geographical boundaries of the island. According to the mayor of Mytilene “Kara Tepe is a village and the travelers here are our guests.”⁴⁴ The director of Kara Tepe said, “We have 1,100 guests and we treat them accordingly.” There is daily access to medical care, while in case of emergency there is a private ambulance that drives patients to the local hospital, usually with the escort of a member of an NGO who is able to facilitate dialogue between doctors and patients. According to the director of the camp, “fights among the ‘guests’ exist, as they exist in villages. [...] Inside our community, we have created smaller communities based on the nationalities. We do not mix nationalities [in order to avoid tension]. Our good relationship with our guests helps us solve any tension very easily.”

The most important change, however, is the design and implementation of integration and educational programs, a development that reflects the island’s change from a short-term transit site for refugees and migrants to one which now hosts long-term-resident refugee and migrant populations. As many families face wait times of more than four months, their integration into society and access to education is prioritized. “We have created a small school here, from morning to evening the children are taught German, English, Greek and French. Also, we offer swimming classes at our natural swimming pool [the sea] with lifeguards, a kind of drama-therapy, crafts and sports activities. For now, children learn the language and the European culture,” says the director of the camp.

PIKPA Center, on the other hand, is run by volunteers and funded by donations. It hosts the most vulnerable cases such as the disabled and sick, those with psychological problems, pregnant women, and families of victims of shipwrecks. As of early May 2016, the camp hosts 62 adults and 18 children, including babies. It provides them with humane living conditions, daily meals, privacy, safety, and continuous access to medical and psychological care, specifically designed for the needs of each individual. The camp also offers integration activities for children, including language courses.

Third-line reception facilities for unaccompanied children and families

These facilities are located in dedicated community-based shelters, such as houses and converted hotels, and were initially designed to host very vulnerable families. In response to prolonged detention times, some of these facilities began to host unaccompanied children. In early May 2016, 52 unaccompanied boys age 12 to 17 were transferred to three different community-based houses run by Metadrasis and Hliaxtida. Five unaccompanied girls were transferred to another house.⁴⁵

These transit accommodation facilities offer a safe, suitably equipped living environment for minors. They are not detained but have the option to socialize by participating in organized trips within the island under the escort of NGOs, engaging in athletic activities or attending language courses. These facilities also provide legal support to the minors to inform them of their rights during the documentation and asylum/relocation process, as well as the dangers they could face during their journey. From here, minors are eventu-

ally escorted to one of the Permanent Hospitality Centers for Unaccompanied Minors that exist throughout Greece. However, as most of these third-line facilities were created under extreme pressure, they prioritized the opening of the facility over the hiring of adequately trained staff. In most cases, staff members have a degree in social work but no specific training to work with children from different cultural backgrounds or those exposed to trauma. “The facilities opened very fast, in order to avoid [keeping] children detained [..]. The staff should be trained [on child trauma and different cultures], at least some of them. But when you are forced to do something fast, how can you find a trained person?” says a volunteer working in these facilities.⁴⁶

Inadequate child protection system

Even though these facilities were created to address the needs of minors for only a short period of time, it is still unknown how long minors will remain there. “At the beginning they told us that the facility will be open for a month. Then, they told us until the end of July. They do not know and we do not know also,” says a volunteer. Even though minors enjoy some freedom, they express frustration regarding delays and the lack of information regarding the status of their cases. “As a lawyer, I face their impatience, distrust, complaints [...]. Minors know that the borders are closed and that there is no other legal way to leave but the process takes too long. They do not understand that the process takes time,” says a lawyer working with minors at one of the transit facilities. Many cases have been documented of minors leaving the centers in mainland Greece to continue their trip.⁴⁷ Now that the Balkan route is closed, the risk of falling victim to human trafficking chains has increased.

“Children have ways to communicate with people [..], there are many ‘friends’ who want to help the children, especially the Pakistani,⁴⁸ even though the borders are closed...” says one volunteer. “Many minors talk about ‘relatives.’ When we ask for more information, they do not say. When we tell them that there is no legal way to leave, other than this, they say to us ‘they have told me that there is and I will go very soon,’ ” reports a lawyer working with unaccompanied youth. Moreover, due to the lack of available space in permanent centers, minors will be forced to remain in temporary transit facilities for longer and longer periods of time, increasing the likelihood that many will attempt to leave. If the system does not work effectively and hurry to prioritize and secure the protection of these minors, they will be forced to seek increasingly dangerous means to complete their journey, likely becoming victims of human trafficking.

