



# PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE OF UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

**Hellenic Red Cross**

**CASE STUDY**

Title page: Young people participating in Hellenic Red Cross program  
Photo credit: Hellenic Red Cross

[ifrc.org](https://ifrc.org)

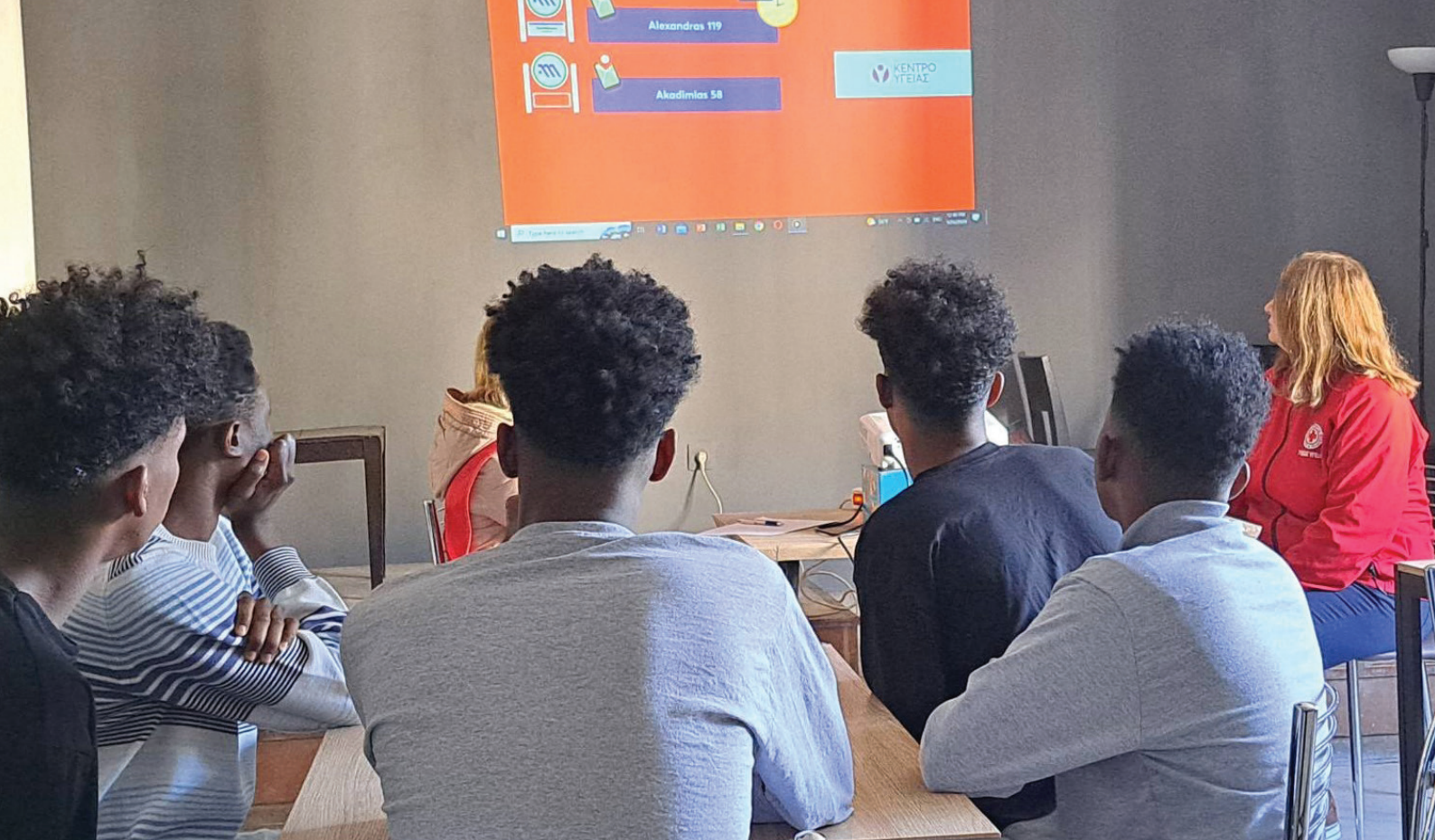


Photo description: Young people participating in Hellenic Red Cross program  
Photo credit: Hellenic Red Cross

## Background

With the massive influx of migrants since 2015, the Hellenic Red Cross has provided support to many people in refugee centers, in safe zones and through Multifunctional Centers with additional assistance from the International Federation of the Red Cross and multitude of other National Societies.

A subject of interest for the Hellenic Red Cross has been groups with particular vulnerabilities such as Unaccompanied Children. The Hellenic Red Cross, in response to a standing request of the Government of Greece, regarding the urgent need to provide accommodation for unaccompanied refugee children, operated 5 Centers for the Accommodation of Unaccompanied Minors in Athens (3), Volos (1) and Kalavryta (1) until July 2023. Since August 2023, the Hellenic Red Cross has been operating two Centers in Athens and Kalavryta with a capacity to host 70 children.

