

Conference “National Emergency Response Mechanism for the protection of unaccompanied children in precarious living conditions (NERM): from needs assessment to response”

Location: Ministry of Digital Governance, Athens

Tuesday, 07.03.2023

Opening Remarks by H.E. Stefan Estermann
Ambassador of Switzerland to Greece

Κυρία Υφυπουργέ,
Εξοχότατοι,
κυρίες και κύριοι

Κατ' αρχάς, θα ήθελα να ευχαριστήσω την Υφυπουργό κυρία Βούλτεψη και τον Ειδικό Γραμματέα κύριο Μοσκόφ για τη διοργάνωση της σημερινής σημαντικής εκδήλωσης - κατά την οποία θα επισημάνουμε τα επιτεύγματα σχετικά με την προστασία των ασυνόδευτων ανήλικων μεταναστών στην Ελλάδα.

(Deputy Minister,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentleman

First, I would like to thank Deputy Minister Voultepsi and Special Secretary Moskoff for organising today's important event – during which we will mark the achievements regarding the protection of unaccompanied migrant children in Greece.)

Greece came a long way from the difficult situation in 2015, when hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees came to its shore and streamed through Europe. While I was serving as Swiss Ambassador in Croatia at the time, I experienced first-hand how difficult it can be for any nation to manage migration of this scale within Europe let alone at the external borders.

And while the numbers today are nowhere near the numbers of then, it is crucial to remain vigilant and to continuously improve and perfect our national mechanisms that deal with migration movements, the accommodation as well as integration of migrants and refugees. And while doing so, we should make sure that the most vulnerable of them all – unaccompanied children – are protected accordingly.

The *National Emergency Response Mechanism* is a perfect example of how to effectively respond to these challenges. With its launch in 2021, the mechanism is relatively young, but it already has proven to be very relevant and potentially life-saving for hundreds of children that lived in precarious situations. It is a tailor-made approach for the needs of unaccompanied migrant children, and takes into account their best interests.

It also serves as a model for other countries, as it ensures the separation between *adult* migrants and migrant *children* right at the registration phase. This is a very commendable approach, from which Switzerland would like to draw some lessons.

Switzerland supports Greece's efforts in this area, which is why we recently signed our first project within the Swiss-Greek Cooperation Programme to accommodate Unaccompanied Migrant Children in five Emergency Accommodation Facilities. Additionally, Switzerland, along with the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, will support project activities of IOM to run the safe areas for unaccompanied migrant children on the islands Lesbos, Kos, Chios, Leros and Samos.

With our efforts and together with Greece we want to make sure to provide a life in dignity to those in need and to respect the fundamental rights of the children and adolescents.

And while we are working together we also want to learn from each other, which is why today's event and future exchanges between our experts are so important.

Let's keep the discussion going...

Thank you very much!