Ineffective legal guardianship system

The lack of an effective legal guardianship system to secure a minor’s right to protection and to facilitate access to legal counsel and representation is one of Greece’s most egregious failures in its response to the crisis. According to Greek legislation,⁴⁹ the Public Prosecutor for Minors is appointed as provisional guardian to unaccompanied minors and is responsible for assigning each unaccompanied minor to a guardian. However, the process is not always effective given the overwhelming workload of the prosecutors. The lack of resources necessary to manage the very large number of cases, along with the lack of trained personnel qualified to be assigned as permanent guardians, makes the system effectively dysfunctional.⁵⁰ In some cases, the Public Prosecutor for Minors delegates the responsibility of provisional guardianship to the managers of the reception centers or to social workers but in the majority

Case Table 2.2 Failures in Child Protection at Second- and Third-line Reception

Lack of space in permanent hospitality centers for unaccompanied minors

- The continued arrival of unaccompanied minors, coupled with the existing number of unaccompanied minors already in Greece, overwhelmed existing accommodations, resulting in a complete lack of availability in the specially designated permanent hospitality centers designed to host unaccompanied minors.
- Compounding the problem, a serious lack of funding has prevented the creation of new centers, leading to the prolonged detention of minors or to longer stays in what were meant to be temporary transit centers, not long-term residences.

Lack of effective legal guardianship system for unaccompanied children

- The appointment of a legal guardian is a crucial step in ensuring that the best interests of unaccompanied minors are served. However, in practice, the legal guardianship system has not fulfilled this responsibility due to a lack of necessary resources to handle the large number of unaccompanied minors, including a shortage of appropriate people available to be appointed as legal guardians.*
- Currently, the Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors project, run by the NGO Metadrasis, has succeeded in appointing legal guardianship to some unaccompanied children, though a large number remain under the legal guardianship of the Public Prosecutor for Minors.

*Greek Council for Refugees, "Age assessment and legal representation of unaccompanied children."

Inadequately trained staff working with refugee children

- This crisis created an unprecedented need for large numbers of specially trained personnel to be deployed almost instantly to manage the urgent needs of a growing child refugee and migrant population. Unfortunately, this urgency combined with the need to release minors from detention, in some cases led to the hiring of personnel untrained to deal with children or those suffering from trauma. Though well intentioned, these efforts were not always successful in addressing the unique set of needs faced by refugee children on the move.

Needs of accompanied refugee children are not always identified

- Even though special efforts have been made to ensure child-friendly spaces in first-line facilities, the special needs of minors living with families or other carers are not always identified.
- Though parents and caretakers have an obligation to secure a minor's safety and to ensure that the child receives the assistance he or she needs, the lack of available resources, squalid living conditions, and the trauma experienced make it almost impossible for them to meet these responsibilities.*

*Fagerholm and Verheul, "Safety and fundamental rights at stake for children on the move."

of cases there is little to no contact between the legal guardian and the child.⁵¹ Given the need for the guardian’s consent for most of a minor’s daily activities, the absence of an effective guardianship system has deep repercussions. “The transit centers have limited decision-making ability. They do not have authority as a legal guardian and don’t have the right to make any major decisions and must seek the approval of the Public Prosecutor for Minors,” says one lawyer.

In an effort to reduce the length of a minor’s stay under detention, the Public Prosecutor for Minors is working with the Municipality of Lesvos and NGOs to create additional transit accommodation facilities. The NGO Metadrasis has begun to operate the innovative Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors. This project appoints specially trained individuals with authority granted by the Public Prosecutor for Minors but without guardianship per se. This allows staff members some flexibility in deciding on daily

