

# MUST DO BETTER

Grading the Greek government's efforts on education for refugee children



*"No person shall be denied the right to education.  
[...]"*

**Article 2, First Protocol to the ECHR**

*"...Education shall be directed to the full  
development of the human personality and to  
the strengthening of respect for human rights  
and fundamental freedoms..."*

**Article 26 (2), Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

# Summary report card: improvement needed

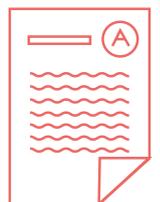
In recent years the government of Greece has struggled to live up to its obligations to ensure that all refugee and migrant children are promptly enrolled in school and receive a quality education. In this report three organisations, informed by interviews with children and based on information provided by the authorities, appraise the government's efforts over the past year in comparison to the previous one and provide recommendations for the improvement of the integration of migrant and refugee children into the Greek education system.

The report analyses six key indicators – a) enrolment, b) attendance, c) access to inclusive education, d) transportation to schools, e) adequate staffing and timely scheduling and f) action to end community hostility and xenophobia – that had previously been identified as key barriers. For each of these, the government has been assigned a grade ranging from fully meeting its obligations to deterioration of the situation from last year.

The government has made significant improvements in some areas, compared to the school year 2020-2021. However, actions by the government to restrict access to asylum, its halt to cash assistance for asylum seekers, and the denial of food support to recognized refugees, rejected asylum seekers and those not registered in the Reception and Identification System, have led to a deterioration in living conditions for families. This deterioration has in turn critically undermined positive efforts to get more refugee and migrant children enrolled and attending school.

## ► Six key indicators:

1. Enrolment
2. Attendance
3. Access to inclusive education
4. Transportation to schools
5. Adequate staffing and timely scheduling
6. Action to end community hostility and xenophobia



**“ Overall, the government is still far from meeting its obligations and urgent action needs to be taken ahead of the next school year.**

INDICATOR	OBLIGATION	SCHOOL YEAR 2021 -2022	GRADE	RECOMMENDATIONS
Enrolment	All children enrolled in school within three months of arrival in Greece.	17,186 children enrolled. A significant improvement on the previous school year when between 8,637-14,423 children were enrolled.	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issue strict instructions to school directorates that all children must be enrolled, regardless of their residence or legal status, or time of arrival.</li> <li>Run an outreach campaign on school enrolment for refugee and migrant families.</li> <li>Increase school capacity in urban areas and make alternative arrangements for children in areas where schools are oversubscribed or full in the meantime.</li> </ul>
Attendance	All enrolled children should attend school.	12,285 (75%) children attended school out of 17,186 children enrolled. An improvement from the 7,769 attending in the previous school year.  Continued dropout was the result of worsening living conditions, and the restrictions/difficulties children face in accessing asylum.	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide the necessary living conditions and adequate support in order for a child to be able to attend school, regardless of legal status.</li> <li>Simplify, improve the efficiency of, and remove costs associated with applications for asylum and residency.</li> <li>Address transportation, scheduling, staffing issues as a matter of urgency and take steps to create a more welcoming school environment.</li> </ul>
Access to inclusive education	Ensure access to education for groups that have historically been excluded.	A new UNICEF project was launched called <i>All Children in Education (ACE)</i> , aimed to facilitate the integration of refugee and migrant children in the formal education through non-formal education services. Still, systemic gaps persist.	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognise lack of inclusivity as a key barrier to attendance and promote a culture of inclusiveness in the educational system.</li> <li>Train teachers on intercultural education.</li> <li>Revise and adjust school materials to ensure accessibility and relevance for refugee and migrant children.</li> </ul>
Transportation	All children who need it are provided transportation to attend school.	Significant issues affecting children in several regions, although improvement overall.	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure all children who are in need of transportation have this provided at the beginning of the school year, even where tenders are unsuccessful or not yet agreed.</li> <li>Simplify and make the public tender procedure for school transportation more flexible.</li> <li>Recruit bus escorts for younger children before the next school year.</li> </ul>
Adequate staffing & timely scheduling	Reception classes are fully staffed at the beginning of the school year and start on time.	This year there were 110 facilities for refugee education (DYEP classes) & 86 active Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs) out of a total 97 that were appointed. Overall, an improvement on particularly delayed classes from the previous year.	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Urgently recruit additional Refugee Education Coordinators, teachers for reception classes and DYEP.</li> <li>Create an adequate number of reception classes and DYEP.</li> <li>Schedule reception classes to ideally start before regular classes, and no later than the start of the school year.</li> </ul>
Efforts to end community hostility	Authorities make efforts to ensure refugee and migrant families feel safe sending their children to school.	Efforts by UNICEF and the MoE to raise awareness and implement best practices. Critical issues remain racism, discrimination and the stigmatization of the refugee/migrant population, as well as violence and bullying in schools.	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create and implement an improved national policy on integration and inclusion.</li> <li>Create school-based, and out-of-school activities for migrant children, their families and the local community and cover costs for children who cannot afford to participate.</li> </ul>

