



PERMANENT MISSION OF GREECE  
GENEVA

Ref. No. 6170.7(24)/1/AS 104

**NOTE VERBALE**

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and, following the latter's Note Verbale, dated 22 November 2013, on the issue of preventable mortality and morbidity of children under 5 years of age as a human rights concern, has the honour to submit the attached response by the Greek Ministry of Health.

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.

*AD*



Geneva, January 20, 2014

To: **The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**  
Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland  
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Att.: 10 pages

OHCHR REGISTRY

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Recipients 16

(R.R.D.)

ΕΠΙΣΗΜΗ ΜΕΤΑΦΡΑΣΗ TRADUCTION OFFICIELLE OFFICIAL TRANSLATION

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#F.092.22

GREEK REPUBLIC

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

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EXTREMELY URGENT

Athens 13/01/2014

Ref Y1/G.P.119030

To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
D4 Directorate of Human Rights  
3, Akadimias street, Athens 10671

**Re: " Questionnaire by the High Commissioner for Human Rights with regard to preventing child mortality"**

**Ref: The Ref. no AS61188/19.12.2013 document by the Foreign Ministry.**

In answer to the captioned document within our competence and according to data provided by the Directorates of Nutrition and Primary Health Care of this Ministry, please be advised as follows:

Data on the health status of children:

The Hellenic Statistical Authority (EL.STAT.) collects data on the development of the Greek population and morbidity by age group.

ΜΕΤΑΦΡΑΣΤΙΚΗ ΥΠΗΡΕΣΙΑ ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟΥ ΕΞΩΤΕΡΙΚΩΝ, ΑΘΗΝΑ  
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In addition, Ministerial Decree A2a/oik.5648 "On introduction of Child Health Booklet" (OJ 1425/B/27/11/1976), regulates matters relating to compliance to Child Health Booklet regulations (V.Y.P), further development of the institution as well as securing terms and conditions of its use and optimum utilisation by health agencies and services.

The management of issues related to the distribution and disposal of Child Health Booklet to competent bodies and families is regulated by Ref n° Y3g/G.F.8/G.P.oik .102297/18.10.2012 (ADA<sup>1</sup>: V430TH-KDCH). The comprehensive and timely completion of Child Health Booklet contributes to the early diagnosis and timely intervention as well as protection of the child' health.

Article 24 of L.4213/2013 (Official Journal Issue A 261/9.12.2013) refers to the recognition of rare diseases in Greece, provides the definition of rare diseases, recognises ORPHANET as the official database for these disorders, provides for the development of a relevant national action plan and the setting up of a permanent "National Committee for Rare diseases in KE.S.Y.<sup>2</sup>" as well as authorization to issue Joint Ministerial Decrees regulating individual specific issues, such as the recording of rare diseases.

Reducing infant and child mortality, as well as preventing serious diseases by vaccination:

According to the article 6 JMD n°. EMP5 (OJ 3054/B/11/18/2012), costs for vaccinations of children under the National Immunization Programme and prenatal examinations, shall be borne solely by Social Security Institutes.

Our country implements the "National Immunization Programme for Children & Adolescents 2011"(ADA: 45PS6TH - TH0K). The vaccines included in the National Immunization Programme are provided free to the poor and uninsured under MD 139491/2006), "Determining the conditions, criteria and procedures for access to the health care system for uninsured and financially weak citizens" (OJ 1747/B) by the Directorate of Public Health of the Ministry of Health.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference n° for Internet uploading

<sup>2</sup> Central Health Council

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According to Ref. n° Y1/G.P.oik.109797/8.11.2012 Circular "Immunization Programme for indigent and uninsured children and adolescents", ADA: V4S6TH - FRS, vaccination is performed on indigent and uninsured children and adolescents, and all those who can not have health care insurance for any reasons, legal or illegal residents in our country, with vaccines administered by the Ministry of Health, in accordance with the provisions of the National Immunization Programme for Children and adolescents.

Especially for the vaccination of indigent and uninsured newborns and infants in maternity clinics with TB (BCG) and hepatitis B vaccine, following medical indications, the Ref. n° Y1/G.P.oik. 109805/08.11.2012 Circular "Vaccinations of newborns & infants" (ADA: V4S6TH-90O) applies.

