



Greece:

Addressing the challenge of education for refugee children and young people

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1. Current Greek Context

- More than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015
- Greece has borne the brunt of the influx as the main entry point to Europe
- The large inflow of refugees in Greece has definitely had an effect on the education policy planned for the school year that has just started
- It is a main objective of the Ministry of Education to ensure access to education for refugee children and young people who either have decided to stay in Greece or will be relocated
- As a result, certain measures have already been taken and other will follow promptly.

2. Main Challenges

- It should first be noted that long now migrant and refugee students enjoy the right to free education exactly as natives do
- Every child living in Greece is entitled to education regardless of their parents' / guardians' legal status in the country
- Because of the frequently special conditions of migration, administrative adaptations have been made to facilitate registering of foreign students who at the time of registration do not possess the official documents that are otherwise required.

3. Priorities and steps that are being taken

- A **Committee for the Support of Refugee Children (CSRC)** and
- a **Scientific Committees** to assist its work were established following a decision by the Minister of Education (**GG1/47070 of 18/03/2016**)
- In April, the Scientific Committee decided to **conduct a survey in Refugee Hospitality Centers** to assist the work of the CSRC. The aim of this survey was to reflect both the number of preschool and school-age children in the Centers, as well as the overall image of the interventions, along with the vacancies, elements which are necessary for the planning and coordination of actions on the part of the Ministry of Education.

3.1. Survey in Refugee Hospitality Centers

- The **SC** carried out a **survey** from **May 11 to 26**, 2016 which involved
 - a. Collection of data** completed for each Center-Accommodation Structure including 3 question sections regarding: The population , The pedagogical - educational activities organized in each Center, a. For children and b. For adults, The infrastructures
 - b. Insertion** of the data into a special electronic platform, **Processing** of data, Continuous **updating**
 - c. Final presentation** of detailed information on each center

3.2. Main results of the survey - recommendations

- Based on the **main results** of the survey, the SC made its **recommendations** for the psychosocial support of refugee children and their education, taking into account international literature on the education of refugee children and on dealing with emergencies in education, the viewpoints of the those stakeholders specialized in refugee and education issues as well as the principles and rights established in international and national law for children
- After the Committee came to conclusions and recommendations, certain measures have already been taken for the **School Year 2016-2017** which will soon be further extended.

4. Education for Refugee Children for the school year 2016-2017

- The Ministry is establishing an effective and flexible emergency action plan for the education of refugee children, taking under consideration the fact that the number of refugees within each accommodation center, as well as the number and the sites of these centers are not stable.
- The main objective of the Ministry, through the following education plan, is to ensure the psychosocial support and the integration of refugee children into the Greek educational system following a **preparatory, transitional period**. This plan is differentiated according to the age groups of children.

4.1. Compulsory education I

- Those aged **0-4 years** will remain under the responsibility of their parents. Those aged **4-7 years** will remain close to their parents (in the Accommodation Centers, if parents reside in them) and will attend preschool educational activities. More specifically, the Greek Ministry will establish **kindergartens within the Centers** where Greek-speaking kindergarten teachers will work (aided wherever possible by intermediaries or mothers), so that the children will gradually learn to communicate in Greek.

4.1. Compulsory education II

- **B.** Those aged **7 to 12 years** will attend **second shift reception classes in Greek Public Primary schools neighboring to the Centers** with the exception of limited cases, where nearby school units are not sufficient to include all refugee children residing in the accommodation center. In those cases, classes will be held in other suitable spaces or within the reception centers.

4.1. Compulsory education III

- **C.** Those over **12 to 15 years-old** who have completed primary education and/or some other type of the secondary education classes in their home country, will attend **second shift reception classes in Greek Public High Schools neighboring to the Centers**, with the exception of limited cases, where nearby schools are not sufficient.

4.2. Curriculum and course schedule

- The curriculum and course schedule to be implemented was proposed by the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) in cooperation with the Scientific Committee (SC). The curriculum will include Greek language, Math, Foreign languages, Computer skills, Physical Education and Arts. Additionally, mother tongue teaching is among the Ministry's concerns.
- For the teaching and learning of the Greek language, teacher guides and textbooks that have been developed and used in Intercultural schools for teaching Greek as a second language will be used.

