



The protection of rights of young unaccompanied children in Europe – Policies and practices*

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Keywords:

unaccompanied children,
children's rights, children
on the move, vulnerability,
European Action Plan,
inclusion, support,
guardianship, education,
shelter, foster care

Abstract:

In recent years, in particular after 2015, tens of thousands of unaccompanied children have arrived in Europe, mostly in Greece and Italy, escaping from war, conflicts and other hardships they were faced with in their countries of origin. A considerable number of them are very young (under 14 years) and extremely vulnerable. The challenge for Europe, in line with the obligations deriving from UNCRC, is to offer them a safe, appropriate environment to live and to carefully examine and protect all their rights, including their protection from violence and exploitation and access to education, health and social participation. In this direction and following EU action plans and decisions, European states are expected to further share responsibilities, collaborate and take all appropriate measures to fully protect the rights of these children.

1. Introduction

The **protection of all unaccompanied children constitutes a question of fact and of principle, and it sets a crucial challenge** that in recent years has touched all European countries, individually and collectively. Considering this challenge on the occasion of a conference dedicated to Irena Sendler, it is important to remind her courageous contribution in saving the lives of vulnerable children during the 2nd world as a beacon of inspiration for the policy planning and actions towards the safeguarding of children's rights. Irena's words "*I was brought up to believe that a person must be rescued when drowning, regardless of religion and nationality*" is still in our times a strong message for the entire world, also applicable to the situation of refugees and the response of societies and states to their needs.

In recent years, Europe has been faced with similar tasks and challenges, regarding numerous children, who have escaped war and other conflict and unbearable situations in their countries and fled with or without their families to our continent, seeking for international protection. Among them, many unaccompanied

* Note by the writer: The current document is based on my presentation in the "Irena Sendler Conference" organized by the Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw, on 7 June 2018.

I would like to warmly thank for his kind invitation Marek Michalak, the Polish Ombudsman for Children, with whom we have spent 10 years of close collaboration in the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC). I feel honoured for having participated in this conference, having had the opportunity to speak to students, teachers and other practitioners of pedagogies and social work, since they are the most crucial professionals to look after refugee children's needs but also to spread to the society the message that these children are not a threat and can peacefully integrate.



children of younger age have been identified, who are in need of special protection; since they are exposed to additional risks due to their age. The **current presentation aims** to share some facts and thoughts about European policies and practices in securing the protection of the rights of these children who belong in lower age groups. It should be underlined though that, by stressing on the vulnerability of these age groups, it doesn't mean that the severe risks and dangers faced also by older unaccompanied children are ignored; especially when they are travelling and approached by various networks and persons who may wish to exploit or harm them. It is reminded that every child, every person under 18, according to CRC, should be regarded and respected as holder of human rights.

My presentation is based in my experience as Deputy Ombudsman for Children's Rights in the independent authority "the Greek Ombudsman" during the period from July 2003 to January 2018 and my participation in the activities of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) throughout this period. Regarding the reception, support and defence of the rights of refugee children, we have dedicated a lot of efforts throughout this period, visiting together with staff of my office "hot spots", reception centres, shelters, detention centres, community centres, schools and other places where we could meet with refugee children and their families or care-givers, examined relevant complaints, produced reports and made a lot of interventions to the government and other responsible authorities. Especially since 2015 we have been following closely the situation of children on the move in Greece and in Europe, gradually strengthened our mechanism for monitoring their rights, with the support of UNICEF, built a national network of organisations working for them and dealt extensively with the rights of unaccompanied children, supervising their treatment and contributing to the improvement of legislation and practices connected with all procedures affecting them (Greek Deputy Ombudsman for Children's Rights 2016).

In line with the above, the presentation is structured on the basis of the following **questions**, with the aim to set the frame of some core issues related to practices and policies on unaccompanied children. Specifically:

- Who are the younger unaccompanied children?
- Which aspects of their protection are more crucial?
- Are existing European policies and practices adequate?

2. Who are the younger unaccompanied children?

From children stories to facts and figures

In order to approach the above questions, it would be important to share a couple of indicative **stories** that would help to better visualize who these children are, their feelings and needs.

