



A Participatory Assessment with Relocated Unaccompanied Children in Finland

Report on Initial Outcomes of Relocation of
Unaccompanied Children from Greece to Finland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UNHCR Representation for Nordic and Baltic Countries together with Save the Children Finland wish to thank the Finnish Government, Finnish Immigration Service, the staff at group homes and most importantly, the children participating in the focus group discussions, whose contributions have been invaluable in the completion of this report.

© UNHCR Representation for the Nordic and Baltic Countries, Save the Children Finland, September 2022

Cover Illustration: © Save the Children

Layout & Design: BakOS DESIGN



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.		
Introduction	.....	4
2.		
Methodology	.....	5
3.		
Background	.....	6
3.1	The Selection Process.....	6
3.2	Asylum and Family Reunification Procedures	7
3.3	Reception and Access to Services.....	7
4.		
Findings of Focus Group Discussions	.....	8
4.2	Pre-departure: Experiences in Greece, Selection and Preparation for Travel.....	8
4.2	Post-Arrival: Immediate and Short-Term Perspectives	9
4.3	Future: Long-Term Integration Perspectives.....	10
5.		
Findings of the Group Home Staff Consultations	.....	11
5.1	Preparedness and Initial Reception	11
5.2	Multiple Transfers between Group Homes	11
5.3	Group Dynamics	12
5.4	Communication	12
6.		
Success Factors and Recommendations	.....	13
Key success factors	.....	13
Recommendations	.....	14

1.

INTRODUCTION

Finland has a long tradition of providing sanctuary to persons in need of international protection. The Finnish Government also has a well-established resettlement program and has made comprehensive efforts to promote safe pathways for entry as well as intra-EU solidarity mechanisms, designed to provide the Member States most affected by migratory flows with needs-based assistance from other Member States. The principles of responsibility sharing and solidarity remain essential for the building of a sustainable and fair EU asylum system and for supporting Member States under pressure. Relocation is a central solidarity tool enabling the transfer of persons granted international protection and of those who are in need of international protection from one EU Member State to another.¹

As part of the EU relocation programme, Finland decided on 27 February 2020 to receive 175 asylum-seekers located in Mediterranean countries, including 126 unaccompanied children (UAC)² and 49 members of vulnerable single-parent headed families from Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Italy.³ The first group of UAC arrived in Finland on 8 July 2020 and the last group on 16 December 2021. The relocation was organized by the Greek and Finnish Governments and coordinated by the European Commission with the support from IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF and the European Asylum Office (EASO).⁴

UNHCR Representation for the Nordic and Baltic Countries (RNB) and Save the Children Finland welcomed Finland's participation in the relocation program and in particular, the relocation of UAC noting that children separated from their parents and families because of conflict, population displacement or natural disasters are among the most vulnerable groups.

The purpose of this report, prepared by UNHCR RNB and Save the Children Finland, is to review the relocation exercise of UAC in Finland and identify lessons learned, including the experiences of the relocated children themselves. Based on the findings, the report puts forward a set of recommendations to strengthen solidarity mechanisms at large and in particular, the relocation of children, further in line with the Finnish Child Strategy, launched in February 2021, which aims to create a genuinely child and family-friendly Finland that respects the rights of all children, including children with heightened vulnerabilities.⁵ Therefore, the report will briefly touch upon the relocation of families, while the focus is mainly on UAC, including their selection criteria, practical considerations around transfer, reception, asylum process in Finland, care arrangements, family reunification and other relevant considerations.

¹ European Commission, Relocation, available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/relocation_en.

² An unaccompanied child is a person who is under the age of eighteen years, unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier and who is "separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care, 1994, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3470.html>, p. 121.

³ Valtioneuvosto, Valtioneuvoston päätös SM/2020/16, 27 February 2020, <https://bit.ly/3Lt4SKj>, 4 February 2022.

