



Integrating refugee and migrant children into the educational system in Greece

ESPN Flash Report 2017/67

DIMITRIS ZIOMAS, CAPELLA ANTOINETTA AND KONSTANTINIDOU DANAI – EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK

JULY 2017

As 62,300 refugees and other migrants are currently hosted in Greece, among them 20,300 children, there is an imperative need for their gradual integration. Ensuring their access to education through the implementation of special educational programmes, is a positive development in this respect. Yet gaps in the provision of education still exist, while a comprehensive action plan for education of these children needs to be developed.

LEGAL NOTICE

This document has been prepared for the European Commission. However, it reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Description

In the course of 2015, over one million people entered or transited through Greece in order to escape conflict in their countries and make their way to Europe. While the numbers have shown a decreasing trend in both 2016 and 2017, mainly due to the EU–Turkey Agreement on Refugees in March 2016 and to the closure of the Balkan route to Northern Europe, Greece still faces great challenges in managing the refugee crisis. Apart from the fact that the migration flows continue, though at a much slower pace, approximately 62,300 persons are currently hosted in the country; among them, 20,300 are children.

One of the main challenges the government has been facing is the integration into Greek society of all those recently arrived refugees and other migrants who remain in the country. To this end, high priority has been given by the government to actions aiming at ensuring access to education for refugee and migrant children (whose parents are third country nationals, irrespective of their legal status).

In particular, a special educational programme targeted at these children was launched in October 2016. It concerns the establishment and operation of “Reception/ Preparatory Classes for the Education of Refugees” (DYEP) in certain public schools (during afternoon hours) in the mainland of Greece, in areas that are accessible

from the various official refugee sites. These classes are part of the mandatory formal educational system (primary and lower secondary education), which are run by teachers selected from the list of “substitute teachers” of public schools appointed by the Ministry of Education; they are geared to refugee and migrant children (aged 6-15 years) who live in the official refugee sites.

The aim of this educational programme is to facilitate the integration of refugee and migrant children into the educational process in a way that should gradually allow them to join mainstream classes in Greek schools. Implementation of the programme’s first year entailed a weekly educational session of twenty hours covering four main subjects: Greek, Mathematics, English and Information Technology. Artistic and sporting activities were also included. It is estimated that, in the school year 2016/17, 2,643 children joined 145 afternoon classes in 111 public schools.

The financial resources used were secured mainly from the European Asylum, Immigration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the funding of which amounts to €7 million for the period 2016-2018 (75% EU contribution and 25% national contribution). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) also secured funding (€2.8 million) from the European Commission’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and

Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) for the transportation of children between the accommodation sites and the schools.

It should be noted, however, that refugee and migrant children who live in apartments or other premises in urban areas, were allowed to attend morning "Reception Classes", which are part of the formal educational system and are addressed to pupils with limited knowledge of the Greek language. Such "Classes" have been in operation in certain public school units since 2010 and are located in areas characterised as Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP). According to the Ministry of Education, approximately 2,000 refugee and migrant children attended such morning "Reception Classes" in the school year 2016/17.

Furthermore, non-formal educational activities have also taken place in the official refugee sites, especially on the islands. These are mainly funded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and implemented by Non-Governmental Organisations.

Outlook & commentary

Undoubtedly, all these educational activities, whether formal or non-formal, are a very positive step towards the gradual integration of refugee and migrant children into Greek society, as access to education is a key factor for their social and economic integration.

Yet implementation of the educational programme (DYEP) has been rather slow, especially in the initial phase. This was mainly due to the very short preparation period for the hosting schools and the lack of proper official information to the local communities. In this context, a limited number of incidents had

occurred, with some parents expressing worries as to the health condition of refugee children. In response to this, the government launched a vaccination process for each refugee child prior to attending school.

Moreover, a number of shortcomings of this programme can be identified, most of which have been confirmed by a recent official assessment report on the programme (Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, 2017). Among them are the following: absence of afternoon Reception/Preparatory Classes on the islands (which implies that refugee and migrant children did not have access to any formal educational activities), lack of cooperation (in both administrative and educational terms) between the school and the Reception/Preparatory Classes, insufficient numbers of teachers with relevant experience and appropriate skills, non-regular attendance of many pupils along with the fact that many dropped out of school (mainly due to change in their residency and/or difficulties with the Greek language). In addition, there has been a significant lack of provision of pre-school education, upper secondary education and vocational training.

It is of utmost importance that immediate action is taken to address these shortcomings and gaps. It is equally important to develop a comprehensive action plan for the education of refugee and migrant children, which would entail, among other things, pedagogical standards, assessment criteria and procedures for the children's school performance, specific arrangements for their promotion to mainstream school classes as well as an institutional framework for linking formal and non-formal education activities.

Further reading

Greek Council for Refugees (2016), Country Report: Greece, Asylum Information Database, available at:

http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2016update.pdf

Greek Ombudsman – Children's Rights Department & UNICEF (2016), Report of the monitoring mechanism for the children on the move in Greece – Executive summary, available at:

[https://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Executive_summary_of_the_Report\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Executive_summary_of_the_Report(1).pdf)

Sakellis Y., Spyropoulou N. & Ziomas D. (2016), The refugee crisis in Greece in the aftermath of the 20 March 2016 EU-Turkey Agreement, Flash Report 2016/64, EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, Brussels: European Commission, available at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=16180&langId=en>

Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children (2017), Assessment Report on the Integration Project of Refugee Children in Education, Ministry of Education, Research & Religious Affairs, Athens, available at:

https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/CENG_Epistimoni_Ki_Epitropi_Prosfygon_YPPETH_Apotimisi_Protaseis_2016_2017_070_.pdf

Authors

[Dimitris Ziomas](#) in collaboration with Capella Antoinetta and Konstantinidou Danai, National Centre for Social Research (EKKE), Greece