# Methodology and scoring

The report reflects the developments in the education system in the school year 2021-2022, compared to the previous school year 2020-2021 and grades them in the following manner:

## Grading in comparison to last school year

A	B	C	D	Fail
Fully met obligation	Significant Improvement	Improvement	No change	Deterioration

Wherever possible, official statistics and data have been used to measure the government's performance. This was not possible in all cases due to lack of available statistical data. The report is also based on the views and perceptions of the children, parents, education professionals and draws on other secondary data.

13 separate focused group discussions took place with a total of 53 children aged between 3 and 18 years old and a young adult boy. The discussions took place in May 2022 in the camps of Ritsona and Lagadikia, in the Greek's Council for Refugees (GCR) Intercultural Centre "Pyxida" in Athens, in the Accommodation Centre for

Asylum Seekers "Philoxenio" of the Municipality of Thessaloniki and of "ARSIS" Association for the social support of youth and in GCR office in Thessaloniki in May 2022. The interviewed children come from 12 different countries (Afghanistan, Angola, Congo, Egypt, Guinea, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Somalia, Syria, Turkey, and Ukraine). Discussions were also conducted with 14 parents and 5 professionals from humanitarian organizations. All children in quoted in the report are anonymised to protect their identity.

While the quantitative and qualitative data in this report are limited, they provide a clear snapshot and are indicative of the situation across the indicators.

## Discussions with children

Location	Number of participants	School enrolment	Level of education enrolled
GCR's Intercultural Centre "Pyxida" in Athens	14	Yes (except 3 children)	Primary & Secondary
Ritsona camp	12	Yes	Secondary
Lagadikia camp	14	Yes	Primary & Secondary
Accommodation Shelter for Asylum Seekers "Philoxenio"	7	Yes	Primary
GCR office in Thessaloniki	6	Yes	Secondary
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>		



## The Right to Education and Greece's legal obligations to refugee and migrant children

The right to education is enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 28(1) and 29(1) of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)<sup>1</sup> and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (article 2 of the First Additional Protocol)<sup>2</sup>.

EU law, including L. 4939/2022 on reception, international protection and temporary protection (Article 55), stipulates that children who are applicants for international protection applicants are obliged to attend school and that *“competent authorities are obliged to provide the necessary and adequate means to support and facilitate the relevant procedure. The integration takes place under conditions, analogous to those that apply to Greek citizens”*. This integration must take place no more than three months after their identification.

The Greek national legislation also codifies this right to education for refugee and migrant children. Article 21 par. 7 of *Migration and Social Integration Code* (L. 4251/2014) provides for *“Minors-third-country nationals, who attend all levels of education, (to) have unrestricted access to the activities of the school or educational community”*.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Law 2101/1992, O.J. A' 192. The right to education derives from articles 28(1) and 29(1) of the CRC in combination with articles 2, 3 and 22(1).