A few years ago, I remember meeting with Ali, an 11-year-old boy who, after his arrival in Greece, on Lesbos island, he had been transferred by boat to Athens area, where he had been placed in an ngo shelter following to prosecutor's order. I remember his scared and mysterious face when he arrived in the shelter and his difficulty in communicating, as he did not speak English and even with the help of an interpreter in Farsi language, he only gave very little information about himself and his background. His father had been killed in clashes, his mother had been forced to re-marry and the boy had been forcibly separated from his mother and placed in a monastery in Afghanistan where he remained remote for 2 years. Then, an uncle of his decided to help him to "escape" to Europe, where, as he had said him, he could study and possibly get a job in future and send some money back to his mother and siblings. Ali was lucky because he managed to get to an appropriate shelter, to socialize, to go to school and gradually to develop his potentials. After our first meeting, I met him again a few times later and I admired his progress and adjustment to the reality of Greece. However, this happened at a time when the total number of unaccompanied children arriving in Greece did not exceed the number of 200 – 300 annually and it was a lot easier to find solutions to protect these children and to gradually help them integrate into society.

A more recent picture I recall is from Lesbos, 15 months ago, when, together with my colleagues, I visited all shelters for unaccompanied minors in the island, where around 190 children had been placed. I met and talked with many children, some of them very young, who had made their long journey travelling together with others, in small or big groups, escaping from conflict and painful experiences and searching for a new safe homeland in Europe. The children, as they said, they felt trapped in the island, since most of them were



stranded there for quite long time, more than a year. Some children asked me about their rights and whether they were going to be given the opportunity to settle, to go to school and have a “normal” life in Europe. Many of them have been later transferred to shelters in the mainland of Greece. Despite the efforts of the State and the significant contribution of civil society organisations for the protection, school education and social integration of these children, the survival and life solutions cannot be found easily and still a lot remains to be done in order to safeguard their rights.

As it is officially acknowledged “Statistics on unaccompanied minors are not widespread or consistent.” (European Commission, Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors, (2010-2014)). In 2017 it was estimated that 17% of the unaccompanied children who arrived in Greece were under 14 years of age. In Italy, 15.800 unaccompanied or separated children arrived in 2017, out of whom 7% were under 14 years old. According to the above figures, **more than 1.500 unaccompanied children under 14 years old have been registered only in these two countries of first arrival** (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM 2017), without including the rest of EU countries where infant and young unaccompanied children are likely to be identified. Moreover, a considerable number of unaccompanied minors have been reported to be “missing” (European Parliament 2016), which does not always mean abused or trafficked, but rather smuggled to another EU country where the child or his family chose as destination. As reported, “The reasons for disappearance include poor reception conditions, lack of child -friendly information, inefficient family reunification and guardian-appointment procedures, and fear of detention or deportation, as well as the desire to join family or friends in another country” (European Parliament 2017).

As far as the situation **in Greece** is concerned, according to recent official figures (May 2018), it is estimated that there are around 3,400 unaccompanied children. Out of them, only 1,100 stay in special shelters, some 400 stay in hotels (run by IOM and ngos) and 300 in “safe spaces” in refugee camps, while around 300 are in first reception and identification centres, 175 are reported to be in protective custody, deprived of their liberty, and the rest either stay in unrecorded settlements or are homeless (National Centre for Social Solidarity, May 2018).

Definitions and conceptual approaches

According to General Comment No 6 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, unaccompanied children are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. Separated children, who may be accompanied by other adult family members and other relatives, are also in need of special protection (CRC/GC/2005/6). In the context of EU law, an unaccompanied child, refers to a minor who arrives on the territory of an EU Member State unaccompanied by an adult responsible or who is left unaccompanied after he or she has entered the territory of the Member States (Directive 2011/95/EU).

As shown by many studies and researches, unaccompanied children do not constitute a homogeneous group; they are a group with **mixed characteristics**. They are identified within the population of children on the move,² or children in migration³. Therefore, the status of the unaccompanied, as of all these children, “may differ at various stages on their journey, including after arrival in the EU, and they may encounter many differing situations of vulnerability” (European Commission 2016b). Moreover, the separation from their parents, or other guardians, may be due to a **variety of factors and reasons**, “including persecution of the child or

² According to Global Movement for Children (GMC): “Children on the move is an umbrella definition for persons under the age of 18 who have left their place of habitual residence and are either on the way towards a new destination or have already reached such destination. Children on the Move may be: across State borders or within countries; movement can be of a seasonal or more permanent nature; movement can be voluntary or forced; they can be accompanied by parents, peers or others, or not; and children who are, for instance: internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees, migrants, trafficked persons or child soldiers. During movement, a child can float from one sub category to the other.”