In addition, the Ministry of Health, with the attached circular n° Y1/G.P.oik.10980/28.11.2012 on "Reminder vaccinations" (ADA: V4S6TH - 1PSS), distributed in maternity clinics throughout the country, recommends that all mothers who gave birth should take the newborns within two months from birth to their paediatrician or the local Health Centres, Socio-medical centres or clinics for the necessary vaccinations. This year, as every year, the antitubercular BCG vaccination is carried out through the free anti-tuberculosis vaccination programmes taking place in schools and TB clinics, according to Ref. no Y1/G.P.oik 92954/8.10.2013 Circular of the Ministry of Health on "antituberculosis vaccination - tuberculosis (cases recording)" (ADA: VLL6TH - 6SD). According to PD 200/1998 (Official Journal 161/1998/A), "Organization and Operation of Kindergartens", PD 201/1998 (Official Journal 161/1998/A), "Organization and Operation of Primary Schools", the Child Health Booklet is required for registration in Kindergarten and Primary School, for vaccines control.

Most notably for polio, rubella and measles:

The Ministry of Health formed the National Commission for the Evaluation of polio eradication programme with the task of assessing the progress of the project to eradicate polio, surveillance of acute flaccid paralysis, vaccination of high-risk groups (Roma, immigrants, refugees, etc.), the maintenance of high vaccination coverage of the population and sending an annual report to WHO on the actions of our country to eradicate polio. It

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also established the "committee of experts" to monitor the polio eradication programme in Greece aiming at the final classification of all cases of acute flaccid paralysis (polio or not) according to the recommendations of WHO, quality control of epidemiological surveillance of acute flaccid paralysis and operation of enteroviruses laboratories, monitoring the progress of actions to eradicate polio, recommending eradication policies and offer technical assistance for their implementation.

In addition, the Ministry of Health established the National Certification Commission for the Elimination of Measles and Rubella aiming at the collection and analysis of data relating to measles and rubella, preparing action plan for certification of eradication of measles and rubella, evaluation of vaccination coverage of the population, counselling intervention on epidemiological and laboratory surveillance of vaccination in case of an epidemic and dispatch of an Annual National Report to WHO on the progress made.

On the promotion of children's health:

Since the 1970s, the Ministry of Health had commissioned the formulation and development of National Neonatal Screening Programme (E.P.P.E.N.) at the Institute of Child Health (OJ 249/A).

The E.P.P.E.N. has universal application in all obstetric - neonatology units and clinics in the country, of the public and private sector and conducted in a uniform manner in all newborns in the Greek Territory.

The Programme is a comprehensive service that includes the detection of phenylketonuria, congenital hypothyroidism, galactosemia and lack of activity of Glucose - 6 - Phosphate Dehydrogenase - G6PD, as well as confirmation the detection, diagnosis, treatment and assessment of the fate of the affected child, according to the criteria of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the report of the Committee of Experts «Newborn screening in Europe Expert Opinion document, Contract number 2009 62 06 of the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers» of the European Union. It also includes genetic counselling and prevention.

Breastfeeding is another object of intervention to promote the health of children. For this reason the Ministry of Health established the National Committee on Breastfeeding by

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Ministerial Decree n° DY157387/2.6.2005. The National Committee supervised the performance of the following actions:

- o Conducting epidemiological study on breastfeeding by the Institute of Child Health.
- o Translation and editing of the International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes.
- o Appointment of breastfeeding consultants in hospitals.
- o Conducting Workshop for breastfeeding consultants in Athens in May 2008.
- o Development of infants-friendly hospitals
- o Promotion of regulation for the recognition of infants-friendly hospitals.

The development of infants-friendly hospitals is a major issue for the promotion of breastfeeding, and therefore a key objective of the Commission's work. In this context, the Institute of Child Health implements through ESPA<sup>3</sup>, a programme for the development of infants-friendly hospitals.

For the enforcement of the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, the provisions of the Joint Minister Decision No. Y1/G.P . 47815 ( OJ t.V/2008 1478 ) apply, which is a harmonisation of national legislation with EU Directive 2006/141 EC of the European Commission. The provisions of this JMD assert that the National Organisation for Medicines (EOF) ensures objective and complete information on the feeding of infants for use by families and those involved in infants nutrition on planning, provisions, form and dissemination of information and their control. Moreover EOF checks that the informational and educational materials, whether written or audiovisual, associated with the feeding of infants and intended to reach pregnant women and mothers of infants and young children, include clear information regarding the benefits and superiority of breastfeeding, the possible adverse effects on breastfeeding caused by introducing partial administration of the bottle, the difficulty of reversing when breastfeeding is stopped and the proper use of infant formulas where needed. Also the labelling of products for first and second stage infants is carried out in such a way as to provide the necessary information for a correct use of the products and not to discourage breastfeeding.