2 The right to education is also guaranteed by the European Social Charter (revised) in article 17 par. 2, in combination with article 15 par. 1.

3 [1] See also: JMD 79942/ΓΔ4/2019 (O.J. 2005/B/31.5.2019) and JMD 2099/ΓΔ4 (O.J. 208/B /3.2.2020) providing for the unimpeded access of children third country nationals to public education.



# Report on six key indicators



# 1. Enrolment

Grade:

**B**

INDICATOR	OBLIGATION	SCHOOL YEAR 2020 -2021	SCHOOL YEAR 2021 -2022
Enrolment	All children enrolled in school within three months of arrival in Greece	Between 8,637 – 14,423 enrolled	17,186 enrolled

According to the Ministry of Education (MoE),<sup>4</sup> in the 2021-2022 school year, 17,186 refugee children were enrolled in school, a significant improvement from the previous year and the result of efforts by the MoE and in particular of the Independent Department for the Coordination and Monitoring of Refugee Education.

More specifically, 1,817 children were enrolled in Reception School Facilities for Refugee Education (DYEP classes), 10,718 children were enrolled in primary and secondary education schools with reception classes (3,294 children in primary and 1,538 children in secondary education) and 4,651 children in schools without reception classes.

This is a significant improvement from the previous school year (2020-2021) when school enrollment ranged from 8,637 to 14,423 children out of an estimated 20,000 eligible children<sup>5</sup>.

“ **School is a way for me to make my dreams come true.**

- L., 10 years old from Congo

▶ In the 2021-2022 school year, 17,186 refugee children were enrolled in school, a significant improvement from the previous year.



<sup>4</sup> Information provided 1 July 2022 by the Independent Department for the Coordination and Monitoring of Refugee Education of the Ministry of Education (MoE). The information refers to the period of January-February 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Greek Council for Refugees / Save the Children, *Back to School? Refugee Children in Greece Denied Right to Education*, written by Agapi Chouzouraki, September 2021, p. 3, [bit.ly/3lYXYRe](https://bit.ly/3lYXYRe)

Issues still remain, however, and the government is not fully meeting its obligation to enrol all refugee and migrant children.

In some areas, there is a shortage of available places, especially in Athens and Thessaloniki and in other urban centres<sup>6</sup>. In some instances, children move elsewhere in Greece or abroad (e.g. through Dublin family reunification), but their school places remain occupied and unavailable to other children seeking to enrol because schools are not officially informed of these movements and are obliged to keep children registered for a certain period.

Refugees and migrant children who are not in the official reception system or are homeless find it particularly hard to enrol.

**“ I do not go to school. I have been in Greece with my family for 3 years. We have been in Athens for the last 1 year. Earlier for 2 years we lived in Thessaloniki in Diavata camp, but we were not officially registered, because there was no space. We lived in a tent. We were told that from the moment we are officially registered, I will have the right to go to school.**

- F., 15 years old from Afghanistan

**“ I haven't been able to register myself and my daughter in a camp. We sleep in the streets and in the squares of Athens, but I can't sleep, I'm stressed out about what will happen next day. Will I be able to find food? Will we make it? I only dream of finding a roof over my head, a job and being able to enrol my child in Greek school. She's seven and has never attended school in her life.**

- A homeless African single mother, 29 years old

Some children who arrive in the middle of the school year are prevented from enrolling by school Directorates.

**“ This year my children managed to go to school for the first time. Last year they did not go because we arrived in the middle of the year and the school told us that it is not possible to register them.**

-N. a mother of a 5 and an 8-year-old from Lebanon

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<sup>6</sup> This was the case during last school year 2020-2021 according to the Greek Ombudsman's report, *Εκπαιδευτική ένταξη παιδιών που διαβιούν σε Δομές και ΚΥΤ του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης & Ασύλου* (in Greek), March 2021, p. 7, <https://www.synigoros.gr/paidi/>. Ombudsman's report findings regard data until mid-January 2021. This remains an issue in the year 2021-2022 according to information provided by the MoE in 1 July 2022. Difficulties in enrolment in Athens, but also in general in the urban centers, is due to schools being overcrowded and to lack of available classes.

