GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children

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Assessment of national capacity on the types of support provided to guardians of unaccompanied migrant children – Report

Greece

D4.1

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In memory of Mr Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), whose work and dedication greatly contributed to the creation of this report. Khalil led the early stages of research, bringing valuable insight to the process. He also developed key methodological tools and contributed to shaping the project's training content. His commitment to children's rights and inclusive policy development remains an inspiration.

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Executive summary

This report explores how Greece supports guardians of unaccompanied migrant children, especially those caring for children with disabilities. It looks at what works, what's missing, and what steps could make the system more effective and inclusive.

Part I outlines the legal and institutional framework. Greece has taken major steps in recent years, especially with Law 4960/2022, which created a structured National Guardianship System. This law shifted responsibility from prosecutors to trained guardians, set up official registries, and introduced clear oversight mechanisms. Civil society plays a crucial role, with NGOs like METAdrasi and PRAKSIS leading implementation. There are also targeted protocols for children with disabilities, including specialised shelters, trained staff, and access to adapted education. Despite this progress, gaps remain: not enough qualified guardians, slow appointments, and uneven service delivery.

Part II focuses on services for both children and their guardians. Most children now receive care through shelters, supervised apartments, or foster families. Guardians receive training and take on a wide range of tasks – from legal representation to emotional support. Still, disability-specific training is often missing or optional, and access to supervision or burnout support is inconsistent. While some good practices exist – like mentorship programs and hands-on seminars – resources vary widely by region, and the support system is not yet fully coordinated or standardised.

Part III offers a qualitative view from the field. Interviews and focus groups show both progress and frustration. There's satisfaction with the legal reforms and the dedication of many guardians. Children often describe their guardians as a steady source of safety and care. But delays, lack of staff, and patchy services – especially for children with disabilities – are common concerns. Guardians report emotional strain and a need for better training, supervision, and support. Services for children ageing out of care (18–23) are especially weak, and long-term integration remains fragile.

Key Insights:

- Legal Progress: Law 4960/2022 is a milestone that created a unified system with clear roles and responsibilities.
- Collaboration Works: NGOs, public bodies, and international partners work together, often filling in critical gaps.
- Training Exists – but Needs Depth: Guardians get basic training, but disability-focused content is lacking or optional.
- Support Systems Are Uneven: Mentoring and peer support are helpful, but not available everywhere.
- Children with Disabilities Need More: From tailored services to everyday care, many needs are still unmet.
- Emotional Burnout Is Real: Guardians need psychological support and tools to manage complex cases.

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- Transitions Are Risky: Turning 18 can mean falling through the cracks, especially for those with special needs.

This report offers a clear message: the system is evolving in the right direction, but it needs deeper coordination, targeted training, and stronger, everyday support for those who care for Greece's most vulnerable children.

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Methodology

This report is an assessment of the capacity of Greece on the types of support provided to guardians of unaccompanied migrant children developed by IASIS. The report aims to focus on unaccompanied children with disabilities and their guardians while assessing the services available for them. It was produced in the framework of the GUIDE project, a project that develops a transnational action to strengthen the capacity of national guardianship systems and the support available for guardians, competencies and visibility of guardians. The project is implemented in 5 countries, namely: Bulgaria, Greece, Slovakia, Italy and Poland.

The report builds on previous research and reports conducted in the framework of the GUIDE project, in particular, the capacity data analysis, implemented as a needs assessment and situational analysis, which supported the development and implementation of the training program and workshop for guardians. The capacity data analysis included an overview of the general context and legislative framework related to unaccompanied migrant children with disability, of the guardianship of unaccompanied migrant children with disability in the social sector and an evaluation of future trends and challenges.

This report is based on literature reviews, 4 extensive interviews, and 2 focus group discussions (FGDs) with multiple stakeholders, particularly children and guardians, as well as guardianship system personnel from both state and civil society organisations that provide services for unaccompanied children in each country, with a focus on unaccompanied children with disabilities. It includes an overview of the legal and policy frameworks related to the guardianship modalities and roles of guardians, a description of the state of play of services available for guardians and a qualitative analysis of those services.

This report and other project outputs build on a framework document developed at the GUIDE project inception, which guides partners' work on the project. It shares several components with contemporary approaches to Early Childhood Interventions, such as Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model, an empowering and participative definition of children and disability, evidence-based support that is early, holistic, and continuous, and assessments and case management planning through transdisciplinary teams. It employs a systemic approach using the integrated child protection systems model.

The purpose of this report is to map existing guardianship system components and functions across the country, map the existing services provided to guardians and carers of unaccompanied migrant children and assess their availability, accessibility and efficiency. It aims to identify key gaps and challenges and provides initial recommendations for enhancing the guardianship system, especially in terms of supporting both guardians and children with disabilities, to ensure sustainable and effective outcomes. Following the assessment, roundtables will be organised in Greece with stakeholders, public authorities and guardians, to discuss the findings of the assessment and identify recommendations related to the gaps, challenges and best practices about national guardianship systems for unaccompanied minors. Assessment findings will be presented and analysed with the aim to create a list of actionable recommendations on safe and appropriate guardianship for children with disabilities.

The target audience of the report includes project stakeholders, guardians, local organisations, local and national authorities, and the children for whom we all have a responsibility. It also targets EU project funders, and the broader community of donors, policymakers, and practitioners related to the subject matter.

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Part I. Overview of policy and legislative frameworks related to guardianship for unaccompanied migrant children

Greece has been at the frontline of migration movements in recent years, with a significant number of unaccompanied migrant children (UAMs) arriving from countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, and more recently, Ukraine. The Greek state has developed a detailed legal framework to protect these minors, yet many of its elements still face challenges in day-to-day implementation.

National Procedures for Unaccompanied Minors: Legal Basis and Practice

Over the past years, Greece has received large numbers of unaccompanied and separated migrant children. In response, the state has gradually built a legal and institutional system to protect their rights and offer appropriate care. At the heart of this effort is the guardianship framework, shaped by a series of laws and ministerial decisions that aim to move from emergency solutions to structured and lasting support.

From Arrival to Initial Care

When children arrive in Greece from third countries, including Ukraine, they are first registered and identified at border entry points. They are then temporarily hosted in reception facilities until more permanent arrangements are found. A major shift came in 2020, when Greece officially ended the use of protective custody for children – the practice of holding minors in police stations[1]. This was replaced by a stronger focus on child protection, reflected in the National Strategy for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors[2] (2022). That same year, a new Special Secretariat was established to lead national efforts on safeguarding, better data management, and long-term planning.

