



« Protection for all Minors: Path to Safety and Stability»

SUMMARY

The Right to Adulthood: Challenges and Prospects for Unaccompanied Children and Young Adults

2026

Implemented by:

With the support:

« Protection for all Minors: Path to Safety and Stability»

March 2025 - February 2026

Summary: « The Right to Adulthood: Challenges and Prospects for Unaccompanied Children and Young Adults »

The full report :

https://ddp.gr/download.php?fgr=stories/stories_3297_1020_1_gr.pdf

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Executive Summary

The project **“Protection for all Minors: Path to Safety and Stability” (March 2025 – February 2026)** has been implemented by the Network for Children’s Rights in partnership with INTERSOS HELLAS, with the support of Stichting Vluchteling and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. **Its aim is to address critical protection gaps and strengthen the integration of unaccompanied minors and young adults (18–21 years old).**

The project has been developed in a context where, despite improvements in the protection system following the establishment of the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM), **a significant number of unaccompanied children continue to live outside formal accommodation structures under highly precarious conditions.** As of January 1, 2026, 1,716 unaccompanied minors were recorded in accommodation facilities, while the total number of those outside the system remains unaccounted for.

Why Young Adults Are Vulnerable ? The Core Problem:

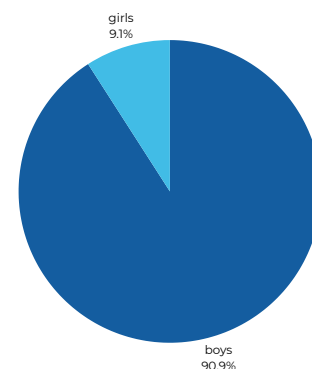
The transition to adulthood is particularly critical, creating a pronounced “protection gap”:

- **End of Protection:** Upon turning 18, guardianship and access to accommodation facilities stops, while young people face barriers in accessing housing, education, and employment.
- **Systemic Exclusion:** Children aged 17+ approaching adulthood are often not prioritized by housing mechanisms. In many cases, the appointment of a legal guardian is delayed or never completed, as younger or more vulnerable children are prioritized.
- **The “Vicious Cycle” of Documentation:** At the same time, they become trapped in administrative deadlocks (such as the interdependence between employment and AMKA/social security number), while often being excluded from existing programs or receiving insufficient support.
- **Limitations of State Interventions:** Programs such as HELIOS Junior are being phased out and show gaps in integration support, while other initiatives, such as PYXIDA, have limited availability compared to the actual needs.

Beneficiary Profile

The project supported a total of **143 beneficiaries**:

- 130 **boys (90.9%)** and **13 girls (9.1%)**
- **Primarily aged 18–21** (up to 23), with parallel support provided to minors **aged 16–17**



Most originate from:

- **Egypt** (86 individuals)
- **Somalia** (23 individuals)
- As well as **Afghanistan, Syria, Congo, Yemen, Pakistan, Palestine, Sudan, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Turkey**

The majority live in conditions of **housing insecurity** and **are already engaged in informal and often hazardous forms of work, mainly in the construction sector.**

Beneficiaries face multiple and interrelated challenges:

- Loss of legal protection upon adulthood
- Limited access to services due to age
- Bureaucratic obstacles in issuing documents
- Limited knowledge of the Greek language
- Increased risk of exploitation and, in some cases, human trafficking

Pillars of Intervention and Services

The project implemented a holistic and individualized support model, including:

- ▶ **Psychosocial Support:** Intake and needs assessment meetings, social history taking, daily living counseling, management and monitoring of complex medical cases, referrals to health, housing, and legal services, support in documentation procedures, and accompaniment to public services

- ▶ **Job Counseling:** Individual skills assessment sessions, CV preparation, interview preparation, information on labor rights, accompaniment to public services (KEP, tax office, social security) for obtaining essential documents, connection to the labor market, educational support, and referrals to schools and training providers
- ▶ **Greek Language Courses:** Structured classes delivered by a professional teacher and volunteers, as Greek language proficiency is the main factor for accessing legal employment and integrating into the education system
- ▶ **Life Skills Workshops:** Experiential workshops covering international protection procedures, requirements for legal employment, risks of undeclared work, and basic life and psychosocial management skills

The intervention focused primarily on employment support, while also addressing social support and education, responding to key needs such as work, housing, legal documentation, and language learning.