³ As underlined (European Commission – 10th European Forum on the rights of the child 2016), “the term ‘children in migration’ covers all third country national children who migrate from their country of origin to and within the territory of the EU in search of survival, security, improved standards of living, education, economic opportunities, protection from exploitation and abuse, family reunification or a combination of these factors. They may travel with their family or independently (unaccompanied child) or with an extended family or a non-family member (separated child). They may be seeking international protection, family members, dependents of labour migrants, victims of trafficking, and/or undocumented migrants.”



the parents; international conflict and civil war; human trafficking and smuggling, including sale by parents; accidental separation from the parents over the course of their journey; and searching for better economic opportunities.” (European Parliament 2016).

In general the available official data and information do not separately or specially focus on specific age groups of unaccompanied children; while there are not adequate data and studies merely referring to infants and very young children. It is also noted that there are many practical challenges and ethical issues as well, especially concerning the young children, which prevent the systematic collection of accurate data and the conducting of relevant researches on their **situation and their specific characteristics** (Vervliet et al 2015). According to empirical data, deriving from stories and cases encountered by the Greek Children’s Ombudsman for 15 years, it could be assumed that although many of the children are not actually victims of trafficking or exploitation when they originally leave their countries of origin, they **are most likely to be victimised later during the migratory journey**. Moreover, within the last years several cases have been also identified where accompanied young children, including also infants, after their entry to the country of first arrival, they have been sent unaccompanied with the “consent” and support of their parents to other EU countries so as to ensure, according to their care-givers perception, that they would avoid being stranded due to the malfunctions of relocation or family reunification system. It is indicative that many EU countries reported that they are aware of the so – called “**anchor child phenomenon**”, referring to cases of “unaccompanied minors who lodge an asylum application in the Member State and for which the authorities, soon afterwards, are requested to take over the parents and other family members” (European Migration Network 2017). As far as the **detention** of young children (below the age of 14) is concerned, available data indicate that their numbers are limited. It is important though to remind that some indicative severe cases of young, and very young children, in detention have been identified (European Court of Justice 2018).

Considering all the above, unaccompanied children mainly (but not always clearly differentiated) are:

- Refugee children coming from war/conflict situation, looking for access to more safe living conditions in Europe
- Children escaping from extreme poverty or other hard life conditions, willingly or occasionally sent by their families to Europe to survive, to get education and possibly (at the end of the day) to support their families
- Children directly used by adults, being victims of smuggling, trafficking or other forms of exploitation

Regardless though the special characteristics, the story and the specific background of these children, it is reminded that every unaccompanied child should be treated as child first, as subject of rights and needs to be protected from any harms and risks.

3. Policies and practices – Crucial issues for the protection of young unaccompanied children

In recent years, all over Europe, there has been a lot of **concern and policy measures** have been announced for the protection of unaccompanied children. Considering their vulnerability, unaccompanied children have been seen as a group that should be specially protected. It is indicative that the Council of EU in June 2017, in the context of its Conclusions on the protection of children in migration, has recognized that many children in migration are unaccompanied and, as emphasized, the protection of all children in migration is a priority at all stages of migration, while the best interest principle is of prime importance (Council of the European Union 2017).

According to the existing **legal norms and policy guidance**, governments are expected, inter alia, to safeguard unaccompanied children’s proper identification, accommodation, age assessment, care, protection from exploitation and violence, access to school and health services and reunification with their families, when the latter is considered to be feasible and in their best interest. In the light of recent developments though, concerning the on-going debates and negotiations including restrictions in refugee and migration policy (c.f. European Commission 2017a), we should be on alert to **ensure that the recognized rights and the protection** scheme for children won’t be negatively affected; and that **their protection has a long-term prospect, not merely limited up to the age of majority**.



