



0.1.2 National Report

Greece

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1. Introduction

The present report was developed in the context of the first Work Package (WP1) “Development of diagnostic tools for the assessment of prior learning” of the project “Inclusion of Refugee Children in Education-Circle”, a two-year Key Action 3 project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programmed of the European Union. The aims of this project are to map the current situation in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain and explore the effectiveness of the available tools for the assessment of the prior learning of newly arrived migrant and refugee primary and secondary school students.

The Circle project aims at the improvement of the prior learning assessment tools and validation mechanism of the partner countries, in order to address the specific needs of newly arrived refugee and migrant primary and secondary students.

2. Key findings from the desk review

The national context: migrant/refugee children in the educational system

The last years, Greece has experienced a large influx of refugees, with 861,630 arrivals in 2015, 177,234 in 2016, 36,310 in 2017, 50,508 in 2018 and 9,223 in 2019 (UNHCR-Data Portal on Refugee Situations, 2019).

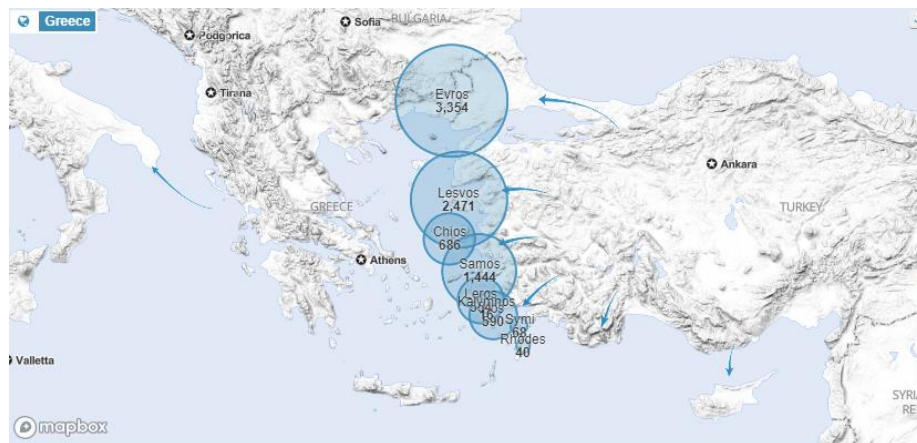


Image taken from the UNHCR Operational Portal-Refugee Situations: Mediterranean Situation. Arrivals in 2019.

According to the European Commission (2015), the upheaval in the Middle East and the war in Syria have created massive influx of refugees who hope to cross the Mediterranean Sea and have access in Europe. Greece has been at the crossroads of the refugee and migrant flow. Although initially considered as an intermediate station for over a million of refugees and their families, the closing of



the borders forced many refugees to seek permanent shelter and residence in Greece, gradually forcing them to consider settling for medium-term accommodation, work and education for their children.

During the period of 2018, according to IOM, the Syrian Arab Republic was “*the most commonly reported country of origin*”, declared by 37% of registered migrants and refugees. Migrants and refugees from Iraq represent the second largest group registered with 22%, followed by those arriving from Afghanistan with 13% of registered. Concerning the remaining 28% is distributed among more than 40 different nationality groups (IOM, 2018). During the first month of 2019, the data change. According to the latest data, Afghanistan is the most commonly reported country of origin in January 2019, with 50% of registered migrants and refugees. Migrants from Palestinian Territories represent the second largest nationality group registered with 17%, Syrian Arab Republic drop out to 9% and Iraq to 8%. The remaining 10% is distributed among 43 different nationality groups.

Based on data from January 2018 of the Operational Portal on Refugee Situations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 39.8% of the total refugee population that arrived in Greece are men, 23.2% are women and 37% are minors. According to Eurostat (2017), in 2017 the number of migrants reached 10.4 migrants per 1,000 inhabitants.

Education in Greece is compulsory for all children residing in Greece, including refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, aging 5 to 15 years old. Compulsory education includes one year of preschool, six years of primary school and three years of lower secondary education.

As foreseen by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, for the enrolment in Greek schools, refugee and migrant children need to provide the same supporting documents as nationals. They can proceed to enrolment after submitting (a) a birth and (b) a family status certificate, (c) proof of address, (d) a health certificate, (e) a valid residence permit (UNCHR, Access to Education) and (f) the child’s International Protection Applicant Card (or asylum seeker’s card).

Available data and other resources

According to the latest factsheet on refugee and migrant children’s access to education in Greece by UNICEF (2019), the total estimated number of children that are enrolled in any type of school in all regions of the country is 11,300 children, while 66% of assessed refugee/migrant children aging from 4 to 17 years old that are residing in urban accommodation are enrolled in formal schools. Out of the total number of children residing in urban accommodation, 13% are 4-5 years old, 52% are 6-12 years old, 16% are 13-15 years old, and 19% are 16-17 years old. The enrolment rate for children aging from 4 to 5 and 16 to 17 years old is 57%; the rate for children aging from 13 to 15 years old is 62%, while for children 6-12 years old the rate rises to 75%.