Key Legislation

Law 4554/2018[3] was the first major step toward creating a proper guardianship system. It transferred responsibility from public prosecutors to professional guardians, and defined their role clearly: to support the child in legal, health, education, and asylum matters. The law also created registries for both guardians and minors and introduced a Supervisory Council to oversee how the system functions.

[1] Stasinos Stavrianeas, *"Epistemological Injustice and the Right to the World: Questioning the Displacement of Refugees in the Mediterranean,"* Academic Article, *Ekistics and the New Habitat*, Ekistics Research Initiative, 2024, https://ekisticsjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/view/639.

[2] Ministry of Migration & Asylum (Greece), "National Strategy on Unaccompanied Minors," Webpage, Ministry of Migration & Asylum, July 2024, https://migration.gov.gr/en/ethniki-stratigiki-asynodeyton-anilikon/.

[3] Hellenic Republic – Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, "Ν. 4554/2018 (ΦΕΚ Α' 130/18.07.2018) – Ασφαλιστικές, συνταξιοδοτικές & εργασιακές ρυθμίσεις," Government Gazette, National Printing Office of Greece, 18 July 2018, https://ypergasias.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/N.-4454-2018-ΦΕΚ-A-130.pdf

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However, despite its ambition, the law wasn't fully implemented in practice. A shortage of staff, funding gaps, and delays meant that many children continued to rely on interim arrangements.

To tackle these issues, more laws followed:

- **Law 4611/2019**[4] strengthened the role of EKKA (National Center for Social Solidarity), giving it responsibility for managing referrals, coordinating services, and maintaining the national registry for UAMs.
- **Law 4623/2019**[5] allowed for a time extension to properly launch the new system and address operational delays.
- **Law 4636/2019**[6] introduced child-centred safeguards into the asylum process and prohibited the detention of minors. It stressed the importance of placing children in friendly, age-appropriate environments, like shelters or foster care.
- **Law 4674/2020**[7] created mobile Protection Units to provide on-the-spot support for children at arrival points and start guardianship procedures early.
- **Law 4686/2020**[8] updated immigration policy more broadly, including provisions for age assessment, integration planning, and cooperation among public services.
- **Law 4960/2022**[9] established the National Guardianship System. This marked a shift: responsibility for guardianship was officially given to legal entities selected by the state, including NGOs and international organisations, under the supervision of the Public Prosecutor and the General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection.

[4] Hellenic Republic (Greek Parliament), "Νόμος 4611/2019 – 'Ρύθμιση οφειλών προς τους Φορείς Κοινωνικής Ασφάλισης, τη Φορολογική Διοίκηση και τους Ο.Τ.Α. α' βαθμού, Συνταξιοδοτικές Ρυθμίσεις Δημοσίου και λοιπές ασφαλιστικές και συνταξιοδοτικές διατάξεις, ενίσχυση της προστασίας των εργαζομένων και άλλες διατάξεις,'" Law (ΦΕΚ Α' 73/17 May 2019), National Printing Office, 17 May 2019, https://www.lawspot.gr/nomikes-plirofories/nomothesia/nomos-4611-2019.

[5] Hellenic Republic (Greek Parliament), "Νόμος 4623/2019 – 'Ρυθμίσεις του Υπουργείου Εσωτερικών, διατάξεις για την ψηφιακή διακυβέρνηση, συνταξιοδοτικές ρυθμίσεις και άλλα επείγοντα ζητήματα,'" Law (ΦΕΚ Α' 134/09 August 2019), National Printing Office, 9 August 2019, https://www.lawspot.gr/nomikes-plirofories/nomothesia/nomos-4623-2019.

[6] Hellenic Republic (Greek Parliament), "Νόμος 4636/2019 – 'Περί Διεθνούς Προστασίας και άλλες διατάξεις,'" Law (ΦΕΚ Α' 169/01 November 2019), National Printing Office, 1 November 2019, https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/N.-4636.2019-ΦΕΚ-169.A.1.11.2019.pdf.

[7] Hellenic Republic (Greek Parliament), "Νόμος 4674/2020 – 'Στρατηγική αναπτυξιακή προοπτική των Οργανισμών Τοπικής Αυτοδιοίκησης, ρύθμιση ζητημάτων αρμοδιότητας Υπουργείου Εσωτερικών και άλλες διατάξεις,'" Law (ΦΕΚ Α' 53/11 March 2020), National Printing Office, 11 March 2020, https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Νόμος-46742020.pdf.

[8] Hellenic Republic (Greek Parliament), "Νόμος 4686/2020 – 'Βελτίωση της μεταναστευτικής νομοθεσίας, τροποποίηση διατάξεων των νόμων 4636/2019 (Α' 169), 4375/2016 (Α' 51), 4251/2014 (Α' 80) και άλλες διατάξεις,'" Law (ΦΕΚ Α' 96/12 May 2020), National Printing Office, 12 May 2020, https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/4686.2020.pdf.

[9] Hellenic Republic (Greek Parliament), "Νόμος 4960/2022 – 'Εθνικό Σύστημα Επιτροπείας και Πλαίσιο Φιλοξενίας Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων και άλλες διατάξεις αρμοδιότητας του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου,'" Law (ΦΕΚ Α' 145/22 July 2022), National Printing Office, 22 July 2022, https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/N.4960_EN-1.pdf.

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Standards and Oversight

Several joint ministerial decisions supported the legal framework by setting clear operational rules:

- **KYA 1153/2019**[10] outlined the qualifications guardians must have, including training in child protection and legal knowledge.
- **YA 1073/2019**[11] established the National Registry for Unaccompanied Minors, allowing better tracking and coordination of services.
- **YA 1154/2019**[12] created the Registry of Professional Guardians.
- **YA 1169/2019**[13] set up the Supervisory Council to monitor how guardians carry out their duties and to handle any complaints.

Despite this solid framework, challenges remain in real life. There are still not enough qualified guardians, many appointments are delayed, and accommodation spaces are limited. Children can spend weeks or months without proper legal or psychosocial support.

The National Guardianship System in Practice

With the 2022 law[14], the Greek state moved to consolidate and expand its guardianship services. In 2023, NGOs like METAdrasi and Praksis were selected to help run the National Guardianship Scheme[15]. Guardians were recruited through public tenders and placed in key locations such as entry points and shelters. UNICEF also plays a crucial role, offering technical support, training, and funding to strengthen the system.