The lack of legal documents appears to either discourage or prevent some families from enrolling their children.

**“ We arrived in Greece in September 2021 and lived in different parks. My children did not go to school immediately, because we did not have documents. We had not yet applied for asylum. We received documents around January 16, 2022. Now we have been informed that the children can go to school.**

- A father of a 10-year-old girl and a 5-year-old boy from Congo

In some cases, it is unclear whether the lack of legal documents means that refugees are being prevented by the authorities from enrolling, or that they have been provided with inadequate or incorrect information from the authorities. This is an issue with other information concerning school enrolment, with some children reporting that authorities told them they must learn Greek before enrolling.

**“ For about a year now we have been officially living in Athens, I have still not been able to go to school, because I was informed that I must first learn Greek.**

- F., 15 years old from Afghanistan

## Recommendations to improve enrolment



The Greek government should:



Increase the capacity of schools in urban centres of Athens and Thessaloniki, and in the meantime, provide transportation to schools in other areas for children who cannot attend currently oversubscribed schools.



Issue strict instructions to school directorates that all children must be enrolled, regardless of their residence or legal status, or time of arrival and regardless of the establishment or not of reception classes.



Run an information campaign on school enrolment which reaches all refugee and migrant families. In this campaign, the government should make clear there are no preconditions related to legal status or residence for enrolment and that knowledge of the Greek language is not a requirement.

# 2. Attendance

Grade:



INDICATOR	OBLIGATION	SCHOOL YEAR 2020 -2021	SCHOOL YEAR 2021 -2022
Attendance	All children enrolled should be attending school, as required under national law	7,769	12,285 attended

In the last school year 2021-2022, attendance reached 75 per cent<sup>7</sup>, i.e., approximately 12,300 children attending school. This is a significant increase in the number of children attending compared to the previous year, when rates were low overall and shockingly so in open accommodation centres (14 per cent attendance) and Reception and Identification Centres (less than one per cent)<sup>8</sup>. The increase in attendance reflects both the passing of the particular challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic response as well as emphasis in the government's efforts to increase attendance this year. It still falls far short of the government's obligations, however, and over a quarter of refugee children enrolled are not attending school.

The lack of language skills deters children from attending school.

<sup>7</sup> Information provided 1 July 2022 by the Independent Department for the Coordination and Monitoring of Refugee Education of the Ministry of Education (MoE). According to the MoE, this data regarding attendance is subject to constant change.

<sup>8</sup> Greek Ombudsman, *Εκπαιδευτική ένταξη παιδιών που διαβιούν σε Δομές και ΚΥΤ του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης & Ασύλου* (in Greek), *op. cit.*

**“ Most of the time my friends from the camp do not come to school and so, when I am left alone, I do not go either.**

- Z., 15 years old from Afghanistan

- ▶ More fundamental and structural issues negatively affect the ability of children to attend school, in particular related to their legal status and the deterioration of living conditions in the past year.



**“ A problem in school is that when we have Greek language course, the teacher or anyone who knows English translates into English. And children who don't speak English find it very hard to understand and participate.**

- B., 17 years old from Afghanistan

D., 14 years old from Egypt said the situation was particularly bad in Greece:

**“ I would like to go back to Belgium... It was better there. In Belgium they pay much more attention to children who don't understand the language.**

- D., 14 years old from Egypt

Children said that the difficulty in making friends is another issue that hinders school attendance and that some of their Greek classmates are reluctant to open up to those from a different culture.