According to the latest data of Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs for the school year 2017 – 2018 (2018), the main objective of the Ministry was the integration of all refugees in the school. So, in its annual aggregated data on registered refugees and migrant students in the school year 2017-2018 as follows:

Total Number of students of DYEPs: **2026**

16 Gymnasium (compulsory secondary education)	15 Primary schools	23 Kindergartens
300 students	1187 students	539 students



Total Number of students in Reception Class of primary and secondary education: **5291**

Primary schools	Gymnasium	Lyceum / Vocational High School / Evening schools
3692	900	699

Estimated number of enrolled students in school units without a Reception Class: **700**

Total number of students enrolled in all levels of education during the school year 2017 - 2018: **8.017**

The figure is part of the estimated 10.000-12.000 population of school-age minors in the school year 2017 - 2018. The rest is estimated as follows: approximately 2.000 in certain areas of the eastern and northern Aegean islands that were not provided in the school year 2017 - 2018 compulsory education and about 2.000 unaccompanied minors mainly in the 15+-age category not in compulsory education.

Limitations of the desk review

Significant limitations in the process of the drafting of this report are the lack of specific legislation regarding the recognition or/and validation of prior assessment learning in national as well as in international context; the lack of elaboration of well-structured good practices specialised for primary and secondary education as well as the lack of prevention and specific legislation. It has to be noted that there are more results concerning the prior assessment learning for Higher Education but which are not related to our subject and will not be analysed in this report.

Setting the scene

Overview of national laws concerning the assessment of migrant/refugee students prior learning

The Hellenic Republic since 1996 with Law No. 2413/1996 "Greek education abroad, intercultural education and other provisions" has started to integrate laws into the legal system, relevant to the support of the integration of refugee/migrant children in the Greek educational system, through the establishment and support of intercultural schools. Also, in 2016, 20 years later with Law No. 4415/2016 "Arrangements for Greek-language education, intercultural education and other provisions." The Hellenic Language Centre provides for the granting of certificates of Greek language by the competent institution of the Ministry and determine the type of these certificates, the conditions for their acquisition, the procedure and the content of the examinations, the conditions for participation in them and any relevant issues. The award of the Certificate of Attainment in Greek is based on examinations in full correspondence with the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Relevant Laws and Presidential Decrees that promote partly the support and the integration of refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors and Thirty Country National students are the Presidential Decree 150/2006, The Joint Ministerial Decision 5185/2014 and The Ministerial Decision Φ1/63691/Δ1/2017.

More detailed, the Presidential Decree 150/2006 foresees the assessment of third country nationals, who are legal residents of Greece and are interested in acquiring a lifelong residency status, on the Greek language, history and culture. The Ministerial Decision Φ1/63691/Δ1/2017 foresees the establishment and operation of reception classes, tutoring lessons and the Host Structures for



Refugee Education (DYEPs). The Joint Ministerial Decision 5185/2014 has set the prerequisites for the participation and the process of qualification, the responsible authority for the implementation of the assessment and qualification of the acquired knowledge of TCN students.

However, it is worth noting that despite the bibliographic review of relevant laws and presidential decrees, laws for the recognition or validation of prior assessment learning / knowledge were not found and this is a very important recommendation.

Overview and evaluation of creation and implementation of national policies and strategies related to the integration in the school system of migrant/refugee students and, in particular, to the assessment of their prior learning

The Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs developed in 2016 the National Education Plan that aimed at the integration of refugee and migrant children in the Hellenic educational system. A team for the Management, Coordination and Monitoring of the Education Refugees was established and was responsible for the coordination of the Plan. The aforementioned Plan included two steps simultaneous:

Creative activities were organised in the summer of 2016 and took place in reception centres and everyday afternoon classes in several schools were organised, delivering lessons on Greek, English, mathematics, creative activities and more, aiming at the integration of migrant children to Greek schools.

For the implementation phase of the plan, two official public organisation were constituted. The Host Structures for Refugee Education (DYEPs), whose aim is to help the children of refugees move from the war-torn state they have experienced to a regularity, to help them also cope with the different demands arising from the training. As indicated by another report of the Ministry of Education, these children have experienced difficult situation but remain children. The Refugee Education Coordinator (SEP) in the Host Centres who are in charge of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. Education professionals were appointed to the Host Structures for Refugee Education, but as mentioned in the report, did not have the necessary training to teach to students that do not speak Greek; only a few attended seminars provided by the Institute of Educational Policy. As mentioned in another Ministry's report (2017), these teachers were invited to act as mediators by bringing together the refugee population with the Greek educational system, creating bridges in school and society. The tasks of these teachers include the explanation of the conditions of operation of the Greek school for refugee / migrant's parents and their constitutional contact with them, the communication with the educators of the DYEPs, the coordination of NGOs as well as the development of practical solutions to improve the issues of education. The European Union considers the contribution of SEPs to the integration process crucial.

According to the report of the Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs regarding the results of the programme for the school year 2016-2017, until April of 2017, 111 DYEPs with 145 classes were operational, that covered 37 Host Centres in all regions of the country, except the islands. DYEPs hosted 2,643 students of school age, in primary and secondary schools).

The action plan has been well received and supported by other ministries, NGOS, and public authorities such as the Ministry of Migration Policy and the Ministry of Health with KEELPNO, which is in charge for children's vaccination, as well as with the support of municipalities and regions, universities, the Ombudsman of the Child, International Organisations (International Organisation for Migration, UNHCR, UNICEF) and NGOs.





During the programme, the Institute of Educational Policy was in charge of issuing books, educational handbooks and an online educational platform, to assist teachers with the needed material for multicultural education (ELIAMEP, 2017).