Case Table 2.3 Failures in Child Protection at Informal Camps

<p>Refugee minors are exposed to dangerous conditions and great risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idomeni and camps like it are a humanitarian crisis. • Basic needs are barely met; psychosocial ones are not.
<p>Failure of responsibility-sharing: Greece’s disproportionate share of camp management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greece lacks the capability to manage this level of migration alone. • The lack of effective management has led to serious violations of human rights, exposing vulnerable populations to severe risks, multiplying as spontaneous, decentralized settlements such as Idomeni spring up without essential infrastructure or local authority coordination. • The EU-Turkey agreement with its accompanying shutting of borders exacerbated existing failures, helping to create informal camps such as that at Idomeni.
<p>Needs of accompanied refugee children are not always identified</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special needs of minors living with families or other carers are not always identified, as the perilous living conditions for minors in Idomeni and surrounding areas illustrate. • Though parents and caretakers have an obligation to secure a minor’s safety and to ensure that the child receives the assistance he or she needs, the lack of available resources, the squalid living conditions, and the trauma experienced make it almost impossible for parents to meet these responsibilities.* <p>*Fagerholm and Verheul, “Safety and fundamental rights at stake for children on the move.”</p>

activities for minors, allowing for closer supervision of minors. Even though measures are underway and progress has been made towards ensuring the safety of these minors, the guardianship system has not yet reached a satisfactory level of functionality.

Informal camps: The Idomeni Site

The Idomeni camp is located next to the tiny village of Idomeni, along a railway station linking Greece and Macedonia, blocking the country's main train line with the Balkans.⁵² This camp is the outcome of the abrupt sealing of the borders, resulting in large-scale human rights violations.⁵³ The closing of the border near Idomeni stranded approximately 10,000 refugees and migrants, 4,000 of whom are believed to be children — the majority under the age of 5.⁵⁴ In March 2016, the situation in Idomeni was characterized as “the definition of a humanitarian crisis” by the Greek Health Minister,⁵⁵ who described the living conditions as deplorable and recommended gradual evacuation as the only solution to avoid loss of human life. However, despite the efforts of the Greek government to transfer these people to official transit camps farther inland in Greece, many have refused to leave the borders, driven by the fear of deportation or by the hope that the borders will open again. Instead, they relocate to informal camps nearby, located at gas stations close to Idomeni.

Risks for refugee children

Some families and children are settled in small tents, exposed to the elements, while others are settled in old train cars wholly inappropriate for housing. Respiratory infections were routine during the winter months, exposing children to serious health risks as access to healthcare is extremely limited and only offered by NGOs. Cases of fever,

pneumonia, septicemia, and skin infections have also been reported by health workers. With the capacity of the camp stretched to the limit, these small tents do not guarantee even a minimum amount of personal safety to vulnerable populations. The lack of sufficient sanitation facilities is another factor that threatens personal health and safety. With 170 unisex toilets and 24 showers with hot water for a total of 10,000 inhabitants, the personal safety of many children and women is severely compromised.⁵⁶

Even though four free meals are served daily, concerns abound about the distribution process as people have to wait in lines for hours to get food portions insufficient to meet the nutritional needs of the different age groups. NGOs have managed to secure some safe spaces for children but educational activities are not easily offered due to the large number of children, the lack of translators, and the lack of infrastructure. Furthermore, psycho-social services are lacking, increasing the risk of psychological breakdown for either caretakers or children as a result of trauma experienced, loss, inhumane living conditions, and uncertainty about the future, factors well known for their link to adult substance abuse or violent behavior.⁵⁷ Studies have also documented the prevalence of PTSD among refugee children,⁵⁸ along with learning disabilities, memory loss, and emotional and behavioral problems, including aggression and affective disorders.⁵⁹ These conditions can be worsened by the lack of psychological support or the psychological breakdown of their caretakers.

The most severe risk to physical harm for minors is the increased tension between inhabitants.⁶⁰ The increased level of anxiety and disappointment surrounding the future, in

combination with a lack of information, perilous living conditions, and the co-existence of many culturally diverse groups have caused many incidents of violence among adults. The existence of criminal activity has also been documented as the informal camp is open and entry is unrestricted, allowing for access to anyone.⁶¹ The limited police presence does not deter clandestine criminal activity linked to drug trafficking, prostitution, human trafficking, and smuggling. The involvement of minors in these criminal activities remains unclear, though many reports allege their involvement.⁶² Given the multiple risk factors minors face in Idomeni, the probability of becoming involved in criminal activities is unacceptably large. According to the volunteers at the site,⁶³ many unaccompanied minors have vanished and are feared lost to the smuggling industry as a result of the criminal smuggling within the camp which promises minors assistance in their efforts to cross the sealed borders.⁶⁴