The **Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors (2010 – 2014)** had set core standards and policy measures towards the protection of the unaccompanied, based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, with particular focus on the principle of ‘the best interests’. In the context of the **2015 European Agenda on Migration**, there were specific references to the need for special protection of vulnerable groups, including children. In 2016 the Commission adopted a communication on the state of play of the implementation of the European Agenda, setting out a comprehensive approach for the protection of children throughout the migration process, including, inter alia, a specific point on guardianship issues (European Commission 2016). The proposals published in the same year on the **reform of the Common European Asylum System** (European Commission 2016a), refer to special guarantees for unaccompanied children in asylum procedures⁴. Additionally, the **European Commission Communication on 12 April 2017** should be highlighted as an important development (European Commission 2017). It sets out actions to reinforce the protection of all migrant children at all stages of the migration process, including unaccompanied children too, while crucial issues specifically concerning them are also being addressed⁵.

Following the issuance of the Commission’s report on the implementation of the European Agenda on Migration (European Commission 2018b), a **coherent overview has been prepared concerning the plans and actions** that have been undertaken and/or are on-going regarding the priorities that were set up by the abovementioned EC Communication on children in migration (European Commission 2018a). **Crucial issues** concerning unaccompanied children, as is apparent from the above overview, are included in all thematic priorities’ clusters. It should be underlined that, up to a considerable extent, these issues are in line with and they reflect **problems facing unaccompanied children**, which have been also stressed in the context of previous studies, calls, recommendations and policy initiatives by several agencies⁶.

Among them, the **European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC)** has repeatedly intervened to defend the rights of children on the move in general and has asked European institutions and governments to take all appropriate measures for their protection. Considering the difficult circumstances after the arrival of massive numbers of refugees and immigrants in Europe during 2015, ENOC undertook several

⁴ These guarantees mainly refer to:

- The need to focus on the importance of the role and supervision of the guardian and his/her required qualifications in order to safeguard that unaccompanied children’s rights are properly protected. It is also proposed that a guardian shall be appointed within five days from the moment when the minor makes an asylum application.
- A proposed amendment allowing for the accelerated examination in cases of unaccompanied as an exception, in special circumstances
- The inclusion of siblings in the term “family members” in the context of Dublin Regulation.
- Ensuring that a best interest determination should be conducted before the transfer of the unaccompanied. An effective remedy should be also provided in family reunification cases.

⁵ These themes as stated, inter alia, include:

- support projects targeting on the protection of unaccompanied children in third countries along migratory routes, in particular to prevent child trafficking or smuggling;
- putting in place the necessary procedures and protocols to systematically report and respond to all instances of unaccompanied children going missing;
- ensuring that a range of alternative care options for unaccompanied children, including foster/family-based care are provided;
- making full use of the forthcoming EASO guidance on operational standards and indicators on material reception conditions for unaccompanied children;
- strengthening the guardianship authority/institution to ensure that guardians for all unaccompanied children are swiftly in place;
- giving priority to the relocation of unaccompanied children from Greece and Italy;

⁶ At this point it is important to remind the coherent indicative selected list of problems in the context of the 2nd report of House of Lords, published in July 2016, including:

- “Dangers faced while entering the EU irregularly
- Lack of protection while following EU migration routes undetected
- Lack of safe reception, reception capacity, proper reception conditions, inspection and monitoring
- Measures to prevent movement to their preferred country of destination
- Procedural and other obstacles to family reunification
- The risk of administrative detention, including in inappropriate conditions (such as a lack of separation from adults)
- Vulnerability to sexual violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking
- Lack of reliable information and advice, including information about trafficking
- Lack of legal advice and support
- Use of invasive methods to assess age, with variable results and reliability”



initiatives to further sensitize the decision makers and societies about the need to consider carefully the needs and rights of all children on the move and give attention to the unaccompanied children. In September 2015, based on its mandate and following its previous interventions (ENOC 2013, 2015), the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children adopted a Statement at its 19th General Assembly “calling upon European Governments and competent European and International authorities to take immediate actions to urgently address the situation of children on the move and to guarantee access to the rights they are entitled to” (ENOC 2015a). Furthermore, the General Assembly established a Task Force to monitor, and report on the ongoing situation of children on the move in different countries within the ENOC membership. The Task Force released its first report in January 2016, which included key recommendations to the EU and its member states for ensuring that the issue of children on the move and the risks they face are put on the European agenda, and that specific actions targeting these children are taken to ensure their rights are respected (ENOC 2016; Fagerholm & Verheul, 2016). During the following year, new data was collected, a relevant report was prepared (Soulele 2017) and an important set of Recommendations was adopted by ENOC members during their meeting in Athens in November 2017, titled “Safeguarding and protecting the rights of children on the move: The challenge of social inclusion” (ENOC 2017). This document, that has a lot of references to unaccompanied children, aims to include and refer to all obligations that derive from international human rights legal instruments and to call governments and societies to develop all appropriate policies and measures in line with them. All these recommendations are based on the fundamental assumption that children, including the unaccompanied, are children first and should be treated as such.