The “Education of immigrants in the Greek language, the Greek history and the Greek culture – ODYSSEUS” programme of the Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation (INEDIVIM) provides lessons on the Greek language as a second language. It also includes lessons in the sociocultural dimension of the language’s cultural elements, as well as Greek history and culture. It is co-funded by the European Union and National Funding, while it is supervised by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. The programme is structured in four levels, is free of charge and is held in all regional units of the country. It addresses to EU citizens and third country nationals, who are 16 years old and above and are legal residents in Greece. Upon the completion of each level, the trainees have the chance to participate in the respective Greek Language Exams (Ellinomatheia), which are held twice a year by the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning, in cooperation with the Centre for Greek Language of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs.

The National Strategy for Integration (2018) includes actions aiming at providing information to third country nationals on the organisations they can address for the recognition of the educational titles they have acquired in other countries, so as to continue their studies or to exercise the professional rights that the abovementioned title provides them. The National Strategy also foresees the creation of relevant legislative framework for the recognition of such titles of third country nationals that are unable to present relevant evidence from their country of origin.

In 2017, the Council of Europe and the Greek Ministry of Education have piloted a programme, which provides certification of the higher education qualifications, work experience and language proficiency to refugees. Refugees may apply for a document called “European Qualifications Passport for Refugees”, which is valid for five years and proves that people who have received it have studied, have attended vocational training, know a foreign language and have work experience; the document provides reliable information for integration and progression towards employment and further studies. The project is currently under implementation and is expected to be completed by 2020.

According to the Ministry of Education, several measures have been taken for the facilitation of education of refugee children. In this context, Host Structures for Refugee Education (DYEPs) were created in order serve as preparatory educational centres for newly arrived refugee children living in the Accommodation Centres. Moreover, a special Analytical Programme for DYEPs, reception classes of primary and secondary education, educational material and a relevant platform by the Institution of Educational Policy were developed. Reception classes in secondary education were also established. The Refugee Education Coordinator (SEP) as a link between schools and Accommodation Centres has been introduced, the integration of refugees in morning classes that live in the islands was facilitated, the number of Reception Classes in public schools has increased, while more educators have been employed in DYEPs in primary education. In this context, more than 25 nursery schools in the Accommodation Centres are operational and refugee children have the opportunity to attend classes in professional high schools. Because of all these measures, more than 8,000 refugee children have attended classes in schools, for the school year 2017–2018. At the same time, services of interpretation have been introduced in the educational procedures for refugees and a programme for the recording and identification of the academic qualifications of refugees has been piloted in cooperation with the Council of Europe.

The integration of migrant and refugee children in the national educational system has great benefits for their socialisation and interaction with their peers. As 84% of the children who reside in open accommodation centres in Greece stated, the regular access to education has facilitated them to make



friends with children from other countries (IOM, 2018).

According to IOM (2018), most children of refugees and migrants (62%) have attended lessons in their country of origin. The vast majority of the participants (84%) mentioned that they have made friends or have regular interactions with students from Greece or other countries and have smoothly integrated in the school environment. During the school year 2017-2018, IOM ensured the transportation of 2,800 children of refugees and migrants with school buses, while 73% of students attended lessons in primary, 21% in junior high and 6% in high schools.

Overview and evaluation of implementation of EU directives and other international legislation, related to the integration in the school system of migrant/refugee students and to the assessment of prior learning

The directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe on laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection defines that Member States shall provide children of applicants and applicants who are minors access to the educational system, under the same conditions as the nationals; such education may be provided in the accommodation centres. The directive also defines that the aforementioned access shall not be postponed for more than three months “from the date on which the application for international protection was lodged by or on behalf of the minor”. Preparatory classes are also foreseen, including language classes, in cases that children’s participation in education needs to be facilitated, while in the case the above participation is not feasible, due to the “specific situation of the minor”, the Member State “the Member State shall offer other education arrangements in accordance with its national law and practice”. With Law No. 4540/2018, Greece has adapted this directive in the national legislative framework.

Evaluation of how the aforementioned policies and directives are actually implemented at the local level in both primary and secondary schools

No data could be retrieved regarding the aforementioned policies and directives are implemented at the local level in primary and / or secondary schools during the desk research.

Evaluation of good practices carried out by primary and secondary schools (national level)

Primary and secondary schools in Greece have no integrated practices for the recognition of prior assessment learning of migrants, refugees, newly arrived, asylum seekers or unaccompanied children. However, there are some good practices carried out by reception classes. These practices are described below, in detail.

The Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, within the framework of the principles of intercultural education, has the basic principle of promoting measures to eliminate inequalities and to ensure equal opportunities in education for all of them / students. In this context, Law 3879/2010 (Official Gazette 163A / 21.09.2010) Art. 26 para 1a and 1b introduces the institution of the Educational Priority Zones (EPZ). According to the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (2019/E), “... The aim of the EPZs is the equitable inclusion of all students in the education system through the operation of supporting actions to improve learning performance, in particular the operation of reception classes [...]. In addition, the issues concerning the organization and operation of the EPZs, staffing, teacher employment in proportion to the number of students in need of differentiated didactic intervention and all relevant issues”.