The Idomeni camp and surrounding areas embody the inability of Europe to manage the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War and the crumbling of the founding principles of Europe. Greek authorities, in cooperation with the rest of the European Union, must improve conditions on the ground and bring them in line with international standards, prioritizing the care and well-being of vulnerable populations and the provision of basic services to all those in need. “We really cannot meet their needs in Idomeni and that’s why we are calling on them to go to the more organized camps,” said Greece’s Public Order Minister.⁶⁵ In line with this sentiment on May 24, 2016, Greek police evacuated the Idomeni camp, attempting to relocate refugees and migrants to organized camps, and to unblock the country’s train line with the Balkans. According to news reports, many

refugees refused to join the government’s operation and decided instead to walk to other nearby, unofficial camps in order to remain closer to the borders.⁶⁶ The main challenge now is the ability of those camps to host this increased population and the fear of another “Idomeni” being created.

FAILURE OF CHILD PROTECTION IN GREECE, EXACERBATED BY INTERNATIONAL AND EU STRUCTURAL FAILURE

In 2015, a migration crisis unprecedented since the end of World War Two began unfolding in Europe. The magnitude and breadth of the flow of desperate migrants defied the coping or management capacities of any single member state of the European Union or the European Union as a whole. The governance challenge was particularly severe for the poorer member states of the Southern Mediterranean, Greece among them, already reeling from severe domestic pressures and fiscal crises.

A radical failure of EU responsibility-sharing and member-state solidarity aggravated the humanitarian emergencies with months of leadership and coordination failure at the EU level. As a result, recent political developments led to grave human rights violations inflicted on extremely vulnerable, often traumatized populations. The violations included prolonged detention of asylum seekers and other distress migrants, including among them children and other particularly vulnerable populations. The developments also included dangerous outbursts of intolerance and xenophobia, fueled by the opportunistic rhetoric of some irresponsible European leaders, placing at increased risk the lives of

Case Table 2.4 International and EU Structural Failures in Child Refugee Protection

<p>Lack of funding in combination with the ongoing economic crisis in Greece</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Already in severe financial crisis, with historic austerity measures in place before the 2015-2016 migrant crisis, Greece struggles to fulfill its obligations not only towards refugees and migrants but also to its citizens and European and international financial institutions.• EU emergency funding does not cover Greece's current costs, let alone pay for the systemic changes needed in its management of migrants and refugees.• EU failure to create effective policy solutions or to provide adequate assistance raises concerns about Greece's ability to continue to manage the crisis.
<p>Failure of responsibility-sharing: Greece's disproportionate share of camp management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greece has been unable to manage the unprecedented flow of refugees effectively, leading to serious violations of human rights, exposing vulnerable populations to severe risks.• These risks multiply in spontaneous, decentralized settlements without essential infrastructure or local authority coordination.• The EU-Turkey agreement with its concomitant shutting of borders exacerbated existing failures, making for longer stays in transit camps such as Moria and helping to create the Idomeni camp.
<p>Failure to institute an effective and speedy relocation scheme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The EU relocation scheme calls for the relocation of asylum seekers from Greece to other EU member states—160,000 through September 2017. As of mid-May 2016, only 970 of the 160,000 asylum seekers from Greece had been relocated.• Refugees lack information about the relocation scheme.• They also would not choose to live in many of the countries, as there are others in which they have existing connections.• The well-being of unaccompanied minors is not prioritized.• Countries delay and place many hurdles.• Some politicians have made racist statements and their countries have very narrow selection criteria, based on race and religion.
<p>Failure of international response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is not only a European issue, but a global humanitarian one.• UN organizations and NGOs can only do so much; individual countries need to provide more assistance and resettlement opportunities.

many. Refugee and migrant children, a particularly vulnerable population, have faced severe fundamental rights violations as states fail to abide by international obligations to ensure “the best interest of the child.” Greece, overwhelmed by the influx of the migration flow, underfunded, and in the middle of its own catastrophic financial and political crisis, finds itself attempting to accommodate 55,000 people stranded in its country with little assistance or support.