Considering the above initiatives at legislative and policy level, it is apparent that the main crucial issues concerning the safeguarding and protection of the unaccompanied children have been included and prioritized in the EU policy agenda. Still though, a gap could be identified with regard to **special focus and measures addressing the needs of the infant and young unaccompanied children**, in terms of the explicit provision for specific standards and guidelines. This, inter alia, may be linked to the lack of consistent data per age group and, as already mentioned above, to additional challenges set when it comes to methodological and ethical issues concerning the research with children, especially the younger.

In the light of the existing **information gaps and data inconsistencies** concerning the population of unaccompanied children, it is important to mention that Eurostat, together with Statistics Norway and UNHCR, led the process towards two landmark documents, agreed by the United Nations Statistical Committee in March 2018. These documents are expected to contribute to the harmonization and availability of the data on refugee population, and unaccompanied children as well.⁷ It is important to ensure that all children who fall within the protection of refugee law are covered, including those who have not been engaged in asylum procedures, or had their application rejected or were subject to detention and/or return. Moreover, it is significant to underline that discussions have been promoted in the context of Eurostat, based on EC Communication of April 2017, to improve the visibility and collection of data on migrant children⁸. Still though, all the above initiatives are in process and several difficulties must be encountered in practice, to put in place a functional and effective mechanism at EU level. **A coherent, holistic and harmonized data collection and statistics system** referring to all unaccompanied children on the move, including the infants and younger ones, is a prerequisite for the proper and timely identification and estimation of their needs. The latter is of prime importance for the planning and enactment of well-targeted legal and policy measures for their protection, which would take into consideration the specificities of each age group.

Especially with regard to the **issues concerning the younger unaccompanied children**, as a first step, it would be important to ensure that **standards and special indicators** are applied for the monitoring of

⁷ These documents, adopted in March 2018, are the “International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics’ and the ‘Technical Report on Internally Displaced Populations statistics’. It should be noted though that, according to the relevant Draft for Global Consultation, “Unaccompanied minors seeking international protection are included in the scope of the report but are not identified as a separate category. They can be distinguished from adults at the analysis stage by their age.”; but they are included in the context of the suggested statistics and tabulations, within basic classificatory variables. (Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics 2017)

⁸ These included discussions on specific measures to improve the availability of data, and the collection of additional monthly, quarterly and annual asylum data on unaccompanied children. Moreover, as reported, “A separate folder on children in migration has been added to improve the visibility of children in data already collected.” (European Commission 2018a)



their situation and for the assessment of the implemented or the on-going projects/actions for children along migratory routes. This would provide valuable insights that could be considered in the development of interventions' planning. Therefore, when overviewing the problems and issues identified in the field of unaccompanied children protection, special consideration should be focused on **specific aspects** affecting the safeguarding of rights and the wellbeing of infant and younger children at migration stages. Moreover, it is underlined that the response to cross-cutting issues, such as the implementation of **child-friendly information approaches, best interests assessments**⁹, need to be reflected in all work strands and actions related to the protection of these children.

At **identification stage**, it is very important to consider that often younger unaccompanied children may travel together with adults who are not even their relatives but present themselves as members of family. Proper and effective identification tools, adjusted to children's age and maturity, and specialised staff are necessary for ensuring children's safety and protection from exploitation; since additional risks and ethical challenges are faced regarding **family bonds' identification and family tracing** (c.f. EASO 2016). Moreover, the age assessment procedure, as part of the identification stage, should be duly adjusted, when deemed necessary in cases of young children (c.f. EASO 2018). It is also noted that controversial issues, such as the collection of fingerprints and other biometric data, especially concerning infants and very young children, remain unanswered; guidelines and child-friendly approaches concerning the **biometric activities for identification and age assessment**¹⁰ are required. The consideration of all the above-mentioned issues arising at the identification stage emphasizes the need for ensuring the establishment and the proper function of **child protection departments and specialized officers in entry points/hotspots**, as prioritized in the Commission's Communication of April 2017.