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<sup>3</sup> National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF)

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Nurseries and kindergartens aim, inter alia, to eliminate as far as possible, the differences that may arise from cultural, economic and educational level of the parents, to provide daily nutrition and care to children in their care, while observing the rules of hygiene and safety (JMD 16065/2002 (OJ 497/A) "Operation Bylaws for Nurseries and Day Care Municipal and Communal Legal Entities of Public Law").

Monitoring the health of children is a commitment for the legal entity in parallel with the family, and is conducted by a paediatrician, who visits them once a week. Health Records are kept for every child and updated by the doctor. Parents are informed once a month about children's health issues.

The safeguarding of the health of the child is also an obligation of the remaining staff, which faithfully implement all the necessary health and safety measures and are responsible for any negligence or omission that may have an impact on children's health. The staff is subjected to screening, and provided with specific individual health book certified by the competent health authority.

As to actions within the school environment, No. Y1g/G.P.oik.81025/27.8.2013 Health Order (OJ 2135/B/29/08/2013) applies, as amended and in force today. This Health Order sets down health and hygiene conditions for the establishment and operation of school cafeterias, canteens and catering facilities in primary and secondary education. Moreover, the list of products allowed to be sold in school canteens has been modernised, according to the latest scientific data on the prevention of childhood obesity and chronic diseases generally associated with dietary habits. Specifically, the official international and national dietary recommendations were taken into account and foods rich in nutrients necessary for healthy development of children were selected, preferably traditional Greek food. At the same time, the placing of foods high in saturated fat, trans fat, sugar and salt has been prohibited, in order to protect the health of students from diseases, which have been associated with the consumption of certain nutrients.

For the correct implementation of this Health Order in primary and secondary education throughout the country, regular and special inspections of canteens in public and private schools are conducted by the competent sanitary control bodies of the Regional Sections of the country. For this reason, this year, as every year, at the start of the school year, the No.

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Υ1g/G.P.oik.86212/17.9.2013 circular was adopted, for intense health controls in all schools.

Moreover, our Ministry has processed recommendations for other interventions related to school life. The most important ones are mentioned below:

- o Training of teachers and parents about nutrition and eating habits.
- o Introduction of nutrition as a taught subject.
- o Increase of teaching hours in physical education.
- o Refectory rooms in all day schools and adoption of dietary plans in these schools.
- o School cooperation with medical staff and dietician.
- o Establishing restrictions on advertisements for packaged foods with high sugar, sodium and fat content.
- o Modification of the existing diet and rations for nurseries in the country according to the latest scientific data, which emphasize that the availability of safe and balanced meals in infancy and early childhood is one of the most important elements for the prevention of childhood obesity.

In addition, the Ministry of Health has collaborated with the Ministry of Rural Development and Food and the Ministry of Education for the implementation of the European Programme of distribution of fruit and vegetables in schools, in accordance with EC Regulation 13/2009 of the EU Council and 288/2009.

Also, the Ministry of Health has approved and co-finances with the financial support of the EU, the implementation of NSRF programmes, which will provide important information and data necessary for the proper design of prevention policies and strategies to tackle chronic diseases related to nutrition of the general population, and children in particular.

On the accessibility of Primary Health Care services:

In accordance with the provisions of L.3235/2004 (OJ 53/ A/18.2.2004), Primary Health Care provides for a set of basic and comprehensive health care services at the individual and family level. Among others, health services for family planning, prevention and health promotion are integrated in primary health care. Especially, paragraph 4 of Article 2 states



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that "the State, aiming at social development and maintaining of social cohesion, ensures for all residents of its territory access to a sufficient set of primary care services".

On prevention, health promotion and social protection of Roma - Roma and Minority Groups Support Centres.