Lack of funding in combination with the ongoing economic crisis in Greece

Greece has received much criticism for its handling of the crisis, for its inability to meet the needs of refugees and migrants in a consistently satisfactory manner and for being unable to systematically guarantee the rights of refugees and migrants. It is widely understood that Greece is among the least economically equipped nations to handle a humanitarian crisis of this magnitude. In the midst of a severe financial crisis, with historic austerity measures in place since 2010, an official unemployment rate among the highest in Europe and with household incomes drastically reduced, the country struggles to fulfill its obligations not only towards refugees and migrants but also to its citizens and the European and international financial institutions responsible for ensuring Greece’s continued liquidity. Greece has received 27.8 million euros in emergency funding from the European Commission with an additional 474 million euros in assistance for the period 2014 to 2020. Though this assistance is far below the levels received by other nations, it has had a significant impact in the context of the ongoing financial crisis.⁶⁷ However, these funds are insufficient to cover current needs

or to address the systemic changes that Greece needs to undergo to ensure just and humane treatment of refugees and migrants. Europe’s failure to provide and implement an effective policy solution or to provide adequate funding and assistance raises concerns about Greece’s ability to continue to manage the crisis, while at the same time ensuring that the anti-refugee and far-right sentiments plaguing the majority of Europe do not take hold in Greece.

Failure of responsibility-sharing: Greece’s disproportionate share of camp management

Greece has been unable to manage the unprecedented flow of refugees effectively. The lack of effective management has led to serious violations of human rights, exposing vulnerable populations to severe risks, multiplying as spontaneous, decentralized settlements spring up without essential infrastructure or local authority coordination. As mentioned above, the EU’s intervention with the Turkey agreement and the stopping of passage of refugees out of Greece into elsewhere in Europe has severely impinged on the human rights situation of refugees in Greece.

There are some positive aspects of the decentralization of approaches for refugees in Greece. In Kara Tepe on Lesbos, the local municipality, in cooperation with NGOs, managed to create a child-friendly camp, ensuring opportunities for play, leisure, and education, while at the same time guaranteeing the personal safety and access to health-care of its inhabitants. In the meantime, the local municipality, in cooperation with a well-known, internationally established football club is working to open a sports camp for ref-

ugee children where they will have the opportunity to prosper and develop, while integrating with the local society. “We are planning to create a football camp [...] Through sports, we want to integrate refugee children into the society. The unaccompanied children will stay in the camp, while the local children will go to train with them. Our purpose is to bring them closer to each other through their common love of the sport,” says the International Relations Senior Advisor at the Mayor’s office. Another successful example is third-line accommodation for unaccompanied minors, which are run by different groups of NGOs and focus strictly on meeting the needs of unaccompanied minors. The assumption of responsibility by different authorities allows for the flexibility to implement innovative methods and individual approaches to care, as the management of smaller groups is easier than managing thousands at a time.

Failure to institute an effective relocation scheme

The EU relocation scheme calls for the relocation of asylum seekers from Greece to other EU member states.⁶⁸ However, as of May 13, 2016, only 970 refugees (out of 160,000 that EU member states pledged to receive through September 2017) had been relocated from Greece to 14 EU member states.⁶⁹ Of the relocated refugees, 246 were minors and 14 were unaccompanied minors.⁷⁰

The small number of asylum seekers relocated is due to many problems in the implementation of the scheme. Firstly, the lack of quality information about the scheme, combined with the desire of many refugees and migrants to reunite with their relatives in countries of their choice instead of being

sent to a country where they do not want to live, discourages them from participating in the scheme. Secondly, despite the risks that vulnerable populations like unaccompanied minors are known to face, the scheme does not appear to prioritize their needs or well-being. Additionally, several member states actively delay relocation, posing a series of logistical, bureaucratic, and even political and societal obstacles. Some states cite difficulties in securing appropriate housing or educational opportunities, while others have introduced protracted security checks on asylum seekers, invoking national security in light of recent terrorist attacks in Europe and elsewhere. Other countries have expressed openly racist and anti-refugee sentiments and cite a long list of restrictive selection criteria based on religion and racial characteristics, leading to further delays.⁷¹ Further, many member states have declared that they will restrict the possibilities for family reunification, infringing on the rights of minors to be with their families or close relatives. All of these are significant factors that lead minors to seeking alternative, irregular routes, exposing them to the risks of smuggling and trafficking.