The responsibilities of guardians, as laid out in **Law 4554/2018**[16], go beyond legal paperwork. They are expected to:

[10] Hellenic Republic – Ministries of Economy & Development and Labour, Social Insurance & Social Solidarity, "Υπ. Απόφαση Δ11/οικ.28303/1153/2019 – 'Καθορισμός απαιτούμενων τυπικών και ουσιαστικών προσόντων για την επιλογή επαγγελματία επιτρόπου ασυνόδευτων ανηλίκων, κωλύματα, αριθμός ανηλίκων ανά επίτροπο, εκπαίδευση, αξιολόγηση, σύμβαση, αμοιβή και σχετικές λεπτομέρειες,'" Joint Ministerial Decision (ΦΕΚ Β' 2558/27 June 2019), National Printing Office, 27 June 2019, https://www.kodiko.gr/nomothesia/document/685213/yp.-apofasi-d11-oik.28303-1153-2019.

[11] Mentzelopoulou, Maria-Margarita; European Parliamentary Research Service (European Parliament), *Unaccompanied migrant children in Greece*, EPRS Briefing (PE 729.356), European Parliament, April 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/729356/EPRS_BRI(2022)729356_EN.pdf.

[12] European Council on Refugees and Exiles (Asylum Information Database), "Overview of the legal framework – Greece," Webpage report, Asylum Information Database (AIDA), European Council on Refugees and Exiles, July 2024, https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/overview-legal-framework/.

[13] PRAXIS – Programs of Development, Social Support & Medical Cooperation, *Greek National Report – GAIN Project: Guardianship Advanced Instruments for Child Protection in Europe*, Report, PRAXIS, July 2018, https://praksis.gr/cms/files/2020/09/GREEK_NATIONAL_REPORT_GAIN_PROJECT.pdf.

[14] Hellenic Republic (Greek Parliament), "Νόμος 4960/2022 – 'Εθνικό Σύστημα Επιτροπείας και Πλαίσιο Φιλοξενίας Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων και άλλες διατάξεις αρμοδιότητας του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου,'" Law (ΦΕΚ Α' 145/22 July 2022), National Printing Office, 22 July 2022, https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/%CE%9D.4960_EN-1.pdf.

[15] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *The National Guardianship System for Unaccompanied Minors (GSVP): Legal Framework and Procedures on Access to the Labour Market*, Situation Report (PDF), UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 16 May 2024, https://data.unhcr.org/fr/documents/download/109775.

[16] Hellenic Republic – Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, "Νόμος 4554/2018 (ΦΕΚ Α' 130/18.07.2018) – 'Ασφαλιστικές και συνταξιοδοτικές ρυθμίσεις · Αντιμετώπιση της αδήλωτης εργασίας · Ενίσχυση της προστασίας των εργαζομένων ·

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- Ensure the child lives in safe and suitable conditions.
- Support them in all legal, medical, and administrative matters.
- Escort the child to medical appointments and follow up on treatment.
- Help them access psychological care when needed.
- Enrol them in school or alternative education programs.
- Guide family reunification or foster care options where appropriate.
- Respect the child's right to express their beliefs and opinions.
- Interact with care, empathy, and respect in all aspects of their work.

Guardians are not just there to protect children's rights. They are also there to help them feel seen, safe, and supported – to give them a voice and a path forward.

Table 1: Key Legislation on Guardianship for Unaccompanied Migrant Children in Greece

Law	Date	Title / Focus	Key Provisions
Law 4554/2018	18 July 2018	Guardianship Framework for UAMs	Defines guardian roles; introduces professional guardianship system; sets up registries and Supervisory Council.
Law 4611/2019	17 May 2019	Role of EKKA	Assigns EKKA to coordinate UAM services and referrals, and maintain the national registry.
Law 4623/2019	9 August 2019	Implementation Extension	Extends the timeline to fully implement Law 4554/2018, allowing for recruitment and system setup.

Επιτροπεία ασυνόδευτων ανηλίκων και άλλες διατάξεις,'" Government Gazette (ΦΕΚ Α' 130/18 July 2018), National Printing Office, 18 July 2018, https://ypergasias.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/N.-4454-2018-ΦΕΚ-A-130.pdf.

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Law 4636/2019	1 November 2019	International Protection and Asylum Law	Emphasizes best interest of the child; prohibits detention; promotes child-friendly accommodation.
Law 4674/2020	11 March 2020	Protection Units for UAMs	Establishes mobile teams to provide immediate psychosocial support and initiate guardianship.
Law 4686/2020	12 May 2020	Broader Immigration Reform	Updates age assessment and asylum procedures; promotes coordination between actors.
Law 4960/2022	2022	National Guardianship System	Establishes an integrated national system; assigns guardianship to legal entities including NGOs.

Legislative Response to the War in Ukraine

The Russian war in Ukraine led to a sharp increase in the number of displaced children arriving in Greece. In response, Greece activated the EU Temporary Protection Directive in March 2022[17], granting Ukrainian minors immediate legal protection, access to education, healthcare, and social services, without going through the standard asylum process.

The Greek authorities, supported by IOM and UNICEF, implemented specific accommodation and support programs, including emergency shelter, psychological care, and access to education. Ukrainian minors

[17] European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), *Information on temporary protection in Greece* (Booklet – Greece), Online booklet (PDF), European Union Agency for Asylum, June 2022, https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-06/Booklet_Greece_EN.pdf.

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were placed in more protective environments, such as foster care or child-specific shelters, and avoided institutional settings. This rapid and focused response highlighted Greece's ability to adapt its systems when political will and international support align.

Structure and Functioning of the Guardianship System

The Greek guardianship system has developed gradually through successive legislative efforts:

- **Law 4554/2018**[18] was the cornerstone, shifting responsibility for guardianship from public prosecutors to trained professionals. It set up registries of guardians and minors, defined their roles, and introduced oversight mechanisms.
- **Law 4960/2022**[19] built on this foundation, formalising the National Guardianship System. It transferred guardianship responsibilities to designated NGOs and entities under the supervision of the state and public prosecutors.

Guardians are now expected to:

- Represent the child in legal, administrative, and health matters.
- Ensure access to education, healthcare, and asylum procedures.
- Facilitate integration by supporting enrolment in school or vocational training.
- Guarantee that children live in safe, appropriate accommodation.

Guardians are appointed through a structured selection and training process, overseen by public prosecutors and supervised by the Guardianship Supervisory Council. Registries help track both minors and appointed guardians to ensure transparency.

Still, the shortage of trained guardians and the bureaucratic pace of appointments result in gaps in coverage. In practice, NGOs like METAdrasi often step in to cover these gaps, particularly at entry points or in emergency settings.