**“ I like school very much, but I am somewhat afraid to go alone. And because I don't know the language, when I go to school alone, I don't know what to do, with whom to speak. And that makes it very difficult for me. And my classmates don't want to hang out with me that much. Sometimes I don't know what lesson we have, and they don't want to tell me.**

- P., 15 years old from Afghanistan

In addition, the fact that refugee and migrant children regularly have to move, often due to the asylum procedure, has a significant impact on attendance and plays an important role in the children's and parents' motivation.

**“ An important condition for dropping out is mobility. A child that comes for a short period of time, temporarily, does not want to study or enrol in programs because she/he does not feel motivated.**

- An education coordinator

More fundamental and structural issues negatively affect the ability of children to attend school, in particular related to their legal status and the deterioration of living conditions in the past year. Abrupt changes of children's legal status with issuance of final rejections of their family's asylum claim –or of their own in the case of unaccompanied children or young adults – is a common reality for a significant number of children.

Uncertainty regarding asylum claims causes enormous stress to children and adults. This undermines their ability to focus on their education.

**“ Recently we had a child who was 3.5 years in Greece and 2.5 years in the camp, attending senior high school. He was rejected and forced to leave. Most of the Afghans have received rejections. They live in insecurity and without papers.**

- Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs)

The possibility for the Appeal Committees to refer asylum seekers whose case was finally rejected to the Ministry of Interior to apply for

a humanitarian residence permit was removed during the previous school year 2020-2021. This situation led to many unaccompanied minors and children reaching adulthood without the ability to regularize their stay in Greece, leaving them at risk of destitution where the only option is often to work in harsh conditions to survive therefore, to abandon school.

In addition, in the last school year 2021-2022, change of children's legal status led to discontinuation of state support and assistance. Ministerial decisions denying specific groups of people access to food catering caused families additional stress and unwillingness to put education as their primary focus as they need their children to help them earn a livelihood. Amongst those excluded from food provision in the camps are people with valid refugee status, people who have not yet been registered in the reception system, and individuals whose request for asylum has been rejected.

**“ I don't have documents anymore since I was rejected. Also, I am not entitled to food anymore. But I still have dreams. I love to learn. Greek language is very rich and has opened many doors in my mind. Reading makes me eager to improve. I would like to study sociology and be able to 'say' something to this society. But as I don't have documents, they probably will not let me graduate**

- M. a young adult from Guinea

Fundamental issues regarding legal status and deteriorating living conditions were also identified as a problem by the MoE,<sup>9</sup> which

<sup>9</sup> Information provided 1 July 2022 by the Independent Department for the Coordination and Monitoring of Refugee Education of the Ministry of Education (MoE). The information refers to the period of January-February 2022.

recognizes that many students reaching adulthood receive rejection decisions to their asylum claims and lose their motivation to progress in school. The MoE also acknowledges the importance of other issues immediately related to children's attendance, such as the cuts of cash assistance, as well as the lack of medical, pharmaceutical and food aid caused by the change of their legal status.

## Recommendations to improve attendance



The Greek government should:



Ensure school age children have access to accommodation, hygiene and food assistance, and psychosocial support, regardless of their legal status.



Develop a plan to tackle the phenomenon of child labour for children forced to work to meet theirs or their families' basic needs.



Create a special legal status for children having reached adulthood and being left without documents, to improve their living conditions and continued access to education.



Provide an individualized plan for every child in need of educational assistance.

# 3. Access to inclusive education



INDICATOR	OBLIGATION	SCHOOL YEAR 2020 -2021	SCHOOL YEAR 2021 -2022
Access to inclusive education	Ensure access to education for groups that have historically been excluded	No specific initiatives for refugee and migrant children	<i>All Children in Education (ACE)</i> project launched in September 2021

Inclusive education means that all children should be able to learn in the same classrooms, in the same schools and that real learning opportunities are provided for groups who have traditionally been excluded, such as children with disabilities, speakers of minority languages or refugee and migrant children<sup>10</sup>. Through an inclusive education, children can develop a more secure sense of identity and confidence in their abilities and ideas, while being treated with respect inside the classroom. Adapting existing educational systems to this approach can be a long process, and requires the involvement of teachers, school directors and other education professionals.