⁴ [UN agencies welcome first relocation of 24 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Greece to Finland – UNHCR Northern Europe](#), 8 July 2020. As of early July 2020, there were almost 4,700 unaccompanied and separated children in Greece in urgent need of durable solutions, including expedited registration, family reunification and relocation. Among them, more than 1,100 are exposed to severe risks, including exploitation and violence, and facing precarious and overcrowded conditions on the Aegean islands.

⁵ Lapsen oikeudet, Child Strategy, available at: <https://www.lapsenoikeudet.fi/en/campaign/national-strategy-for-children/general/>.

2. METHODOLOGY

The first part of the collection of information for this report consisted of a thorough desk review of the relocation process in Finland, from the initial stage of selection through to integration. The desk review included an analysis of Finnish legislation on asylum, integration, and family reunification⁶ as well as interviews with Finnish immigration authorities and reception actors.

The second part took place in November and December 2021, when UNHCR RNB and Save the Children Finland, with the support of the Finnish Migration Services (Migri), carried out focus group discussions with some of the relocated UAC to capture their views and experiences. Interpreters were present for the group discussions. All UAC participating in the focus group discussions came to Finland from Greece. A total of 25 children residing in the Espoo and Oravainen group homes in Finland were interviewed. The children came from the following countries of origin: Afghanistan, Iran, Somalia and Syria. At the Espoo group home, two focus group discussions were carried out (boys and girls aged 13-17). At the Oravainen Group Home, two focus group discussions were carried out (boys aged 16-17).

The group discussions covered pre-departure preparations, settling in Finland and the children's views concerning their future. The highest level of effort was made to protect the identities of the children and as such, any identifying information of an individual child is not included in this report. The children volunteered to participate in the group discussions and received counselling on the purpose at the start of the discussion. The children did not have to answer questions if they did not wish to do so. Statistically, for most questions, it could not be reflected how many children shared a certain opinion or challenge as not all children answered every question. The children sometimes agreed with the statements of other children or shared a differing view without further elaboration.

Bilateral discussions also took place with Migri and reception centre staff, social workers and civil society partners. Key staff members in all the reception centres in Finland partaking in the reception of relocated UAC were interviewed. Discussions with staff members at the Espoo, Oravainen, Oulu and Vantaa group homes were jointly carried out by UNHCR RNB and Save the Children. Consultations with staff of Oulu and Vantaa group homes were carried out remotely via Teams platform.

⁶ Ulkomaalaislaki, 301/2004, available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2004/20040301>; Laki kansainvälistä suojelua hakevan vastaanotosta sekä ihmiskaupan uhrin tunnistamisesta ja auttamisesta, 17.6.2011/746, available at: [Laki kansainvälistä suojelua hakevan... 746/2011 - Ajantasainen lainsäädäntö - FINLEX®](#).

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Selection Process

The selection of the children who would be relocated as part of the EU relocation scheme was undertaken in close coordination with participating Member States under the overall coordination of the European Commission. Under the leadership of the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum and through the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, the UN agencies, including UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the Greek Asylum Service, coordinated the process for the identification and processing of children to ensure relocations are in the best interests of every child.

Joint Standard Operating Procedures were developed, including eligibility criteria to be followed for the exercise. Finland could express particular criteria and prioritisation within this, in light of its reception capacity or service availability. UNHCR conducted Best Interest Assessments for children prior to relocation. Before the final selection, the files of UAC whom the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum had preliminarily identified for relocation were sent to Finnish authorities for final selection. Some UAC, above the age of 15, underwent an additional interview in Greece, conducted by EASO, upon the request of Finnish authorities. The additional interviews had the objective to better understand the background of the children and any potential security considerations relevant for selection.