Care Arrangements and Support for Guardians

Children are typically placed in shelters, supervised apartments, or, less commonly, foster care. These placements are supposed to be matched to the child's needs and overseen by the appointed guardian. The National Registry of Accommodation Centres (established through ministerial decisions) supports this by mapping available spaces and monitoring standards.

[18] Hellenic Republic – Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, "Νόμος 4554/2018 (ΦΕΚ Α' 130/18 July 2018) – 'Ασφαλιστικές και συνταξιοδοτικές ρυθμίσεις · Αντιμετώπιση της αδήλωτης εργασίας · Ενίσχυση της προστασίας των εργαζομένων · Επιτροπεία ασυνόδευτων ανηλίκων και άλλες διατάξεις,'" Government Gazette (ΦΕΚ Α' 130/18 July 2018), National Printing Office, 18 July 2018, https://ypergasias.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/N.-4454-2018-ΦΕΚ-A-130.pdf.

[19] Hellenic Republic (Greek Parliament), "Νόμος 4960/2022 – 'Εθνικό Σύστημα Επιτροπείας και Πλαίσιο Φιλοξενίας Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων και άλλες διατάξεις αρμοδιότητας του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου,'" Law (ΦΕΚ Α' 145/22 July 2022), National Printing Office, 22 July 2022, https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/%CE%9D.4960_EN-1.pdf.

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Guardians receive specialised training and support through programs such as:

- **METAdrasi Training Seminars**[20]

Since November 2023, METAdrasi has been running training seminars as part of the National Guardianship System, with funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2021–2027. Over 210 guardians, along with 20 lawyers and coordinators, have already taken part. The seminars cover key topics such as legal procedures, asylum, foster care, and how to carry out a Best Interest Assessment (BIA). Sessions are interactive and practical, with presentations, real-life case studies, and group activities. Trainers come from METAdrasi, but also from public services and organisations like UNICEF and Praksis, ensuring that the training reflects both field realities and legal standards.

- **U-CARE Program**[21]

This program was developed by IOM Belgium in collaboration with Pleegzorg, an organisation specialising in foster care. Its goal is to equip foster carers with practical tools and knowledge to support unaccompanied minors. It covers a wide range of topics – from legal and psychological issues to cultural sensitivity – and includes manuals, toolkits, and other learning materials. It's designed for social workers, psychologists, trainers, and experienced carers. These professionals are then able to deliver short courses to others who are already fostering or thinking about it. The program also promotes sharing experiences across countries, helping foster carers learn from one another and improve how they care for these children.

- **GUARD-UP Initiative**[22]

GUARD-UP is an EU-funded project that focuses on improving guardianship systems in Greece and five other countries (Italy, Poland, Cyprus, Croatia, and Belgium). It brings together professionals from different sectors – government agencies, NGOs, lawyers, educators, and mental health experts – to share practices and strengthen collaboration. So far, around 100 guardians have been trained, and over 200 stakeholders have taken part in workshops. The project also created a digital platform where professionals can connect, exchange ideas, and access tools that support their daily work. The goal is to make guardianship more consistent, effective, and child-centred.

Protocols for Unaccompanied Minors with Disabilities

Greece has put in place specific protocols to support unaccompanied children with disabilities. These protocols aim to respond to their needs in a more targeted and respectful way. The General Secretariat

[20] METAdrasi – Action for Migration and Development, *Training seminars for the Guardianship Mandated Persons of Unaccompanied Minors*, Webpage (program announcement), METAdrasi, 13 January 2025, https://metadrasi.org/en/training-seminars-for-the-guardianship-officers-of-unaccompanied-minors/.

[21] International Organization for Migration (IOM) – Greece Mission, *Unaccompanied Children in Alternative Residence (U-CARE)*, Webpage (project description), IOM Greece, accessed June 2025, https://greece.iom.int/unaccompanied-children-alternative-residence-u-care.

[22] GUARD-UP Project Consortium, *GUARD-UP: Empowering Guardianship Systems to Improve the Guidance of UAC*, Project Webpage, GUARD-UP, accessed June 2025, https://www.guard-up.eu/.

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for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection[23] is the main body responsible for coordinating these efforts. It works across sectors to make sure that care is adapted to each child's situation.

Here's what this includes:

- **Specialised accommodation:** Children with disabilities are placed in shelters that meet their needs, with accessible infrastructure such as ramps, elevators, and bathrooms designed to be barrier-free.
- **Trained staff:** Caregivers working in these shelters are trained in disability support and understand how to provide the right care and attention.
- **Health and psychological assessments:** From the moment they arrive, children go through medical and psychological evaluations. These help identify their individual needs and form the basis for tailored care plans.
- **Access to education:** Depending on their abilities, children are supported to join either regular or specialised schools. They also receive help through adapted learning methods and personalised education plans.
- **Partnerships with NGOs:** Organisations with experience in disability and child protection offer additional training, psychosocial support, and guidance to both children and staff.

On a legal level, Law 4554/2018[24] makes clear that guardians are responsible for ensuring the integration of children with disabilities. The law also established the Supervisory Guardianship Board, which monitors how well children's rights are protected, not only in terms of disability, but also in relation to religion, identity, and custody matters.

The aim is simple: to treat every child with dignity, provide them with the support they need, and make sure no one is left behind.

[23] Hellenic Republic – Ministry of Migration & Asylum, *General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons & Institutional Protection*, Webpage, Ministry of Migration & Asylum, accessed June 2025, https://migration.gov.gr/en/grammateies/geniki-grammateia-evaloton-politon-kai-thesmikis-prostasias/.

[24] Hellenic Republic – Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, "Νόμος 4454/2018 (ΦΕΚ Α' 130/18 July 2018) – 'Ασφαλιστικές και συνταξιοδοτικές ρυθμίσεις · Αντιμετώπιση της αδήλωτης εργασίας · Ενίσχυση της προστασίας των εργαζομένων · Επιτροπεία ασυνόδευτων ανηλίκων και άλλες διατάξεις,'" Government Gazette (ΦΕΚ Α' 130/18 July 2018), National Printing Office, 18 July 2018, https://ypergasias.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/N.-4454-2018-ΦΕΚ-A-130.pdf.

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Part II. State of play on services for guardians of unaccompanied migrant children

Unaccompanied migrant children arriving in Greece, particularly from third countries like Ukraine, face multiple vulnerabilities. Greece has developed a structured yet evolving system to provide legal, psychosocial, and institutional protection, driven by both state and civil society efforts[25].