The project functioned as a mechanism of immediate and practical support, facilitating beneficiaries' access to fundamental rights and contributing to the stabilization of their living conditions.

Measurable Outcomes and Project Significance

During the first year of implementation:

- 547 individualized support sessions were provided (counseling, accompaniment, referrals)
- 85 participants in Greek language classes
- 10 workshops were conducted with 78 participants

In terms of **tangible results**:

- **15 beneficiaries secured housing** in a context of severe shortage of available options
- **4 beneficiaries accessed legal employment**, transitioning from informal conditions
- **9 CVs were developed and targeted employment actions were carried out**
- Applications for vocational training were submitted, with at least one successful completion



Beneficiary Experience

Program evaluation showed **high satisfaction levels (92%–100%)**, positive feedback regarding communication and treatment, and a clear improvement in access to employment support after participation.

Participants described “a harsh daily routine focused exclusively on work, home, and cooking,” expressing frustration that at their age they should not bear such heavy responsibilities. **They noted that before arriving in Greece they believed conditions in Europe would be easier, but the reality proved otherwise, as jobs are “harder and more demanding.”**

Key issues identified:

- Fear due to lack of documentation and bureaucracy
- Labor exploitation (low or unpaid wages)
- Limited educational opportunities
- Need to learn Greek as a fundamental integration tool

Key Challenges

Significant systemic barriers emerged during implementation:

- **Lack of Housing:** Limited availability of accommodation, often outside Attica. Housing options within the Attica urban area are extremely scarce. Many young people refuse accommodation in other regions (e.g., Larisa or Thessaloniki) because employment opportunities, education programs, and support services are concentrated in Athens. As a result, even individuals with recognized refugee status continue to experience homelessness.
- **Legal Uncertainty:** Including changes in residence status and the abolition of Article 161 allowing a 10-year residence permit through education. A major negative development was the adoption of Law 5275/2026, which abolished this provision

This article allowed former unaccompanied minors aged 18–23 who had successfully completed three years of secondary education in Greece to apply for a 10-year residence permit. Although transitional provisions protect current students, its repeal removes a key integration incentive, increases legal insecurity, and effectively undermines long-term state investments in housing and education.

- **Limited Coverage & Implementation of State Programs:** Particularly regarding the guardianship system. Significant delays are observed in appointing legal guardians, especially for children in the last six months before adulthood, who may wait months or never be assigned a guardian.
- **Labor Market Integration and Exploitation:** The report raises serious concerns about an alarming trend: unaccompanied children and young people, primarily from Egypt, are frequently identified as potential victims of human trafficking for labor exploitation. They are often forced into informal, dangerous work (mainly construction) under threats or false promises that employers will “arrange their papers.”
- **Access to Education:** Challenges include procedural and institutional barriers, as well as practical obstacles related to age, residence status, and the absence of a legal guardian in the case of unaccompanied minors.

Indicative Success Stories

- **Protection of a Vulnerable Young Person:** A beneficiary, a victim of sexual abuse with severe mental health issues, required hospitalization for immediate psychiatric support. The team gained his trust, closely monitored his hospitalization, and despite major difficulties, secured his removal from the abusive environment and his placement in safe housing, along with ongoing monthly psychiatric follow-up.
- **Prevention of Exploitation:** For a beneficiary, a victim of torture (as reported) and possible financial exploitation, targeted counseling sessions successfully prevented him from paying a significant amount intended for opening a bank account through illegal procedures.
- **Regularization of Employment:** For one beneficiary, targeted counseling resulted in the legalization of employment. Through guidance, he was informed about legal work frameworks, social security, and his rights deriving from formal employment.

Overall Assessment

The project demonstrated that in an environment where institutional structures are insufficient to meet the full range of needs, **targeted and flexible small-scale interventions can have a substantial and measurable impact.**

By combining psychosocial care, education, and employment support, the program:

- Reduced the risk of exploitation
- Strengthened access to fundamental rights
- Created realistic pathways toward legal employment and autonomy

It therefore represents a **meaningful tool for addressing protection gaps**, actively contributing to the transition of unaccompanied children and young adults toward a more stable, safe, and dignified life.