Finland generally applied flexible eligibility criteria, and mainly selected UAC who were likely to receive international protection (refugee status or subsidiary protection) on the basis of having a nationality with a typically high recognition rate. In addition, Finland prioritized the selection of UAC with compounding vulnerabilities, particularly those with severe psychological trauma or other medical conditions as well as very young children and girls. Approximately 10% of the UAC were girls, representative of the demographics in the Mediterranean countries at the time. The majority of the UAC were from Afghanistan, with a number of other nationalities, including Syrian and Somali also represented. Finland's total quota of 175 individuals was divided as follows:

	Pledged	Relocated
Greece	111	111
Malta	28	28
Cyprus	30	30
Italy	6	6
Total	175	175

Although Finland's selection criteria were generally flexible, some challenges and delays with identifying children in Greece were reported due to the fire at the Moria Camp in Greece in September 2020,⁷ a multi-layered identification process involving a broad range of actors and access challenges due to COVID-19.

⁷ UNHCR, 9 September 2020, UNHCR - [UNHCR offers support as large fire destroys asylum center in Moria](#).

3.2

Asylum and Family Reunification Procedures

In Finland, the children underwent asylum proceedings, which were managed by Migri. Further, Migri ensured appropriate support and safeguards were present throughout the process. This included child-friendly proceedings and the presence of a guardian, a legal representative and an interpreter during the hearings. In accordance with Article 98a of the Finnish Aliens Act, an asylum decision was generally made within six months from the date when an application was lodged.⁸

All UAC had the right to apply for family reunification once they had received a residence permit in Finland. Relocated UAC enjoyed this right on an equal footing with all other persons granted international protection in Finland on the basis of Article 114 of the Finnish Aliens Act.⁹ Family reunification in Finland is generally a lengthy process with several procedural and practical requirements that may in practice create significant obstacles for UAC to meaningfully access family reunification. This included a requirement for children granted subsidiary protection to have a certain income.¹⁰

3.3

Reception and Access to Services

Upon arrival, Migri provided appropriate reception for all children in group-homes and where relevant, made referrals to social welfare and health services and other practical support needs. All UAC relocated from Greece underwent a two-weeks quarantine as per the Finnish COVID-19 related health regulations in the Espoo group home. After the quarantine, all UAC were placed in group homes across five different units, either in Espoo, Kotka, Oravainen, Oulu or Vantaa. The group sizes varied depending on location and the Oulu group home was a special unit for small children. Once the child arrived in the group home, an individual care plan was prepared for the UAC. Each child was assigned two caregivers. Access

to hobbies and other social activities were also explored as an integral measure for the integration of the children in the local community.

The children were received in group homes and benefitted from the strengthened reception capacities that followed as the relocation exercise started, including the setup of additional housing units. The reception units in Kotka and Oravainen were “hybrid” units, meaning that once status was determined, the UAC remained in the same group home to ensure continuity in the child’s environment, including caregivers and school. In other units, children moved to another long-term group home upon a municipal placement following the determination of their status. Eventual secondary relocation of UACs in some cases led to disruption in services, education and a change of the child’s guardian where the relocation took place from one municipality to another.

All UAC had access to education in Finland. The education level of each child was individually assessed and based on this, a majority of the relocated children began in a preparatory class for the first year after moving to regular classes with Finnish children. Access to school was ensured as soon as possible and preliminary steps to start education was considered as part of the individual care plan. While access to education was guaranteed without undue delay, the length of time it took for a child to start education was considered on a case-by-case basis based upon the child’s circumstances and needs. Many of the UAC had limited prior education and as such, most entered a preparatory class. Access to education varied depending on the receiving municipality, considering capacity and specific needs of the child.

⁸ Ulkomaalaislaki (No. 6), art. 98a.

⁹ *Ibid*, art. 114.

¹⁰ The Ministry of Interior of Finland has passed a draft law, amending the Aliens Act, to the Parliament in June 2022 whereby children as family unifiers would no longer have to meet the income requirement. The draft law is currently under review and expected to pass into law in fall 2022. Eduskunta, HE 100/2022 vp, 16 June 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3DAC2FS>.

4.