Services for Unaccompanied Migrant Children (Including Those With Disabilities)

The Greek state, in close cooperation with NGOs like METAdrasi and international partners such as UNICEF and IOM, provides a wide array of support services for unaccompanied children. The process begins with identification and registration at border points or Reception and Identification Centres. From there, depending on age, gender, vulnerability, and available capacity, children are placed in appropriate accommodations. These include emergency shelters, long-term accommodation centres, foster families, or Supervised Independent Living (SIL) apartments designed for older minors[26].

As of July 2024, more than 2,000 unaccompanied and separated children were residing in Greece, with over 80% receiving support from trained guardians under the National Guardianship System. In total, more than 2,485 children have received guardianship services since the beginning of the year[27]. Children with disabilities are identified early through medical screening and psychosocial evaluations.

Although national protocols exist, gaps remain in the delivery of tailored services such as regular access to speech therapy, assistive technologies, and individualised education programs. These services are often patchy, especially outside urban centres, and the continuity of care is not always guaranteed[28]. The Russian war in Ukraine brought a rapid increase in displaced children, many of whom arrived in Greece unaccompanied. In response, Greece swiftly implemented the EU's Temporary Protection Directive, ensuring that Ukrainian minors received immediate access to health care, psychological support, schooling, and social welfare services without having to go through the regular asylum procedure. The IOM also helped facilitate medical transfers and emergency accommodation for children arriving in vulnerable conditions[29].

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[25] Farmakopoulou, Ignatia; Baltsioti, Vasiliki (University of Patras), *The Impact of Institutionalization and the Application of Alternative Forms of Child Protection in Greece: A Conceptual Review*, Research Article (PDF), Technium Education and Humanities, Vol. 8, 9 March 2024, https://techniumscience.com/index.php/education/article/view/10717.

[26] UNICEF Greece, *A Network of Care for Unaccompanied Minors in Greece*, Online Article, UNICEF Greece, September 2024, https://www.unicef.org/greece/en/stories/network-care-unaccompanied-minors-greece.

[27] METAdrasi – Action for Migration and Development, *Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors*, Webpage (campaign description), METAdrasi, circa April 2014, https://metadrasi.org/en/campaigns/guardianship-of-unaccompanied-minors/.

[28] Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), *"GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children – Recommendations Paper,"* Deliverable D2.1, Recommendations Paper, GUIDE Project (Grant Agreement No. 101141170 — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), July 2024.

[29] Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), *"GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children – Recommendations Paper,"* Deliverable D2.1, Recommendations Paper, GUIDE Project (Grant Agreement No. 101141170 — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), July 2024.

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Services for Guardians and/or Carers (Including Those Supporting Children with Disabilities)

Greece has moved away from the old system where public prosecutors were automatically assigned as guardians for unaccompanied children. Today, the country operates a much more structured and professional model. Since the start of 2024, under Law 4960/2022, the National Guardianship System has been fully rolled out. METAdrasi and PRAKSIS are leading its implementation, with 161 trained guardians supporting more than 1,770 children across 25 locations[30].

Guardians now have a clearly defined role: they represent the child in all legal and administrative matters, ensure access to healthcare and education, and act as the child's main point of contact and support. They receive core training covering children's rights, asylum procedures, and intercultural communication. However, while the basics are there, the training still falls short when it comes to equipping guardians to work effectively with children who have disabilities. Modules on disability-specific support, communication strategies, and mental health needs are either too brief or entirely missing[31].

On paper, there are also support structures in place for guardians: mentorship schemes, peer support, and case supervision. In reality, though, access to these varies a lot depending on where the guardian is based. Some regions have regular check-ins and mentoring, while others work more in isolation. And although the job is emotionally heavy, with cases involving trauma, loss, or disability, formal burnout prevention tools like access to psychological support or structured downtime are rarely available[32].

Training, Tools, and Capacity-Building Activities

Professionals working with unaccompanied children (such as guardians, social workers, and shelter staff) come from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. Their preparedness often depends on the organisation they are affiliated with and the resources made available to them. While some benefit from structured, continuous training, others receive only limited or ad hoc preparation.

Several important initiatives have sought to address these gaps. The EU-funded GUIDE project developed a comprehensive training approach that emphasises trauma-informed, rights-based care for unaccompanied minors. The curriculum goes beyond legal procedures, incorporating case studies, interactive exercises, and reflective practice to help professionals understand the complex realities children face[33].

[30] METAdrasi – Action for Migration and Development, *Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors*, Webpage (campaign description), METAdrasi, circa April 2014, https://metadrasi.org/en/campaigns/guardianship-of-unaccompanied-minors/.
[31] Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), *"GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children – Recommendations Paper,"*Deliverable D2.1, Recommendations Paper, GUIDE Project (Grant Agreement No. 101141170 — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), July 2024.
[32] Khan, Farah; Eskander, Noha; Limbana, Therese; Salman, Zainab; Siddiqui, Parveez A.; Hussaini, Syed, *Refugee and Migrant Children's Mental Healthcare: Serving the Voiceless, Invisible, and the Vulnerable Global Citizens*, Journal Article (Review), Cureus, 22 August 2020, https://www.cureus.com/articles/38984-refugee-and-migrant-childrens-mental-healthcare-serving-the-voiceless-invisible-and-the-vulnerable-global-citizens#!/.
[33] Missing Children Europe, *Good Practices Guide*, PDF Guide (Final Draft), Missing Children Europe, June 2024, https://missingchildreneurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2.2.-Good-Practices-Guide_-FINAL-DRAFT.docx.pdf.

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The Mentorship Project[34] has also contributed to capacity-building by connecting newly recruited guardians with experienced peers, fostering hands-on learning and mutual support. However, access to such initiatives remains uneven, and in many regions, professionals continue to operate with limited guidance or follow-up.

The G.A.IN. project[35] has introduced transnational tools, including comparative mappings and shared standards on guardianship. These tools promote consistency across countries while emphasising principles such as continuity of care, accessibility, and respect for the child's evolving capacities.

In Greece, organisations like METAdrasi have extended training to cover mental health, intercultural communication, and child-friendly practices. Yet, the absence of a national training standard has led to disparities: some guardians undergo in-depth preparation, while others receive minimal instruction. Disability-specific training remains largely optional and insufficiently integrated.

According to findings presented in the GUARD UP[36], professionals often experience high levels of stress and emotional fatigue, particularly when confronted with complex cases. Several described making critical decisions without adequate tools or time, and expressed concerns about their ability to meet children's needs effectively. While some NGOs have begun to offer reflective sessions and psychological support, such measures are not widespread.

The same guide documents good practices that emerge organically in the field. For instance, a guardian used narrative methods to connect with a withdrawn child, while another developed a visual diary to assist a non-verbal child in expressing emotions. These creative, empathetic responses – though informal – proved effective and underscore the value of relational competence in this line of work.