During the school year 2019-2020, it is possible for the primary schools of the country to operate the Educational Priority Zones (EPZ), through a co-funded project by the European Union - European



Social Fund, as part of the continuation of the Actions:

- “Action 6.10.1.1.01.01: Integration of Vulnerable Social Groups into Primary Schools - Host Classes”. “Development of Human Resources, Education and Lifelong Learning” of NSRF 2014-2020, co-financed by the European Union/European Social Fund (ESF) and the Greek State.
- “Action 8.10.1.1.01.01: Integration of Vulnerable Social Groups (EKO) into Primary Schools - Host Classes”. “Development of Human Resources, Education and Lifelong Learning” of NSRF 2014-2020, co-financed by the European Union/European Social Fund (ESF) and the Greek State.
- “Action 9.10.1.1.01.01: Integration of Vulnerable Social Groups (EKO) into Primary Schools - Host Classes”. “Development of Human Resources, Education and Lifelong Learning” of NSRF 2014-2020, co-financed by the European Union/European Social Fund (ESF) and the Greek State.

The relevant Act for the school year 2019-2020 will be to reduce early school leaving of students from vulnerable social groups and students with cultural and religious peculiarities and to improve learning outcomes, especially in literacy but also in numeracy. In addition, in complementary subjects so that they are able to cope with their curriculum and remain in the education system by completing their studies. Consequently, the act aims at enhancing equal access and effective integration of the above-mentioned students (Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, 2019/E).

The Act will aim at the education and the smoother adaptation of refugee children. In this context, it is envisaged to enrich the educational potential of primary schools that need to support the integration of the above-mentioned students (horizontal intervention in all elementary schools with relative pupil populations). In particular, the teachers working in the framework of the Act will host the Reception Classes with the main object of learning the Greek language and teaching support to other subjects in order to facilitate a smoother adaptation and stay in the student's vulnerable social groups, students with cultural and religious peculiarities, and refugee children.

For the education of students who do not have the necessary knowledge of the Greek language (Roma, Refugees, Vulnerable Social Groups etc.), a flexible scheme of institutional and didactic intervention is formulated in the context of intercultural education, school unit, weighing the actual educational needs of these pupils and their abilities (Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, 2019/E).

More specific, the program of the Educational Priority Zones (EPZs), Reception Classes includes two rounds included in the school timetable:

- Reception Classes, EPZs I
- Reception Classes, EPZs II

The students of the EPZs I have students with little or no knowledge of the Greek language. There is an intensive program of learning the Greek language. Students attending EPZs I attend some classes in their regular class, such as physical education, art exhibitions, musical education, foreign language or other lesson, according to a decision of the teachers. Attendance at the EPZs I lasts one academic year with the possibility of extension (Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, 2019/E).

In the EPZs II, there are students of moderate level of Greek language, which may cause difficulties in attending courses in the normal classroom. For students attending EPZs II, support is provided in Greek or in more courses in the normal class with parallel teaching (second-class teacher) either out of order. Studying lasts for up to three years. Students who have completed their studies in the EPZs II cannot return to the Educational Priority Zones, Reception Classes (Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, 2019/E).

The minimum number of students with whom EPZs II and I are set up is nine. In each Reception Class, groups of students from different classes can be created based on their educational needs and their level of learning. The main purpose of the EPZs I and / or EPZs II is to help students to keep an eye on classroom classes. As a result, during the school year, the students' attendance at the Reception Class



may be interrupted by decision of the teachers upon a reasoned recommendation by the teacher of the Receptionist and the teacher of his/her class (Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, 2019/E).

The Headmasters/Headmistress in cooperation with the teaching staff and the Head of Educational Affairs of their respective Primary Education Directorate will take into account for the students to attend the EPZ that the school unit, in cooperation with the Head of Educational Affairs of the Department of Primary Education, needs the following:

- Carry out test findings to identify the student's level of English.
- Signed parent or guardian's statement that he wishes to attend his/her child's EPZ.
- Decision of the Association of Teachers for the Students' Participation in EPZs I and/or EPZs II.
- The Teachers' Association, under the guidance of the head teacher of the relevant Primary Education Directorate, prepares the Weekly Timetable Program of the EPZs, taking into account the suggestion of the teachers who teach these classes.
- The Weekly Schedule of these Classes is submitted for approval and endorsement to the Head of Educational Affairs of the relevant Directorate for Primary Education.

The schools will initially do the following:

- In performing student tests for the detection of the level of Greek and their classification in EPZs I and/or EPZs II.
- The gathering of signatures of parents or carers wishing to attend their child in the EPZs.
- In a decision of the Teachers' Association for students in EPZs I and/or EPZs II.

Concerning the reception classes for primary education, there are the "Certification of Greek Language Testing" (Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, 2019).

The initial/prior assessment learning of the linguistic level in Greek is particularly necessary, especially after the latest inflows. According to the instructions given to the teachers by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, the teacher who assumes the teaching of the Greek language must know first the degree of occupation of the Greek language. This will help the teacher to understand and to help each student with his/her quality, needs and interests, and gradually lead him/her to acquire higher language levels (Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, 2019/A).

In the Greek language teaching sections, in Greece there are students who have a variety of linguistic and schooling experiences, regardless of their age. The most common cases of students, with the use of the Greek language in the oral and written language, are described below:

- students who do not speak Greek at all – beginners in all linguistic areas;
- students who understand the language a little but cannot talk, read and write;
- students who have learned elementary reading and writing, understand little language but cannot speak;
- students who are advanced to listening and speaking but have not yet begun to read and write in Greek; and
- students who understand, speak, read and write the Greek language to a satisfactory degree.

In order for the teacher to appreciate the level of all these individual linguistic skills of students a diagnostic tool is needed. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs having taken into account the fact that there are few or no relevant aids/tools for classifying students with migrants background at different linguistic levels, has given some exercises, activities, appraisal tables and general guidelines to help teachers in their work (Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, 2019/A, 2019/B, 2019/C, 2019/D).

