



**UNHCR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**72<sup>nd</sup> Session**

**Geneva, October 4 – 8, 2021**

**Agenda item 3 – General Debate**

**Statement of Greece**

**delivered by H.E. Ambassador Panayotis Stournaras**

**Permanent Representative of Greece**

**to the United Nations Office**

**and other International Organizations in Geneva**

High Commissioner,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

Greece aligns itself with the Statement of the European Union and its Member States.

At the outset, I would like to thank the High Commissioner Mr. Filippo Grandi for presenting us a comprehensive, enlightening and, mostly, forward – looking outline of progress to solutions and challenges ahead, stressing the urgent need for collective action. Amidst a global environment afflicted by violence, protracted conflicts, tensions, climate emergency, starvation and, on top of all, by the pandemic, the UNHCR and its staff worldwide decided to “stay and deliver”, defying often life-threatening conditions.

In this regard, let me reiterate my country’s sincere appreciation to UNHCR here in Geneva and its staff in Greece for their longstanding presence, invaluable contribution, advice and expertise to the Authorities in addressing emerging challenges and needs in housing, hygiene, sanitation, livelihoods, healthcare, education and social services, thus mitigating the disproportionate socio-economic impact of the pandemic on refugees, asylum – seekers and other persons of concern.

In this vein, we are pleased to announce that the transition of the accommodation component of the ESTIA Programme, run by the

Ministry of Migration and Asylum and co-funded by the EU, to the Greek Government was successfully completed in June 2021. Full ownership to the Greek Government also for the cash component of the ESTIA Programme is now on track. In figures, approximately 59,000 eligible refugees and asylum-seekers received cash assistance in June 2021, amounting to 6,9 million Euros.

In addition, cooperation with municipalities and local authorities remains key. A vivid example is the signing, on September 13, 2021, of a Memorandum of Cooperation between the UNHCR's Office in Greece and the Municipality of Igoumenitsa in south-western Greece, on social inclusion and integration of refugees and migrants into local communities.

Furthermore, in the framework of the voluntary relocation scheme, implemented by the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum, with the support of and in cooperation with UNHCR, IOM, the European Commission, UNICEF and EASO, more than four thousand applicants and beneficiaries of international protection have been transferred so far to fourteen EU Member States and Schengen-associated countries; among them 976 unaccompanied minors. Let me stress here that, despite all challenges caused by the pandemic, the relocation mechanism stands operational.

As regards, in particular, unaccompanied minors, a Special Secretariat has been established at the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, as the competent authority for the development, implementation and supervision of the National Strategy for the protection of the unaccompanied migrant minors in Greece. This Special Secretariat is responsible for accommodation and relocation requests, supports social integration of unaccompanied minors residing in Greece, and, ensures that adequate institutional protection is provided.

Moreover, the so-called "protective custody" of unaccompanied minors in police stations was abolished in December 2020 by Law 4760/2020 that also stipulates that the Special Secretariat has the task of ensuring the immediate transfer of minors to an appropriate accommodation facility. In April 2021, an emergency response mechanism under the Special Secretariat was launched, for unaccompanied minors in an immediate need of protection and accommodation or living in precarious conditions.

Chair,

It is widely acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and severely affected vulnerable groups as well as refugee and migrant – hosting countries. Against this

backdrop, Greece has stepped up its efforts with a view to mitigating the impact of the pandemic on persons of concern, including through their inclusion into national health responses, vaccination campaigns and social protection schemes, on an equal basis and without any exclusions.

Chair,

Greece has come a long way in the last two years in all fields of migration management, and, notably, in terms of significant decrease in flows, improvement of reception conditions, acceleration of asylum procedures and provision of better integration prospects in host communities. Within the scope of upgrading the reception system and ensuring better reception conditions, all Reception Facilities will be gradually replaced by the new Multi-purpose Reception and Identification Centers, MPRICs. The first such centre was inaugurated by the Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum, H.E. Mr. Notis Mitarachi, on the island of Samos, on September 18, 2021. The old facility was fully evacuated and handed over to the local authorities of Samos on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

This new kind of center, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union, with a capacity of 3,000 persons and a modern technical infrastructure, aims at ensuring proper implementation of the necessary reception and identification procedures, while guaranteeing better living conditions for asylum seekers, employees and local communities. Since this is a pilot project, new centers will be operational in a few weeks also on the islands of Kos and Leros, and, in 2022, on Chios and Lesbos.

Distinguished delegates,

Greece reaffirms its determination to actively and effectively protect EU's external borders, in full respect of international and EU law, and prevent any abuse of the asylum system. Instrumentalization of the suffering of human beings to advance political agendas is utterly unacceptable. We firmly condemn such attempts, including against other EU Member States facing similar challenges.

We strongly believe in a more equitable, predictable and sustainable burden and responsibility sharing that guarantees the necessary solidarity towards countries hosting and supporting world's refugees, including front-line EU Member States.

In closing, Chair, allow me to underscore that support and assistance to Greece by UNHCR, other international agencies, EU institutions and civil society actors remain of crucial importance. My country is committed to continuing and further expanding this fruitful cooperation. Protection of human life and dignity stands as a prevailing principle in our migration and protection policies.

I thank you.