The Roma and Minority Groups Support Centres have been implemented during CSF<sup>4</sup> III through the ESF integrated interventions of Regional Operational Programmes (ROP) according to JMD 15422/oik.31022/2.5.2011 (OJ 824/B). The purpose of these structures include the provision of support and social inclusion services, such as the provision of advisory services for the integration of the family, particularly children in the Greek society, support and promotion of children's rights and the use of institutionalised structures of state (education, sport, culture, creative, etc.).

On 30.12.2011 the National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma was lodged with the European Commission, which has four priorities. Priority Axis 4 (Health - Social Care) will take action, so that to ensure access to primary health care and support for the full integration of Roma by 2020. The Ministry participates in inter-ministerial Commission for the operational planning aiming at the implementation of the Strategy.

On the provision of medical and hospital care to aliens (including children)

According to Article 7 of Law 3907/2011 (OJ 7/A/2011), all third-country nationals apprehended entering the country without legal documentation, shall undergo reception procedures which include medical control, provision of any necessary medical care and psychosocial support, in accordance with the Decision of the Minister of Health on "Schedule of medical examinations, diagnostic and psychosocial support and referral of incoming undocumented third-country nationals in reception structures" (OJ 2745/B/2013, ADA: VL1PTH - 6IN). In addition, the General Rules and Regulations of the Regional Reception Centres (Nos. JMD 7001/2/1454- or OJ 64/B/2012) provide (Article 20, para Ib) establishing an office for medical checks.

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<sup>4</sup> Community Structural Fund

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Regarding access to the health and medical care system to foreigners and uninsured, according to Y4a/oik.45610/02-05-2012 (ADA: 49KTH - 55P ), the following shall apply: Article 23 of I.D 3989/1959 states that Greece is obliged to accord to legitimate refugees, treatment similar to that accorded to its citizens, regarding the care and assistance provided by the State.

Article 15 of Presidential Decree 266/1999 states that medical and hospital care is free for foreigners who are in the Greek Territory provided that are uninsured and financially weak and belong to one of the following categories:

- a) have been identified by the authorities as refugees.
- b) have applied for refugee status recognition, which is under review by the Ministry of Public Order.
- c) residence has been approved for humanitarian reasons or the prescribed period that has not expired.

Article 29 of Presidential Decree 96/2008 in conjunction with Article 2 states that "the beneficiaries of international protection status", i.e. persons who have been recognized by the competent Greek authorities either as refugees or as beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have access to medical care under the conditions applying to Greek citizens."

The provisions of Article 28 paragraph 6 of PD 114/2010 stipulate that "the rights of applicants who have been granted leave to remain on humanitarian grounds are similar to those of beneficiaries of subsidiary protection".

Article 14 of Presidential Decree 220/2007 provides that aliens asylum seekers have "free medical and hospital care, provided that they are uninsured and financially weak."

Following the above, the categories of these aliens are the following four:

- a) recognized refugees,
- b) asylum seekers
- c) beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and
- d) those enjoying protection regime for humanitarian reasons.

Presidential Decree 266/99 and PD 220/2007, in conjunction with the provisions of Presidential Decree 96/2008 and 114/2010, clearly recognising the vulnerable situation of

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refugees in general and of beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers, have provided free medical and hospital care in principle in favour of the financially weaker among them; in fact, however, no financial conditions apply.

For unaccompanied migrant minors in any event (emergency or not) and regardless of their legal status and the general lack of any legal documents, unhindered access to health services is ensured.

However, for all foreigners, including undocumented aliens, free access applies for incidents, which come as emergency and life-threatening and extremely urgent situations, entering from the Emergency Department of each hospital. The same applies to the oncoming individuals infected by HIV or other infectious diseases since they require treatment until stabilization of their health.

For foreign migrants who are infected by HIV, free medical and hospital care applies in accordance with Article 11 of Law 2955/2001 (OJ 256/A ) and JMD DYG3a/oik.104747 (OJ 2883/B/2012).

Antibodies control for the detection of HIV infection is conducted free and anonymously by AIDS Reporting and Control Centres.

The Head of Directorate

Dr . K. SYRROS

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Exact translation of the original in Greek attached herewith.

The official translator: Maria K. Karageorgou

20/1/2014

ΜΕΤΑΦΡΑΣΤΙΚΗ ΥΠΗΡΕΣΙΑ ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟΥ ΕΞΩΤΕΡΙΚΩΝ, ΑΘΗΝΑ  
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