After the latest aforementioned inputs, the Minister of Immigration Policy, Mr Dimitris Vitsas has



underlined the importance of creating a more structured Greek model of integration. “We believe that building a ‘Greek integration model’ with a view to mutual understanding, peaceful and creative coexistence and interaction can make a decisive contribution to eliminating the phenomena of intolerance, racism and xenophobia from the whole of Greek society” (The Toc, 2019).

Quite recently, the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and UNHCR co-organised a symposium on the education of the children of refugees in the Aegean islands. Participants at the symposium underlined the need to take action which will facilitate access to school to refugee and migrant children. They also highlighted the contribution of non-formal education to the enhancement of formal education, the importance of awareness raising and co-existence opportunities for local communities and the refugee and migrant population, as well as the need to distribute students based on their age and cognitive level and the positive effects that the good climate, communication and cooperation between all relevant operators can bring (Ministry of Education, 2019).

In March 2019, the Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs issued forms for applications for the establishment of integration sections.

The state of art

Overview of research and reports (national and international) regarding the tools and practices used to evaluate migrant/refugee students’ prior learning, the challenges they have to face and their actual needs

Due to the increasing numbers of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers globally, priorities of the school environment have shifted in order to promoting successful (re)settlement outcomes and offer inclusion for this target group of students. Yet schools in Greece as well as in the rest of the European countries and especially in countries hosting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers *“may be poorly equipped to recognise and respond to the multiple challenges”* (Block. K et al, 2014). Challenges such as learning of a new language, understanding of an unfamiliar educational system, adjustment of a new social system have ridden. According to the data collected by Asylum Insight, 19.9 million refugees registered with the UNHCR and developing countries host 85% of them, leading to the conclusion that countries with *“minimal resources are hosting the majority of refugee”* (Asylum Insight, 2018). This fact, relates to the UNESCO’s findings of the latest report, that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers students face being placed *“in the inappropriate school level without official paperwork”* (UNESCO, 2018).

The international situation does not differ much from the national situation we have just described, except for some exceptions.

At the international level, according to latest report of Eurydice, pointed out that Germany and France have set of measures for the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seeker students but with emphasis in Higher Education. Costa Rica, Iraq, Lebanon, South Africa, Turkey and Sweden try to tackle the problem of absence of formal prior learning, “including sitting placement or general knowledge tests, doing interviews, or bridging programmes” (UNESCO, 2018).

More specific, between the 36 European countries, only Sweden’s Education Act lets unaccompanied minors be assessed and placed at the appropriate level within two months of arrival. Asylum seeking young adolescents between 16 and 19 “often have to attend a preparatory course to improve their skills in Swedish and other core subjects before being able to access vocational education” (Asylum Information Database, 2019). Indeed, only in Sweden, the issue of recognising *prior learning* is



important and underlined (Eurydice, 2019).

Overview of reports of international organisations and EU institutions

International organisations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM, <https://greece.iom.int/>), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org>), the Global Forum on Migration & Development (GFMD, <https://gfmd.org/>), and the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC, <https://www.icrc.org/en/resource-centre/result?t=prior+>) have not identified any proposal or any relevant report for recognition of prior assessment learning for students of primary and secondary education. The same applies for competent EU institutions, and more specifically DG HOME (Migration and Home Affairs) and DG EAC (Education, Youth, Sport and Culture).

Overview of projects and project outputs (national and international)

NGOs with European projects and project outputs, co-funded by the European Commission, have not yet tried to fill the gap concerning the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, especially the recognition of prior assessment learning for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers students of primary and secondary education.

However, at the international level some projects touch the subject of recognition of prior learning in general – especially for the work environment and High Education.

The IPA 2010 project on Human Resources Development in Albania, funded by the European Union is implemented by the International Labour Organization, under the leadership of the Decent Work Technical Support Team and Country Office for Central and Eastern Europe (DWT/CO-Budapest, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MoSWY), the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES) and their implementing agencies. Under the implementation of this project is developed and adopted, a frame methodology on the Recognition of Prior Learning has been developed by the Project and validated by the Beneficiary as a preparatory phase.

So far, in Greece there are no relevant projects. At the national level, Greece has projects for the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the school life.

Conclusions and recommendations

National and local level recommendations

However, despite the influx numbers of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers minors there are no formal and official tools, practices or diagnostic measures used to evaluate migrant / refugee students' prior learning, the challenges they have to face and their actual needs. From our side we believe that the recognition of prior learning of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is vital issue for their integration into school society firstly and society in general. We could argue that the recognition of prior learning could be the first part of a healthy integration and a first recommendation of this report. Some others recommendation in a national level could be:

- The development and implementation of appropriate diagnostic tests, based on scientifically produced and tested material, on students' previous school background, knowledge and experiences, as well as the adoption of an individual development strategy for each student could be the second recommendation.
- The support of ongoing evaluation of students' learning and social inclusion progress and
- The inclusion of newly arrived parents in all aspects of schooling would be useful as well.





- Educators to have the necessary tools and resources to assist in children's integration.
- The state and NGOs services should be more organised and the provisions should be implemented.
- A needs assessment should be implemented to investigate the current needs of educators and students.
- More internet courses, that will be accessible to all teachers, should be available.