4.3. Non-compulsory secondary education

- Children from **15-18 years old** will either attend reception classes or will join forms of formal or informal technical or vocational education in cooperation for example with:
 - **OAED** (Manpower apprenticeship schools)
 - **KANEP-GSEE** (The Center of the Greek General Confederation of Labor for Education and Lifelong Learning)

5. Staffing

- The staff that will implement the aforementioned Education Plan will be comprised by:
- **a. Refugee Education Coordinators (R.E.C.),** i.e. highly qualified and experienced educators that will be responsible and liable for the coordination, operation and supervision of all annexes (reception infrastructures) created to accommodate the education of the refugee children, as well as of the educational staff of the reception center of their responsibility.
- **b. Educational staff,** i.e. permanent teachers who will be detached in the Reception School Annexes for Refugee Education or supplementary teachers, who have experience and/or a postgraduate degree in intercultural education or teaching Greek as a second language. They will receive special training before taking up their post and also throughout the course of their posting.

6. Specific policies and measures

- **Children of all ages** living outside the Accommodation Centers, in rented flats and hotels (supported by the UNHCR) will attend regular morning classes of Greek public schools close to their residences. Reception classes, supplementary teaching and tutorial support will be provided to them within the schools they will attend.
- **Children with special needs:** policies and pilot actions to be designed by the SC members' experts.
- **Unaccompanied children and adolescents:** pending clarifications on their legal status and the responsibilities of the Public Offices of the Ministries involved in the protection of unaccompanied children, actions will be designed by members of the SC for the support of refugee children who are knowledgeable on the subject.

7. Pilot summer school for young refugees I

- It is also worth noting here an event which took place only last summer. The Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, in cooperation with the Council of Europe and with the participation of the School of Philosophy of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, organised a summer school for refugees, under the title “**Beyond the refugee crisis – Studying in Europe**”.
- The aim of the Summer School, which was a pilot educational action, was to facilitate access to university for young refugees who wish to study in Greece or elsewhere in Europe.

7. Pilot summer school for young refugees II

- Twenty-nine (29) students participated in the summer school. 2/3 of them were refugees and 1/3 were peer Greek students. The summer school took place from 18th to 28th August 2016. Participants were hosted in the campus of the International Olympic Academy, in the ancient area of Olympia, in the Peloponnese.
- The educational programme included a series of seminars in European Culture, workshops on language (Greek and English), workshops on human rights and citizenship, as well as presentations/discussions concerning European universities and studies provided. Free time activities (physical and cultural) and one full day excursion were also included in the programme. The courses and activities were held in English.

7. Pilot summer school for young refugees III

- The professors and the trainers came both from Greece and other European countries so that a broad and diverse perspective of Europe, its culture and its system (political and educational) would be presented.
- This initiative of the Summer School proved to be a great success and its effect has not stopped after its completion. In the aftermath of this difficult undertaking it can definitely be said that it was both necessary and required. Considering the amount of problems refugees face, there has to be a European student-care, a student passport needs to be created, the criteria for the recognition of students' qualifications and studies need to be determined so that refugee students will be able to enter the Higher Education Institutions of the European countries.
- As a result, conclusions will be reached as to how we proceed with regard to access to higher education for refugee students, but also because it has been very evident throughout the summer school how urgent this issue is as part of the general issue of access to education for migrant and refugee children and young people.

8. Concluding remarks I

- **Inclusion** is a means for building strong relationships among individuals, groups and society as a whole
- **Inclusive education** implies talking about differences: how to deal with differences in schools, in classrooms and in the curriculum in general
- The **key question** of policy making is what needs to be done at national level and how to implement the right policy measures at regional and local levels, within the wider, current context

8. Concluding remarks II

- Given the fact that the planning for the education of refugee children involves many bodies and is a delicate issue, those involved must make a **coordinated effort**.
- To achieve the objectives of the Ministry of Education for the education of refugee children, **cooperation and synergies** are considered necessary with the Ministry of Migration Policy, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Solidarity, with education officials and educators, municipalities and regions, with the Universities - Technical Educational Institutions, international organizations and other bodies.

9. References



- Hellenic Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs (2016). **Scientific Committee to assist the work of the Committee of Support of Refugee Children. Educational actions for refugee children. Athens, June 2016.**
(https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2016/Epistimoniki_Epitropi_Prosfygon_YPPETH_Full_Report_June_2016_update.pdf)

Thank you for your attention