FINDINGS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

4.1

Pre-departure: Experiences in Greece, Selection and Preparation for Travel

Children in all the focus groups expressed that they faced challenges during their time in Greece, both on the islands and in Athens. The challenges mainly concerned the living standards, access to services and security. Some children talked about experiences of maltreatment by adults, such as staff and other asylum-seekers in the reception centers. They spoke of experiences of verbal abuse and a few reported instances of physical violence in the form of pushing or hitting as well as discrimination due to their appearance or background. Most children also detailed challenges in relation to the living conditions in Greece. They described the conditions as crowded and at times not meeting their needs. In particular, children with special needs, such as mobility issues, described their accommodation to not meet their needs which in turn exacerbated their conditions. A few children expressed having adopted negative coping mechanisms, such as smoking.

Almost all the children described positive attitudes towards moving from Greece to Finland. Only one child mentioned hesitation towards the relocation due to personal relationships the child had in Greece. Following pre-departure counselling, all the children had agreed to relocate voluntarily to Finland and no child expressed any wish or intention to return to Greece post-relocation. Many of the children expressed that the hardest part of the relocation process was the long waiting time between receiving information that they were going to relocate to Finland and the actual travel. In most instances, children had waited for several months before the relocation took place.

All the children were asked how they prepared for the relocation and what information they received about Finland prior to the departure. Most children reported receiving a limited amount of information about Finland prior to the relocation. Children described being shown pictures of Finland and a map of Finland's location in Europe and basic information on Finnish culture and society. Some children, though not all, said that they were shown pictures of the Espoo group home, where all children spent the first two weeks in COVID-19 quarantine and that they had understood that they would be accommodated there long-term. This was described by several children as a challenge as no information on a secondary move from Espoo Group Home to their long-term home was given prior to travel. Almost all children noted that they had no prior knowledge about Finland and several children said they found it difficult to retain the information they had received. Only a few children said they did not understand to which country they were going to relocate to and that the details about Finland only became clear to them at the final stages of the relocation process. A few children noted they had independently acquired more information on Finland, but this was dependent on the children's proactiveness, technical skills, and access to social media and other online platforms.

A general consensus existed among the children that they had hoped for more information about Finnish society and culture, the asylum process and the residence permits, as well as information on what kind of support they would receive in Finland. Children wanted to better understand where in Finland they would move to, basic information about the receiving municipality and other key information such as the local language spoken in the municipality of destination which is particularly relevant in the Finnish context as a bilingual country.

For example, the Oravainen group home is located in a primarily Swedish speaking area. The children who were subsequently moved from the Espoo group home (after the initial two-week quarantine period) to another unit in Finland had also hoped for information about the secondary move already at an earlier stage of the relocation process.

Only a few children mentioned they had received information about the asylum process in Finland. A few children explicitly mentioned not having received any information about the asylum process or could not remember being counselled on this.

4.2

Post-Arrival: Immediate and Short-Term Perspectives

All the children who participated in the focus group discussions were asked about their experiences after arriving in Finland and any challenges they faced in settling in Finland. Nearly all children expressed that the actual move from Greece to Finland had gone smoothly. They had received sufficient help during their travel to Finland, including children with special needs. The children had travelled together in groups and as such, felt supported by one another during the process.

Concerning the quarantine and secondary move in Finland, many children at the Oravainen group expressed feelings of frustration concerning the secondary move from Espoo to the Oravainen group home. The differences between the two group homes exacerbated these feelings, mainly in relation to the Espoo group home being in the capital area and Oravainen being a smaller town in a primarily Swedish speaking municipality which in turn limited their ability to locally integrate and led to consequential feelings of isolation. In Oravainen, the school is further away, and extracurricular activities are less accessible. The children who remained at the Espoo group home all expressed positive attitudes towards staying there, although many children voiced feelings of worry due to the secondary move awaiting them once their asylum decision would be issued since the Espoo group home is not a hybrid center.