EU level recommendations

At European Union Level, because of the large number of inputs, are now more and more recommendations regarding the proper configuration of prior learnings tools that could help the right integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers into educational systems. According to the Commonwealth Education Hub (2017), the educational systems must integrate *recognition* of education/qualifications, experience and skills of refugee and migrant learners (recognition of prior learning) that can lead to the proper integration into learning paths that are the most appropriate for scaling-up their skills. UNHCR's policies for migrants and refugees must be included as part of national educational and social systems. Policies relative to the development of the language, the vocational trainings, the proper accommodations and the suitable workplace (UNHCR, 2007). However, as referred to the Commonwealth Education Hub (2017), there is need for *"a multi-sectoral, integrated policy funding approach that could become compulsory for all countries"*.

Recommendations for future research areas

Recommendations for future research areas could be:

- Ways that other good practices developed in another country could be adapted in the Greek educational system;
- Evaluation of the existing programmes;
- Research on the needs of educators for the teaching of foreign students and no native speakers ;
- Research on the needs of migrants / refugees, asylum seekers and their families;
- Research on the needs of unaccompanied minors;
- Provision of trainings addressing to teachers on intercultural competences.



3. Field Research Focus Groups

Practical Information

For the field research two focus groups took place in Thessaloniki. One with participants from Primary Schools and one from Secondary schools. All participants signed a Consent Form to participate at Research.

Maria Vafiadou and Lina Staikou conducted the focus Group for Primary Schools that was carried out on 04/06/2019. The Focus Group was consisted of nine people, six women and three men. The participants' fields of expertise were mainly education professionals working as School Advisors, School Principals and members of the Ministry of Education of primary school in Thessaloniki.

Charicleia Tsirigoti conducted the focus Group regarding Secondary Schools on 5/6/2019. It consisted of eight people, four women and four men all of them education professionals.

Key findings from Field Research for Primary Schools

Practices and tools employed by the local schools

Methods of evaluation

To this day, to enter into the Reception Classes the evaluation of the prior knowledge of pupils / migrants / refugees, is being implemented by the Ministry of Educations' Certification tests. These tests are divided into two levels of difficulty. They include written and oral comprehension exercises in order for the teacher to understand what the childs' level of Greek language and where he / she is behind. There are also exercises for assessment of listening skills.

Families' involvement

The evaluation process usually does not involve the family as active participants in the assessment of knowledge. Parents are only informed of their child's results and classification in the Greek educational system.

Native language evaluation and Linguistic and cultural mediators' involvement

The assessment of mother tongue is a difficult process because many children can speak it (fluently) but few have attended classes in their country of origin so that they can read or solve linguistic exercises (in writing, in grammar rules, etc.). Unfortunately, their native language is not evaluated due to a lack of interpreters or the existence of teachers who know the child's mother tongue. There are also no linguistic / cultural mediators. Sometimes refugee pupils who have successfully mastered the Greek language are used as mediators, to help the communication of teachers with the child or the refugee family.

Training for teachers and other school operators

Participants of the focus groups commented that they have not attended any specialized training, nor have they heard anything about training related to the assessment of prior knowledge of migrant / refugee children. They point out that training for intercultural education usually does not focus on the first assessment of refugee / immigrant children, and notes that such training must precede the integration of children into the education system and not follow. Due to lack of such training, teachers apply different / teaching methods that they decide and in this way the education of the



migrant/refugee children is left to teachers' good will and personal diligence.

Evaluation of tools and practices

Individual points of view

According to the opinion of the majority of the participants, the tools and practices currently in use to assess prior knowledge of migrant / refugee children are inappropriate. The assessment focuses exclusively on assessing the knowledge of the Greek language and not really on activating the students in the educational process. Also, participants mentioned that there is a possibility that children are reluctant to answer although they may know the answers due to their lack of Greek language skills. Thus, they argue that the tools and practices currently in place are not sufficient to assess the prior knowledge of migrant/ refugee children.

Effectiveness of tools and practices currently in use

Participants stated that students evaluated with the given tools and practices are not necessarily successfully (at school) as the tests are incomplete and do not examine the child's knowledge in other subjects such as mathematics, natural sciences, the environment, etc. In addition, school integration is a function of many factors, such as social, psychological, etc. Good test performance can trigger the child to try more for his / her school integration and success

Weaknesses and strengths of tools and practices currently in use

Regarding the practices that are currently being applied, their positive aspects are that the duration of the test does not tire children to burden their performance and that it includes targeted exercises that activate and exacerbate the student's thinking. On the other hand, there is no audiovisual material, which would facilitate the understanding and solution of the exercises and it would provide a pleasant environment, which corresponds to the aesthetics of the children's age. Finally, a basic omission is the absence of exercises in the mother tongue of the students.

Target group: challenges and difficulties to face

Main challenges/difficulties of migrant/refugee children in the educational system

The participants during the focus group session reached a clear distinction between migrant and refugee children. According to their statements, the biggest challenges and difficulties faced mainly by refugee children in primary and secondary school education are the fear of the unknown, emotional instability / psychological chaos, as the refugees still have the feeling of uprooting, loss, fear and uncertainty. Additionally, the lack of a language of communication, which creates difficulty in expressing thoughts, emotions (positive or negative), as well as socialization and interpersonal relationships (concerns older children and adolescents), is a major difficulty.

Both migrant / refugee children, face difficulties in being accepted by the social environment. In some cases they need to make a big effort to be integrated to the class when the school environment is not supportive. Finally, it is difficult to adapt to school rules and school regularity in general, especially when the family is not supportive or the parent figure is absent.