Despite the availability of tools such as trauma screening checklists, supported decision-making templates, and risk assessment protocols, their use remains inconsistent. Barriers include a lack of awareness, insufficient time, and a lack of confidence among professionals in applying these tools without expert supervision[37] [38]

A sustainable approach to training must move beyond one-off seminars. It should include ongoing professional development, access to peer support, and regular supervision. Ultimately, effective support for unaccompanied children requires not only legal knowledge but also emotional readiness, cultural sensitivity, and the capacity to build trust with children in vulnerable and often traumatic situations.

Addressing Special Needs and Disability-Related Support

Unaccompanied children with disabilities often face even greater obstacles within the protection system. Although vulnerability assessments are typically conducted upon arrival, the continuity of tailored care

[34] European Commission – Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, *Mentoring project: Supporting unaccompanied children in Greece*, Webpage (project description), European Commission, accessed June 2025, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/projects/mentoring-project-supporting-unaccompanied-children-greece_en.
[35] PRAXIS and GAIN Project Consortium, *G.A.IN. Transnational Paper – Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Italy*, Transnational Report (PDF), PRAXIS, 2018, https://praksis.gr/assets/G.A.IN._Transnational_Paper_Belgium-Greece-Hungary-Italy.pdf.
[36] Missing Children Europe, *Good Practices Guide*, PDF Guide (Final Draft), Missing Children Europe, June 2024, https://missingchildreneurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2.2.-Good-Practices-Guide_-FINAL-DRAFT.docx.pdf.
[37] Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), *"GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children – Recommendations Paper,"* Deliverable D2.1, Recommendations Paper, GUIDE Project (Grant Agreement No. 101141170 — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), July 2024.
[38] PRAXIS and GAIN Project Consortium, *G.A.IN. Transnational Paper – Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Italy*, Transnational Report (PDF), PRAXIS, 2018, https://praksis.gr/assets/G.A.IN._Transnational_Paper_Belgium-Greece-Hungary-Italy.pdf.

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is not guaranteed. In Greece, children with disabilities are frequently placed in shelters that lack the infrastructure, staffing, or training to meet their specific needs. This mismatch can lead to isolation, anxiety, or regression in development.

Guardians play a crucial role in advocating for these children, yet many report feeling underprepared to do so. Most guardians do not receive structured training on disability rights or supported decision-making. According to the GUIDE project, disability-specific modules are either optional or absent in the majority of guardianship training programmes[39]. This gap leaves professionals without the tools to understand how best to support children with intellectual, psychosocial, or physical disabilities.

The Guard Up project documents several promising efforts aimed at addressing this issue[40]. Some guardians, for instance, have developed informal but effective methods to engage with children with complex needs, such as visual storytelling or sensory-based activities. These methods are not yet codified into national practice but offer valuable insight into how creativity and empathy can bridge communication gaps. Still, such innovations depend heavily on individual initiative and are not systematically supported.

Moreover, systemic barriers continue to slow progress. These include a persistent lack of specialised personnel, fragmented coordination among child protection actors, and entrenched stigma towards disability. Shelters often lack links to external specialists such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, or disability advocates, leaving many children without access to comprehensive care.

Projects like G.A.IN.[41] and the ASOP4G[42] propose more structured and accessible tools to support professionals in disability-sensitive care. These include simplified assessment templates, step-by-step guides for supported decision-making, and training materials co-developed with disability organisations. However, their integration into day-to-day practice remains limited.

Implementation, Coordination, and Evaluation

The coordination of guardianship and care services for unaccompanied minors in Greece has significantly evolved, especially with the establishment of the General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection under the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. This authority now leads the national strategy, ensuring that all policies and services align with the rights and needs of unaccompanied children[43].

Two key implementing partners – METAdrasi and PRAKSIS – have been tasked with delivering the guardianship system across the country. With funding from the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), their joint project supports over 1,770 children across 25 locations, which accounts for more

[39] Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), *"GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children – Recommendations Paper,"*Deliverable D2.1, Recommendations Paper, GUIDE Project (Grant Agreement No. 101141170 — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), July 2024.
[40] Missing Children Europe, *Good Practices Guide*, PDF Guide (Final Draft), Missing Children Europe, June 2024, https://missingchildreneurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2.2.-Good-Practices-Guide_-FINAL-DRAFT.docx.pdf.
[41] PRAXIS and GAIN Project Consortium, *G.A.IN. Transnational Paper – Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Italy*, Transnational Report (PDF), PRAXIS, 2018, https://praksis.gr/assets/G.A.IN._Transnational_Paper_Belgium-Greece-Hungary-Italy.pdf.
[42] Separated Children in Europe Programme (joint initiative of UNHCR & Save the Children Alliance), *Separated Children in Europe Programme Training Guide: SCEP Training Pack*, Training manual (PDF), Separated Children in Europe Programme, circa 2000, https://asop4g.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Training_module_EN.pdf.
[43] Farmakopoulou, Ignatia; Baltsioti, Vasiliki (University of Patras), *The Impact of Institutionalization and the Application of Alternative Forms of Child Protection in Greece: A Conceptual Review*, Research Article (PDF), Technium Education and Humanities, Vol. 8, 9 March 2024, https://techniumscience.com/index.php/education/article/view/10717.

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than 80% of all unaccompanied minors in Greece[44]. Their work covers not just legal representation but also practical support in education, health care, asylum processes, and daily life.

Still, implementation varies from place to place. While the legal framework introduced by Law 4960/2022 offers a solid foundation, gaps remain on the ground. Many regions report shortages in trained staff, inconsistent communication between agencies, and challenges in maintaining up-to-date national registries for minors and guardians[45]. Digital tools are available, but their integration into everyday workflows is uneven.

Monitoring mechanisms are being strengthened. The Supervisory Council for Guardianship, in collaboration with UNICEF and national authorities, oversees the performance of guardians and the overall guardianship framework. In addition, a Monitoring & Evaluation Framework has been introduced to collect feedback not only from institutions, but also directly from the children themselves. This child-centred approach is central to identifying real-life challenges and improving the quality of support[46].

The system also includes a Complaint Mechanism designed with accessibility in mind. Children can raise concerns through multiple channels–online, in-person, or by phone–ensuring that their voices are heard regardless of language, age, or legal status. All complaints are handled confidentially, and children receive clear, age-appropriate information throughout the process.[47]

Despite these developments, long-term sustainability depends on better coordination among public actors, NGOs, and civil society. Effective case management still relies heavily on the individual motivation of professionals rather than streamlined procedures. Feedback loops between guardians, shelter staff, prosecutors, asylum services, and NGOs are improving, but more structured cooperation is needed.