When asked about their impression of the group homes, some children mentioned that they enjoy the peaceful environment, the good food and adequate space, including their own rooms, and these were all considered as positive factors. Almost all children felt they had an overall good relationship with the staff who they considered to be supportive and friendly indicating the crucial role of staff in the reception and integration of children in Finland. Some children, however, expressed that some group home and school staff did not seem to have sufficient understanding of their culture or background, contributing to some of the children not feeling welcomed in Finnish society. The experiences of being heard and welcomed as well as the general atmosphere in the group home seemed to correlate with children's attitudes regarding the future and how they will be able to cope in Finland as children who perceived their living environment as less welcoming also expressed concerns regarding their future (see paras. 25-28).

Most children expressed positive attitudes towards their school and hobbies. Some children, particularly at the Oravainen group home, however, expressed disappointment over the limited possibilities of extracurricular activities and difficulties in making local friends. These difficulties were exacerbated due to COVID-19 restrictions and the relatively long distance of the group home from the children's school. Some children said they faced challenges in making local friends, and instead sought support from one another as a group, both at the group homes and at school. The support of the group was felt by some children, both as a positive factor as well as a challenge. On the one hand, the group support contributed to a feeling of safety and comfort due to a shared language and experiences and on the other hand, created a sense of isolation from the local Finnish community and culture.

The importance of learning Finnish was highlighted as the most important first step during the integration process for most of the children. Inability to learn Finnish properly was seen as a barrier for integration in Finland, particularly among those children who were about to turn 18 years and especially children who lived in Swedish speaking areas of Finland.

4.3

Future: Long-Term Integration Perspectives

Concerning the children's views on the future, most children highlighted opportunities to learn the local language as their primary consideration. Other important factors included their ability to continue to study and to eventually work in Finland.

The views of the children were generally mixed. Some children – particularly those who had made progress integrating in Finland through learning Finnish, having hobbies in the local community and local friends – expressed more positive thoughts on what they want to achieve in the coming years, including hopes of studying engineering, medicine or further their interests in their hobbies. On the other hand, children who struggled with the Finnish language and expressed feelings of isolation in their school and local community shared feelings of worry and uncertainty about their future, particularly so children approaching adulthood. In these instances, children struggled to elaborate on any mid to long-term plans for their future where worry about the immediate integration concerns surrounding language, studies and living situation felt overwhelming. Most children expressed an interest in either remaining in the capital area or moving thereto in the near future where children felt they have more opportunities to integrate and make friends.

Only a few children discussed their family or plans for family reunification in the focus groups. This is, however, partly explained by the sensitivity of the subject which children may not wish to speak about in front of other children. The children who spoke of their families in their country of origin expressed feelings of worry concerning their well-being as well as the limited prospects of family reunification once they were made aware of the obstacles surrounding family reunification in Finland.

Many children mentioned that they maintain regular contacts with their families through their phones. At times, the children found that this created pressure on them to reunite the family in Finland. Hearing about the precarious conditions of their families in the home country also added to the pressure, particularly on the children from Afghanistan where the humanitarian situation had significantly worsened a few months prior to the group discussions.

Finally, upon final reflections, several children voiced a message to decision makers to continue relocations of children as soon as possible. Despite challenges children had expressed in Finland, all children were happy about being relocated to Finland noting the opportunities afforded to them, safety and stability as important factors.

5.

FINDINGS OF THE GROUP HOME STAFF CONSULTATIONS

Separate consultations with the group home staff were carried out after the focus group discussions with the children. One consultation was conducted with Espoo group home staff (one head social worker) in November 2021, one in the Oravainen group home (two social workers) in December 2021 and two remote consultations were carried out with the group homes in Vantaa (two social workers) and Oulu (two staff members) in February 2022. Vantaa group home was a new group home opened in December 2019 and the Oulu units was re-opened in 2020 particularly for the purpose of receiving relocated children. During the years 2020–2021 Vantaa received two groups of children and Oulu received three groups of children. At the time of these consultations, there were no more children through the relocation exercise staying in Vantaa and Oulu group homes. The main findings from the consultations are outlined below.