Reception standards and facilities are listed among the major priorities for the safeguarding of children protection. Issues related, inter alia, to adequate and timely access to **healthcare and psychological support, guardianship, emergency support services, education, foster care, shelter and housing solutions** are to be addressed within this stage. It is underlined, particularly regarding younger children, that **alternative care options**, mainly including the **foster/family-based care**, are of major importance (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA] 2017, pp.182-185). Children should be placed in care until their family reunification or, if this is not possible and in their best interest, until they reach adulthood. In particular unaccompanied children of younger ages (under 14), after consenting, should be given the opportunity to stay and be looked after by a foster family that is supervised and supported by the state. Foster care is already widely implemented in some EU states, while in others, like in Greece, it is still only at an early stage, mainly supported by non-governmental organisations, like METAdrasi that runs a pilot project for the temporary accommodation of UAM in foster families, with the authorization by the public prosecutor of minors (Fili & Xythali 2017).

Access to **asylum procedures** is an extremely challenging issue when it comes to younger children; often inextricably linked with **family reunification** procedures. As it is widely acknowledged, the role of guardians and the establishment of a functional **guardianship** scheme are, inter alia, of vital importance towards the safeguarding of children's asylum rights and the proper implementation of procedural safeguards.

Elaborating and supporting **durable solutions** for young unaccompanied children includes multifold factors and crucial challenges that should be assessed as part of a continuous dynamic process. The effective response to the abovementioned issues, concerning identification, family tracing, family reunification, guardianship etc., affects, up to a large extent, the assessment and implementation of durable solutions that suit children's needs, on the basis of their best interests. As far as the **integration** in host society, the **role of education**, including early childhood education and care, is highlighted. It is encouraging that issues related to children's education and to their inclusion in schools have been taken into account and promoted in the context of current policies (European Commission 2018; Urban Agenda for the EU, 2017). Attending school, apart from being a fundamental right of all children, seems to be also a very strong tool to help children on

⁹ It is noted that EASO Practical guide on best interests is expected to be published within 2018. Similarly, relevant documents are expected by FRA within the current year, concerning child practices in different procedures in EU28.

¹⁰ Since 2017 an increased interest is observed at EU level policies and agencies about these issues. Indicatively: The Commission has proposed to adapt the Schengen Information System (SIS) by adding subcategories including for missing unaccompanied children; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has launched publications on age assessment and fingerprinting of children in asylum procedures, biometrics, EU IT systems and fundamental rights; The Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) is carrying out a study on child-friendly biometric activities etc. (European Commission 2016c; FRA 2018; FRA 2018a)



the move to return to regular life, feel safe and secure. Mixing with local children and participating in their educational, cultural and recreational activities can also help them feel less isolated and traumatized.

4. Epilogue

The experience that we have obtained in Greece in recent years, in receiving, supporting and looking after large numbers of refugee children, has led to some findings that can be very useful globally. Regarding young unaccompanied children, we are convinced that the strongest tool to respond to their multiple needs and fragile mental stage, is to offer a safe social environment of acceptance and participation, where their personalities can be expressed and respected, and their abilities can be cultivated in exchange and co-existence with other children of their age.

Recently, following a year of collaboration with local schools and public educational authorities, I contributed in organising a big celebration that took place in Elaionas refugee camp in Athens, that involved the participation of schools and the local community. Around 200 accompanied and unaccompanied children living in the camp, who have been enrolled and attended lessons in various schools together with local children, had the opportunity to attend and participate in a big open feast with songs, dances, theatre plays and games along with 700 visitors, other school pupils, their parents and teachers, showing how important it is for all of them to meet and to learn together, to be creative and enjoy their rights together. The smiles of these children, as well as the satisfaction, the joy and tranquility in the faces of everyone who was there, was a vivid example that societies can successfully offer space for the integration and inclusion of refugee children.

Everyone working with and for unaccompanied children, especially the very young ones, who has experienced how they can peacefully integrate in European societies, needs to spread this message to as many other citizens as possible. Such examples show that the positive response to international legal obligations to respect refugee children's rights, as well as to consciousness calls, like the one of Irena Sendler "to rescue the drowning person, regardless of religion and nationality", are in line with modern social cohesion challenges and policies.

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