Role of Civil Society and Ukrainian Organisations

Civil society organisations play a central role in supplementing state efforts. METAdrasi, for instance, has supported nearly 12,000 minors since 2014, offering direct, localised assistance[48]. NGOs often provide case management, legal aid, interpretation, and psychosocial support.

Ukrainian community organisations have also mobilised, helping bridge cultural and language gaps. These groups enhance outreach, especially in supporting trauma recovery and facilitating integration through informal education and peer networks[49]

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[44] Farmakopoulou, Ignatia; Baltsioti, Vasiliki (University of Patras), *The Impact of Institutionalization and the Application of Alternative Forms of Child Protection in Greece: A Conceptual Review*, Research Article (PDF), Technium Education and Humanities, Vol. 8, 9 March 2024, https://techniumscience.com/index.php/education/article/view/10717.

[45] Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), *"GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children – Recommendations Paper,"* Deliverable D2.1, Recommendations Paper, GUIDE Project (Grant Agreement No. 101141170 — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), July 2024.

[46] Farmakopoulou, Ignatia; Baltsioti, Vasiliki (University of Patras), *The Impact of Institutionalization and the Application of Alternative Forms of Child Protection in Greece: A Conceptual Review*, Research Article (PDF), Technium Education and Humanities, Vol. 8, 9 March 2024, https://techniumscience.com/index.php/education/article/view/10717.

[47] Farmakopoulou, Ignatia; Baltsioti, Vasiliki (University of Patras), *The Impact of Institutionalization and the Application of Alternative Forms of Child Protection in Greece: A Conceptual Review*, Research Article (PDF), Technium Education and Humanities, Vol. 8, 9 March 2024, https://techniumscience.com/index.php/education/article/view/10717.

[48] METAdrasi – Action for Migration and Development, *Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors*, Webpage (campaign description), METAdrasi, circa April 2014, https://metadrasi.org/en/campaigns/guardianship-of-unaccompanied-minors/.

[49] Dong, L.; Peng, Y.; Zhang, R.; Ju, K.; Xi, J., *The Unique Role of Peer Support: Exploring the Effects of Various Sources of Social Support on the Mental Health of Unaccompanied Children in China under Residential Education*, Journal Article, *Children* (MDPI), 1 August 2023, https://doi.org/10.3390/children10081326.

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Part III. Assessment: Qualitative analysis of the state of play

Main Issues, Gaps, and Lessons Learnt

Availability of Guardianship Modalities and Support Services

Greece has made progress in building a national guardianship framework, especially with the adoption of Law 4960/2022 and the creation of the General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons [50]. However, many challenges remain. Guardianship services are still fragmented, and there's a shortage of qualified personnel[51].

A key issue is the lack of trained guardians across the country. Despite efforts, like the METAdrasi and PRAKSIS-led programme under AMIF 2021–2027, the number of trained professionals falls short compared to the growing number of unaccompanied minors, which was over 2,000 in July 2024[52]. As of March 2025, Greece hosted 2,641 unaccompanied minors. The country provides 59 shelters with a total capacity of 1,507 places, 60 Supported Independent Living (SIL) apartments with 238 places, and 4 emergency accommodation facilities with 154 places[53]. The imbalance is also geographic, with most guardians based in urban areas and few available in border or rural regions.

Moreover, long-term planning for children's transition into adulthood is often missing. Many support services respond to problems after they arise, rather than working preventively[54].

Support for Guardians

Support systems for guardians are still developing. NGOs and actors like UNICEF have introduced mentoring, but public structures offer limited supervision and mental health support. Many guardians manage complex cases with little backup, leading to stress and emotional fatigue[55].

[50] UNICEF Greece, *A Network of Care for Unaccompanied Minors in Greece*, Online Article, UNICEF Greece, September 2024, https://www.unicef.org/greece/en/stories/network-care-unaccompanied-minors-greece.
[51] Farmakopoulou, Ignatia; Baltsioti, Vasiliki (University of Patras), *The Impact of Institutionalization and the Application of Alternative Forms of Child Protection in Greece: A Conceptual Review*, Research Article (PDF), Technium Education and Humanities, Vol. 8, 9 March 2024, https://techniumscience.com/index.php/education/article/view/10717.
[52] METAdrasi – Action for Migration and Development, *Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors*, Webpage (campaign description), METAdrasi, circa April 2014, https://metadrasi.org/en/campaigns/guardianship-of-unaccompanied-minors/.
[53] Hellenic Republic – Ministry of Migration & Asylum, *Unaccompanied Minors in Greece – Monthly Statistics (March 2025)*, Statistical Report (PDF), General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection, 1 March 2025, https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/SGVP_Statistics-March_EN-1.pdf.
[54] Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), *"GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children – Recommendations Paper,"* Deliverable D2.1, Recommendations Paper, GUIDE Project (Grant Agreement No. 101141170 — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), July 2024.
[55] PRAXIS and GAIN Project Consortium, *G.A.IN. Transnational Paper – Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Italy*, Transnational Report (PDF), PRAXIS, 2018, https://praksis.gr/assets/G.A.IN._Transnational_Paper_Belgium-Greece-Hungary-Italy.pdf.

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Specialised support for children with disabilities is particularly lacking. Most guardians are not trained to recognise or address complex disability needs. While some training materials exist[56], participation is optional, and disability modules are still not part of standard training[57].

Positive trends

There is general satisfaction with the legal reforms, especially Law 4960/2022, which sets out a unified guardianship system[58]. METAdrasi's guardianship officers have also received positive feedback for their consistent and child-focused work.

According to reports like GUIDE and GAIN, many children value the bond they develop with their guardians. These relationships often provide both emotional support and reliable advocacy[59].

Negative trends

At the same time, delays in implementation, unfilled guardian posts, and poor follow-up remain serious concerns. Civil society organisations often face coordination issues with public authorities. Some children report not having regular or meaningful contact with their guardian[60]

Transitions–from emergency to long-term accommodation, for example, can be disjointed. Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable during these times, as many services are inaccessible or unaware of their needs[61].

What is a satisfactory outcome?