5.1 Preparedness and Initial Reception

Some group homes were established for the relocation exercise within a short timeframe. The staff were experienced in working with children and UACs specifically and demonstrated a high degree of professionalism, providing a high standard of care. The staff indicated that the relocation process enabled them to be better prepared for receiving the relocated children than with spontaneous arrivals. The information provided to staff pre-arrival was thought to be helpful.

Group home staff was prepared to work with children with specific needs and vulnerabilities, such as experiences of maltreatment, sexual and drug abuse as well as children with disabilities. Several children with medical needs were relocated, in line with Finnish selection criteria including children with heightened vulnerabilities, and staff reported preparedness to care for such children, in close coordination with medical professionals.

5.2 Multiple Transfers between Group Homes

According to the group home staff, the two-weeks quarantine period for all children in the Espoo group home, was well organised with joint activities with the staff and the children. After the quarantine, a majority of the children was relocated to group homes in other municipalities. In all the discussions, the group home staff mentioned that children expressed some dissatisfaction about the relocation. The children seemed disappointed at settling into “normal” daily routines with less contact and activities with the staff. They also compared Espoo with the new group homes, where the facilities were different. Also, the remote location of some of the group homes was a disappointment for the children, who had spent the first two weeks in the capital area.

While some of the children stayed in hybrid centres, others faced a third move to their final homes in Finland once they received their asylum decisions. According to the staff, these children experienced difficulties in having to move again, and the impact of these transfers was ultimately greater than the staff had initially thought. Some children were very disappointed with the decision of having to move far from their friends and familiar surroundings in this final relocation. Some of the third placements were not successful and it was necessary to move some children again, even after the final placement

The impact of the change of group home was most noticeable for the first group of arrivals. They had higher expectations about the facilities they would be provided as well as about other possibilities such as family reunification. In the later groups, these expectations were less noticeable, possibly due to information that was shared in advance by the children from the first group.

5.3

Group Dynamics

Unlike situations where UAC arrive spontaneously to Finland, the relocated children were moving as a group and most of the children already knew each other. The opinions of the staff varied as regards the impact of the group dynamics on the children's well-being and integration in Finnish society. Group dynamics were therefore viewed as both an opportunity and a challenge.

The network of support that the children established amongst themselves was perceived by the staff as a strength. The fact that the children knew each other well may have contributed to some children feeling more comfortable expressing negative and positive emotions. In a similar manner, acting as a group may have made it easier for some children to start their integration process. Sometimes the children were reminded not to take too much responsibility for each other and to let the staff care of them.

Interacting in Finland as a group, however, also challenged the individual progress and well-being of some children. As a particular challenge, several staff members noted that the children who had lived in a camp-like environment in Greece had developed coping mechanisms that were not suitable for their new surroundings in Finland, including substance abuse, resorting to violence or aggression as a form of personal protection and difficulty conforming to a clear daily structure. Learning healthier coping mechanism was a challenge which the staff paid special attention to. Moreover, several staff members observed some relocated children's trauma from their experiences in their home country or during their flight to be exacerbated due to long stays in unsafe conditions in the Mediterranean countries compared to other children arriving via different routes.

According to the staff, it was easier for the group homes to organise services when the asylum-seeking process was proceeding concurrently for all the children in the same group. However, the asylum decisions were not made at the same time, and this led to comparison between the children as well as stress to some, in particular where decisions between children varied, including some children being granted refugee protection and others subsidiary protection.

Several staff members interviewed further noted that some teachers had raised concerns about the group dynamics of the relocated children at school. All relocated children from one group home attended the same school and preparatory classes which in turn may have limited their opportunities to interact and make friends with other children at the school. In this regard, the staff felt that smaller group sizes or separation into different classes would have been more beneficial for the integration of the children.

The staff in one group home suggested that conducting a study on the effects of group dynamics would be useful for future relocation exercises in order to better understand the impact of group dynamics and measures to address it.