The Hellenic Red Cross, through the operation of the Centers for Hosting Unaccompanied Minors, aims not only to ensure safe living conditions for hosted children, but also to meet their psychosocial needs, and to support their smooth integration into Greek society.

The organization and operation of the centers are governed by the principles of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child; specifically the principles of:

- a. The best interest of each child;
- b. confidentiality and respect for private life;
- c. the participation of children in decision making, and the expression of their opinions on any matters concerning them;
- d. respect for dignity;
- e. non-discrimination; and
- f. maintaining family unity.



## Who was Supported and How

The Centers provide accommodation for adolescent boys, ages 12-18 years, who are not accompanied by their parents, or another adult, and who request protection in Greece.

The countries of origin of the unaccompanied children are mainly Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iran, Egypt and Bangladesh.

The Centers apply a holistic approach that aims to ensure unaccompanied children are supported through protection and care activities, and that they have capacities to gain autonomy in their daily lives and transition smoothly into adulthood. The Centers also aim to help unaccompanied children create networks with other peers in similar situations by providing a sense of community.

Throughout their stay in centers children receive the services and the

support that are necessary for their everyday care, living, empowerment, social inclusion and their gradual autonomy. These include:

- housing
- feeding
- psychosocial support
- health care including medical and pharmaceutical services
- legal aid
- education
- vocational training and access to the labour market
- access to cultural/entertainment/sports activities and strengthening links with the community
- interpretation
- Greek and English language learning
- access and free transportation to services and activities outside the Centers
- provision of financial support
- provision of clothing and other non-food items
- coverage of special reception needs
- hygiene and cleanliness
- security
- connection - internet access.

Trained, professional staff provide:

- assessments focusing on the best interests of the child
- mental health first aid, psychological and psychosocial support, and personalized interventions to deal with each child's particular challenges
- awareness sessions on trafficking in human beings, gender-based violence, and protection
- counseling about the risks of labour exploitation and information on labour rights
- referrals and liaison with specialized services for protection matters.
-

The Hellenic Red Cross employs several methods to enhance protection of unaccompanied children. For example:

- developing a network of protection focal points, using methodological protection tools and protocols, ensuring awareness and mainstreaming to prevent, mitigate, identify, and respond to protection concerns, including safe and timely referrals to specialized services.
- approaching with sensitivity gender and diversity. For instance, special care for children who identify as LGBTQI+ and children living with disabilities.
- Applying a person- centered approach for survivors of violence. Specifically, following the principles of confidentiality, respect, safety, and non- discrimination.
- Implementing a participatory approach. Children participate as much as possible in the decisions that concern them through feedback mechanisms and other Community Engagement and Accountability tools.

### Successes

- Through the programming of the Hellenic Red Cross, in 2023 346 unaccompanied children were reached.
- After attending school, developing skills, and preparing to find work as they turn 18 years, the participants often find legal jobs through Hellenic Red Cross support.
- Many children also reunite with their families or reestablish contact with relatives.
- Unaccompanied children are accommodated in a safe environment and are protected from violence abuse and exploitation.

### Challenges and Difficulties

During the implementation of the Centers for Unaccompanied Children, a few challenges have been faced.

- At times there has been no interpretation into the languages of some children. This has happened due to a lack of interpreters or when children come from locations where interpreters have not yet been found. However, this has been overcome through cooperation with the interpreters of other Hellenic Red Cross programs or through other organizations.
- For some unaccompanied children topics such as gender and diversity, abuse and exploitation, and human rights can be new and challenge their existing beliefs. As such, if the children experience any form of abuse, exploitation or other related violations, it can be hard for the children to recognize them. To counter this, awareness sessions and psychoeducation is delivered on these topics.
- Managing aggressive behavior among children can be a struggle. Emphasis is placed on the prevention of such incidents through the support of children in individual and group counseling, psychoeducation, and participation in creative and recreational activities.

## Lessons Learned

The Hellenic Red Cross has identified several lessons learned through their work with unaccompanied children.

- Working with unaccompanied boys is particularly demanding because the risks they face and their needs are many and varied.
- It is essential to hire staff suitable for working with children. Key considerations include staff behaviour, knowledge, and commitment.
- Staff development is essential the impact of the Centers. Specific areas to focus on include professional development in technical areas related to role of staff; improving skills to manage crises, conflicts and emergencies; and strengthening professional skills through clinical supervision.
- Protection, Gender, and Inclusion as well as Community Engagement and Accountability are required in the planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation phases of all programming in the Centers.
- Continuous monitoring of the implementation of the Child Protection Policy and the Staff Code of Conduct are necessary by competent professional Protection, Gender, Inclusion personnel.
- Having well designed policies and procedures is crucial for implementation. Some of the key documents that guide the Hellenic Red Cross work with children are:
  - Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct
  - Minimum Standards for Protection, Gender & Inclusion
  - Operation Guide
  - Internal Operating Regulations and Standard Operating Procedures
  - Protocols for the management of Sexual and Gender-based Violence
  - Protocol and Guidelines for the management of emergencies related to the health and safety of people the Hellenic Red Cross interacts with
  - Community Engagement and Feedback mechanisms.