Failure of International Response

The factors which have caused the 2015-2016 surge of refugees to leave their war-torn countries are not only a European responsibility, but also a global one. All of the major global powers have contributed through action or inaction to the conditions leading up to and continuing the violence in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, to name just some of the relevant refugee-producing countries of origin. In any case, the comparison with the World War II refugee

situation is apt; such a magnitude of crisis requires a response from all the global powers. Although the United Nations (and in particular the UNHCR) and many NGOs have acted, individual countries, with the exception of Canada (which agreed to take 25,000 refugees), have done little by way of resettlement.⁷² In the United States, President Obama's promise to take in 10,000 Syrian refugees (2 percent of the estimated 480,000 Syrian refugees in need of resettlement) by September 2016 was met with resistance from several governors and many congresspeople.⁷³ Individual countries and their leaders need to step up to their moral obligations to assist in this crisis so that the well-being and care of the vulnerable, particularly children on the move, can be guaranteed along with their human rights.

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Interview List

- Andreaddelli, Vasiliki. Director of NGO “Hliaxtida,” Lesvos, Greece. May 11, 2016.
- Andriotis, Marios. International Relations Senior Advisor, Mayor’s Office, Lesvos, Greece. May 9, 2016
- Christou, Valantoula. Lawyer working with unaccompanied refugee children, Lesvos, Greece. May 11, 2016.
- Kourtis, Spyros. Director of the First Reception Center in Moria Hotspot, Lesvos, Greece, May 13, 2016.
- Latsoudi, Efi. Member of the “Lesvos Solidarity Network,” PIKPA Camp, Lesvos, Greece. May 13, 2016.
- Livaditou, Zwi. Emergency MD cooperating with IOM, Smile of the Child, Medical Association of Lesvos and Greek Coast Guard, Lesvos, Greece. May 6, 2016.
- Maxaira, Molu. Pathologist, Vostaneion Hospital of Mytilene. Lesvos, Greece. May 6, 2016.
- Murogiannis, Stauros. Director of Kara Tepe Camp, Lesvos, Greece. May 7, 2016.
- Papaiwannou, Leuteris. Retired Major General, Hellenic Army, Lesvos, Greece. May 9, 2016.
- Pothas, Stratis. Director of “Synuparksi” Initiative, Lesvos, Greece. May 11, 2016.
- Tagaris, Nikos. Special pedagogue, responsible person for the NGO “Arc of the World,” Chios, Greece. May 10, 2016.

List of Interviewees that requested anonymity

- Pediatrician, Vostaneion Hospital of Mytilene. Lesvos, Greece. May 6, 2016.
- Pediatrician, Vostaneion Hospital of Mytilene. Lesvos, Greece. May 7, 2016.
- Nurse, Vostaneion Hospital of Mytilene. Lesvos, Greece. May 7, 2016.
- Volunteer cooperating with local NGO in third-line facilities for unaccompanied children, Lesvos, Greece. May 12, 2016.
- Volunteer cooperating with NGO within Moria Hotspot. May 8, 2016.
- Volunteer cooperating with NGO within Moria Hotspot. May 7, 2016.
- Volunteer cooperating with NGO within Kara Tepe Camp. May 5, 2016.

Information collected during the workshop “Refugee Crisis: Challenges and Measures”*

from:

- Nikomani, Alexia. Lawyer, Europe Direct North Aegean, Lesvos, Greece. May 12, 2016.
- Kapitanelis, Mixalis. Coast Guard, Lesvos, Greece. May 12, 2016.
- Papadopoulos, Kuriakos. Coast Guard, Lesvos, Greece. May 12, 2016.
- Cheshirkov, Boris. Communications and Public Information Officer, UNHCR Lesvos, Greece. May 12, 2016.

*The workshop was organized by Athens Network of Collaborating Experts at the University of the Aegean. Even though personal interviews were not conducted, the nature of the workshop allowed for questions and the collection of specific information.

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Suggested citation: Bhabha, Jacqueline, et al. *Children on the Move: An Urgent Human Rights and Child Protection Priority*. Boston: Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, 2016.



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