Main obstacles to a successful integration in the educational system

The most inhibiting factor in the integration of children is their psychological state. The lack of appropriate specialists in schools, such as psychologists and social workers, makes the process of integration very difficult.

The biggest obstacles for the successful integration of migrant / refugee children into the education system are the apathy / indifference of the family environment on the value and importance of school





in the child's life, the financial problems of the family that appear even in the clothing and the personal objects of refugee / migrant child, the participation in school activities and sometimes all these lead to the creation of forms of racism by the children of the class.

In addition, the provision of non-formal training courses by NGOs to Hospitality Centers is often conflicting with formal education priorities. Frequently, the perception among refugees that Greece is not their pre-planned or final destination is often inhibiting, which discourages regular attendance and consistent monitoring of the educational process.

Another fact that was discussed during the focus group is that participants have observed that the concentration of a large number of migrant / refugee children in a single school unit reduces their performance. On the contrary, when they are among children with greater ambitions and better performances, they tend to improve their own performance. Finally, younger children that have not attended any of schooling in their country of origin, find it extremely difficult to adapt to school rules and duties. They also do not know their mother tongue well, and they even have difficulty communicating with each other.

Target group: needs to be covered

Actual needs of migrant/refugee children in the educational system

According to teachers' observations, the real needs of migrant / refugee children in school education are the sense of security and support in the school environment as well as the ability to communicate as they have difficulty asking for the basics and expressing their feelings and beliefs.

Needs addressed/not addressed by the assessment practices

According to the participants, the current insufficient practices for assessing the prior knowledge of children are shallow and do not give a complete assessment of the child. Finding the individual needs of each child is a time consuming process and cannot be limited to the findings of one test in Greek language skills. Throughout the day and with everyday contact, the needs of children become more apparent.

Participants' suggestions, regarding the change in the tools and practices used by schools to assess the pupils' earliest knowledge, indicate that they should be enriched with more audiovisual media to enable the pupil to be able to compare with their mother tongue and culture so that children feel more comfortable with the whole process.

Participants of the focus group proposed that one of the "good practices" of primary / secondary school integration at national level proposed by teachers is the interpretation program. This program enables interpreters to visit schools at regular intervals, and gives schools, children and their families the opportunity to communicate, to express themselves and inform about anything related to school life. Also, it allows migrant/ refugee parents to get information on educational programs that are currently implemented by NGOs and UNHCR that are intended to inclusion, acceptance of difference and respect of human rights. In addition, they propose the "ΔΙΑΠΟΛΙΣ" program, which adopted a holistic approach and explored all aspects of the issue of 'migrant refugees' on various topics such as Reception classes. Such topics are Greek language classes, intercultural communication, teacher training, pupils' mother tongue classes, psychological support and educational child visits, evaluation.

Also important are the school activities that involve the parents / guardians of the children in the educational process such as school events as well as regular informative progress meetings with refugees / migrant parents. Last but not least, all the participants agreed that there should be a Network of support for migrants / refugees with teachers and other scientists and professionals to help meet basic needs such as housing, food and clothing, psychological support and empowerment of the child and the family.



It is interesting at this point that participants of the focus group have given conflicting information as on the one hand they have mentioned that NGO's provide mixed signals to migrant/refugee children regarding their permanent integration in the educational system, and on the other hand most of the good practices they presented were NGO initiatives and do not come from the formal education system.

Research results of the focus groups for Secondary Schools

Practices and tools employed by the local schools

Methods of evaluation

For the evaluation of the prior knowledge of migrant / refugee children, the Ministry of Education is using tests in Greek language. Participants of the focus group mentioned that there are even cases of teachers in schools that they apply their own evaluation methods as they have no other way to evaluate prior knowledge. The evaluation tests provided by the Ministry of Education assess only the Greek language skills of migrant/refugee children so it was agreed during the session that these methods are not sufficient. Also the existing tools of evaluation do not cover the need to evaluate previous knowledge in other subjects, eg. Computer science, mathematics.

Families' involvement

Participants in the focus group agreed that families are not involved in the evaluation process because there is a language barrier and furthermore, some children are unaccompanied.

Native language evaluation

Participants of the focus group stated that the mother tongue of migrant/ refugee children is not evaluated at any stage before or after the children are admitted in the Greek educational system. In a need to communicate the teachers and students have acquired English as the communication language at Greek schools which makes it very difficult for all members involved. The ultimate target of the migrant/refugee students should be following the material and lesson in Greek which is not currently the case.

Linguistic and cultural mediators' involvement

The focus group participants stated that mediators are not involved in and in case a school interpreter is required, an entry permit for him needs to be issued, which is not an easy bureaucratic procedure.

Evaluation of tools and practices

Individual points of view

According to teachers' opinion, the evaluation tests of the Ministry of Education are obsolete. There are examples of teachers who exaggerate themselves and teach with "Differentiated Instruction" for the integration of migrant/ refugee children. Finally, the tests only concern Greek language, not their mother tongue, and are not combined with other subjects

Effectiveness of tools and practices currently in use

Students evaluated with the current tools and practices are successfully integrated (at school) at a cognitive level but not emotionally. In general, their integration into school is left to the formation of each teacher and not to the general program. When the language barrier is overcome, they become successfully integrated.

Weaknesses and strengths of tools and practices currently in use



Children feel left out because they can't communicate in their language. They focus on Greek, which is taught as a native. The tools are not properly structured because their skills are not checked, only the vocabulary. There must be a search for help from intercultural intermediaries rather than interpreters.