5.4

Communication

Many children had access to smartphones, which was seen by the staff both as an advantage and a challenge. The children communicated with different group homes on a frequent basis as well as with children awaiting relocation from a Mediterranean country and with networks more broadly in Europe and beyond. Often the children were aware of the next relocations before the information reached the group home through official channels. These communication channels also enabled those children who arrived at later stage to be more prepared on what to expect when arriving in Finland. The possibility to communicate with family members in home countries via smartphones was considered important by most of the children.

Children's unlimited access to information and communication with friends and family through their smartphones also posed challenges. Staff members found this to be problematic in certain situations, especially in crisis situations, such as during the Afghanistan emergency, that affected the children's well-being in a significant way. Frequent communication with their families in the home countries also put pressure on the children. Such communication was not always perceived as positive by the children, particularly where the relationship with their family members was strained or where the family had expectations from the children to facilitate family reunification. Additionally, the sharing of information between children staying in different units was challenging when the children would compare the facilities and access to activities. The information shared was often incomplete or misunderstood, ultimately causing unnecessary frustration and impacting the daily life of the children. The use of smartphones also provided the children with possibilities for limitless online gaming, which led to problematic addiction, in particular to violent computer games, among some children.

6. SUCCESS FACTORS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has looked at the whole process of relocation of UAC, from the pre-departure phase through to arrival and integration in Finland. The findings are based on a desk review, focus group discussions with the children and consultations with reception centre staff and Migri.

Based on this assessment, UNHCR RNB and Save the Children Finland find that the relocation of UAC to Finland over the course of 2020 and 2021 has overall been a success and could serve as a model for future action.

Key success factors

- 1 A robust network of actors and close coordination nationally and with Greek authorities;
- 2 Flexible selection criteria, including children with heightened vulnerabilities;
- 3 Finland's ability to provide children with robust support after arrival, including health and psychosocial services;
- 4 Welcoming staff at reception centres, helping the children to overcome past negative experiences while guiding them to adopt constructive coping mechanisms during the integration process;
- 5 The training and expertise of the staff as a key contributor to children's wellbeing;
- 6 High quality and home-like group homes;
- 7 Timely registration of the children in a school and opportunities to take on extracurricular activities;

8 A clear daily routine and a predictable daily schedule as a contributing factor to creating a sense of safety and continuity in the children's lives;

9 The establishment of hybrid units which enabled stability in a child's life by way of fewer changes in the child's living arrangements.

Based on the findings in this report, UNHCR and Save the Children put forward eight recommendations with the aim to strengthen future relocation exercises. The Government of Finland is encouraged to:

Recommendations

1 **Advocate for strengthened solidarity measures, in particular relocation**, as a measure of predictable intra-EU responsibility sharing;

2 **Promote and implement a genuinely child-friendly European asylum policy** where the rights of children, including relocated children, are fully realized;

3 **Cross-fertilize good practices in Finland with other countries in the region** and beyond to encourage wider participation in the solidarity mechanisms and as a model for responsibility-sharing;

4 **Ensure child-friendly information is shared and adequate counselling is provided for children prior to relocation** on the purpose and objective of relocation, receiving country and the asylum process to ensure children are part of the decision-making process;

5 **Prioritize language learning** as a key component of integration, taking into account considerations impacting the learning process such as bilingual local community or group sizes at school;

6 **Assess and evaluate the impact of group dynamics** noting that the length of time the children have spent in a camp environment before arrival in Finland, which impact their coping mechanisms, routines and sense of security;

7 **Promote the use of hybrid units as a standard model for all UAC in the future and establish foster care options** which may be in the best interests of a child;

8 **Facilitate access to family reunification for children in a safe, humane and expedited manner** to uphold children's right to family life, further noting that barriers to family reunification negatively impacts their care arrangements as children who cannot meaningfully access family reunification will stay in institutional care for extended periods of time.