A good outcome should include:

- A guardian appointed within 72 hours
- Stable, ongoing support
- A safe, consistent living environment

Key procedural indicators:

- Timely allocation and active case management
- Regular contact and follow-ups

[56] Separated Children in Europe Programme (joint initiative of UNHCR & Save the Children Alliance), *Separated Children in Europe Programme Training Guide: SCEP Training Pack*, Training manual (PDF), Separated Children in Europe Programme, circa 2000, https://asop4g.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Training_module_EN.pdf.
[57] Khan, Farah; Eskander, Noha; Limbana, Therese; Salman, Zainab; Siddiqui, Parveez A.; Hussaini, Syed, *Refugee and Migrant Children's Mental Healthcare: Serving the Voiceless, Invisible, and the Vulnerable Global Citizens*, Journal Article (Review), Cureus, 22 August 2020, https://www.cureus.com/articles/38984-refugee-and-migrant-childrens-mental-healthcare-serving-the-voiceless-invisible-and-the-vulnerable-global-citizens#!/.
[58] Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), *"GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children – Recommendations Paper,"*Deliverable D2.1, Recommendations Paper, GUIDE Project (Grant Agreement No. 101141170 — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), July 2024.
[59] Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), *"GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children – Recommendations Paper,"*Deliverable D2.1, Recommendations Paper, GUIDE Project (Grant Agreement No. 101141170 — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), July 2024.
[60] METAdrasi – Action for Migration and Development, *Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors*, Webpage (campaign description), METAdrasi, circa April 2014, https://metadrasi.org/en/campaigns/guardianship-of-unaccompanied-minors/.
[61] Khalil Cambron (Eurochild), *"GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children – Recommendations Paper,"*Deliverable D2.1, Recommendations Paper, GUIDE Project (Grant Agreement No. 101141170 — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), July 2024.

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- Cooperation among legal, medical, and social services
- A guardian-child relationship that lasts at least a year

From the child's point of view, success means:

- Safe shelter
- Ongoing access to school, healthcare, and mental health services
- A voice in decisions
- Possibility for family reunification or future integration

Safety and Access to Services

Emergency shelters and supervised apartments are available, but not always accessible. Some children spend days in police stations or other unsuitable spaces. For children with disabilities or developmental delays, such waiting periods are particularly harmful: every day without appropriate care can impair their adaptation to the new environment and hinder critical developmental processes, given the importance of early intervention and neuroplasticity in childhood[62].

Even where services exist, they are often disjointed. Children may lose support during transfers or after turning 18, especially when no one is monitoring their progress[63].

Unaccompanied minors with disabilities face even greater challenges. There is limited data on the scope of their needs, and ministerial policies sometimes lead to premature exits from care facilities, resulting in homelessness or unsuitable placements. Although stays may be extended for educational reasons, support structures for refugees aged 18–23 remain weak. Experts point to the urgent need for semi-autonomous living programmes tailored to these vulnerable youths.

Integration and Long-Term Belonging

Integration into society remains weak. There are a few support schemes for turning 18, but long-term mentorship and job training are rare. Without these, young people risk falling into homelessness or exploitation[64].

Unaccompanied children often face language barriers, delays in school enrolment, and difficulty adjusting socially. Many families see Greece as a temporary stop, which hinders deeper integration[65].

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Guardianship should help prepare children for adulthood, not just protect them during childhood. Legal residency, vocational education, and stable housing are essential parts of this path[66]

Capacity of Guardians and Burnout Prevention

Many guardians are stretched well beyond recommended limits. While programmes like Nidos suggest a maximum of 15–17 children per guardian[67], actual caseloads can be drastically higher. For instance, on Lesvos, two guardians were tasked with safeguarding around 1,200 unaccompanied minors, meaning each was responsible for approximately 600 children[68] [69]—clearly far above acceptable levels for meaningful oversight.

Burnout prevention is almost non-existent. Psychological support and debriefing are not standard. Peer support, supervision, and a national protocol for mental health care are badly needed[70].

Future Trends

In the coming years, we expect:

- Disability-inclusive registration tools
- Better training for guardians
- Stronger connections between guardianship and health or disability services[71]

Digital tracking systems and performance indicators are also being developed to improve case monitoring and reduce bureaucratic delays. Legislative efforts are expected to focus on reducing waiting times for services and improving access to education and healthcare.

A shift toward deinstitutionalisation and family-based care models is gaining traction, promoted by both Greek authorities and UNICEF. Holistic support services, including trauma-informed care and early childhood interventions, are likely to become more central in the future framework.

There is growing recognition, particularly following displacements from Ukraine, that systems must be inclusive and holistic, with an emphasis on children's rights[72]. With stronger coordination and better use

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of resources, Greece can significantly improve the quality and consistency of its guardianship system and ensure that children with disabilities receive the protection and support they need.

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Conclusions

The guardianship system for unaccompanied migrant children in Greece has come a long way. Important legal steps, most notably the introduction of Law 4960/2022, have helped build a more structured and transparent framework. This law gave new shape to guardianship, ensuring that support is not only a legal obligation but a human responsibility.

One of the major strengths of the current system is the collaboration between public bodies, NGOs, and international organisations. Guardianship services are now delivered through a mix of actors, which allows broader national coverage and more flexible support. Training programmes for guardians have also been developed, helping professionals better understand the legal, psychological, and social needs of the children they work with.

Still, challenges remain.

Administrative delays in appointing guardians are frequent, leaving many children without dedicated support during critical moments. Resource limitations–both financial and human–restrict how well services can function on the ground. And while training exists, it doesn't go far enough when it comes to disability-specific knowledge or tools for supported decision-making. Many guardians are left feeling unprepared, especially when working with children who face multiple layers of vulnerability.

From our analysis, it's clear that legal reform alone is not enough. What really makes the difference is how things are implemented day to day. When guardians are trained, supported, and emotionally present, children feel safer and more seen. Where gaps appear–due to time, stress, or lack of coordination–trust is harder to build, and needs go unmet.

What stands out is the value of human connection. A strong, lasting relationship between a child and their guardian often becomes the single most reliable point of stability in an otherwise unpredictable world. But for this to happen consistently, guardians must be supported too.

Some steps can be taken now.

- A national roundtable should be organised to bring together public authorities, NGOs, guardians, and–crucially–young people themselves. This space can help validate the findings of this assessment and set shared priorities.
- Basic supports for guardians–like supervision, mentoring, and access to emotional care–need to become the norm, not the exception.
- Disability-focused content should be fully integrated into training programs, not offered as an optional extra.

In the long term, the system needs to evolve into one that not only protects children, but prepares them for life. That means stronger coordination, better data, more tailored care, and a real commitment to follow-through when children reach adulthood. It also means ensuring that children with disabilities are not just acknowledged, but actively included and supported every step of the way.

A better guardianship system is within reach. But to get there, we need to keep listening, keep adapting, and keep putting children at the centre–especially those whose voices are heard the least.

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