Target group: challenges and needs

Main challenges/difficulties of migrant/refugee children in the educational system

The biggest challenges and difficulties that migrant / refugee children are facing in primary and secondary schooling are difficulties in the cognitive level, as Greek is considered difficult and it's being taught in an academic way in schools. Specialization of teachers in the teaching of Greek as a second foreign language is needed. The integration of migrant / refugee children in schools is a quite difficult because there is a different perception of roles, sexes and different cultural backgrounds. There is also a difficulty in the perception and integration of school function and school life rules. Moreover, the violent interruption of their mother tongue can lead to an inferiority syndrome for many of the children which is the reason most of the participants agreed that it is imperative to continue and strengthen their mother tongue and cultural development. Integrating them into an intercultural context and avoiding the loss of identity is a challenge.

Main obstacles to a successful integration in the educational system

Our focus group participants discussed that the basic barriers to the successful integration of migrant / refugee children into the education system are the structural barriers to school itself. Teachers see it as load and there is no mood, courage for more training, so they react uneasily and unprepared sometimes. In addition, xenophobia, poor living standards, temporaryism, lack of acceptance by the local community, inadequate support from the family environment and the child-growing environment lead to marginalization. A major barrier is also the language of communication in which the training material could be adapted, for example, bilingual books.

Target group: needs to be covered

Actual needs of migrant/refugee children in the educational system

The participants during the focus group session reached a clear distinction between children that reside in apartments and in Host Centres. According to the participants, the psycho-emotional needs of Children who are living in apartments have been covered, so they will focus on cognitive fields. As far as the children who reside in hospitality centers are concerned, participants claim that it is necessary to cover their psycho-emotional and social needs. Children need security. They do not need incentives because they want to leave. There is a need for effective inclusion in the school environment and not to be treated as a foreign body. They need to feel secure and that their identity is not endangered. Things to be ensured are communication, relationships, friendship, socialization, academic skills. The framework of Host Classes should be made more flexible for the children who live in Host Centers.

Needs addressed/not addressed by the assessment practices

Participants stated that they believe that the above mentioned good practices used by various schools respond to the real needs of migrant / refugee children.

Suggestion for changes in the tools and practices used by the schools to evaluate students' prior learning

Focus Group participants suggested various changes to the tools and practices used by schools to assess pupils' early knowledge, such as the need for tools to be evaluated in the language and not "by



declaration" of the child. It has also been proposed to use creative writing (from a philologist to a host class. It is also important for teachers to have motivation and to use methodological tools for language learning. The reception classes start at the beginning of the school year and it would be preferable not to limit themselves to language courses, as well as to start a supplementary teaching program. Last but not least, the reception classes should continue in the summer, especially in the language.

Good practices implemented by secondary schools in the national context

In addition to classical lessons, it would be wise to have joint actions with students in the same school or other schools that will result in the inclusion of students in lessons, activities, excursions, school holidays, choirs, plays, dances and programs.

Extremely good practice was the visit of the parents (of the pupils who stay in hospitality centers) at the school that their children are attending, in order to be informed about their progress. Also, on the other hand, teachers visiting the hospitality center to participate in a ramadan / religious celebration as well as pupils' participation in sports activities / acquaintance with historical monuments of Thessaloniki (children from Alexandria, 60km from Thessaloniki). Moreover, another good practice was the emergence of their traditional cuisine and participation in communal meals. Also, in a Thessaloniki, at a school within a course, migrant / refugee students were asked to refer to something nice from their own country. Some Kurdish pupils brought cardboards and with the help of their Greek classmates they set up a monument and began to tell the story of the monument in Greek. They felt great pride and the desired acceptance and integration was achieved. Another example concerns a practice that was applied by a philologist for a refugee student of the 3rd Lyceum in GEL, who did not know Greek but knew English. So his philologist gave the literary exam translated into English. The child responded and felt great.

Conclusions of Field Research

All education professionals that participated in the field research of Primary and Secondary schools agree that the current practices used for the evaluation of the prior (educational) knowledge of migrant/ refugee children do not respond to their real needs.

Participants in all focus groups also commented that they have not attended any specialized training and that they believe that education professionals are in dire need of further training and education.

Most of the participants disapproved the fact that migrant / refugee pupils are being assessed only in Greek and confirm a need for evaluation in their mother language and in other subjects of school. Such as Physics, mathematics.

Further more they agree that the demand of the Greek language knowledge is a big barrier for the integration of the children because it creates difficulties in the cognitive level, as Greek is considered difficult and it is being taught in an academic way in schools. Moreover, the violent interruption of their mother tongue teaches makes it harder for them to adapt in a new reality. The current evaluation methods for assessing the prior knowledge of children take little time and do not give a complete assessment of each child.

Participants agreed that the level of knowledge of the different native languages of migrant/ refugee children are not evaluated due to a lack of interpreters or the existence of teachers who know the child's mother tongue. There are also no linguistic / cultural mediators to help the communication of teachers with the child or the refugee family. It is imperative to strengthen their mother tongue and culture. Integrating them into an intercultural context and avoiding the loss of identity is a challenge. The biggest barriers that migrant / refugee children face are the lack of a language of communication,



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which creates difficulty in expressing thoughts, emotions, as well as socialization and interpersonal relationships. The acceptance from the social environment is quite difficult when the school environment is not supportive.

Furthermore, teachers suggest that it is important for the parent to be supportive and their presence is essential in order to be informed for their childrens' progress.