In Greece, there are a number of barriers to inclusive education, including the culture in the school community and the existence of stereotypes and some negative views of “foreigners”.

**“ We would like to have projects that are inclusive and inspiring. Projects that help students create something.**

- A., 13 years old from Afghanistan

<sup>10</sup> See *Inclusive Education*, UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/education/inclusive-education>

The denial of registrations and the indifference towards children's attendance in school is a clear problem, but also the lack of a uniform approach to be implemented by school directors. This can range from a lack of skills or inadequate training on intercultural education, to school directors incorrectly applying the provisions governing children's school attendance, for example by barring admittance if no teacher has been hired for a reception class. This can lead to students not attending or dropping out of school.

On the other hand, Refugee Education Coordinators pointed to positive examples, and again highlighted the need for leadership from school directors.

**“ The Director sets the framework. Let me give you a very positive example: the first day [refugee] children start school, the Director arranges for the entire student's Council to be present to welcome them and introduce them to the other children. This is the first step to inclusion: a school that is willing to be inclusive.**

- Refugee Education Coordinator

In September 2021 UNICEF launched the project *All Children in Education (ACE)* with the collaboration of the MoE and Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA)<sup>11</sup>. The project aims to facilitate the integration of asylum-seeking, refugee, and migrant children in the formal education system through non-formal education services, such as interpretation services in schools, Greek language courses, psychosocial support for students and teachers' empowerment.

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11 UNICEF, press release entitled: 'Διαβατήριο' για την εκπαίδευση για 8.400 το ελληνικό πρόγραμμα ACE που θα γίνει πρότυπο για εφαρμογή σε όλη την ΕΕ (in Greek), June 17, 2022, <https://uni.cf/3a45Pum>

The combination of non-formal education activities and techniques, activities that include art and movement with the formal education curriculum is one way to help integrate refugee and migrant children into the educational system.

**“ We can learn better if school lessons are combined with something that we understand better, like music, theatre, dance, painting, photography.<sup>12</sup>**

- Children's reflections

**“ We would like to have photography, drawing or music classes. Lessons where language is not necessary. These lessons would help students feel closer to one another and have fun**

- High school student in Ritsona camp

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12 Focus Group Discussion in Ritsona camp.

# Recommendations to improve access to inclusive education

The Greek government should ensure that:



All teachers are adequately trained on intercultural education, buildings are refurbished and students receive accessible learning materials that are designed for their specific educational needs.



Curricula and school materials are revised and adjusted to ensure accessibility and relevance for refugee and migrant children.



Promote the development of projects that encourage the participation of all students such as projects through arts, music and theatre that overcome language barriers and enhance participation and interaction of all students.



A “best practices” platform for inclusion initiatives is developed, through which schools will be encouraged to learn from each other and cooperate with each other (i.e. through exchange programmes) and with local communities.



At the community level, projects are promoted to combat stigma and discrimination and individuals are educated on the benefit of inclusive education.



At the school level, school directors should encourage inclusiveness by the whole school community and not leave this responsibility to the teachers running the reception classes.



# 4. Transportation

INDICATOR	OBLIGATION	SCHOOL YEAR 2020 -2021	SCHOOL YEAR 2021 -2022
Transportation	All children who need it are provided transportation to attend school	In many parts of the country the necessary procurement procedure through the Prefectures was not concluded or the tenders failed. Also, the lack of escorts on the buses, whose presence for the transportation of younger students is mandatory by law (e.g., camps of Serres and Skaramaga) worsened the situation.	Most transportation problems have been settled due to the direct cooperation of MoE with the Prefectures, the Regional Directorates of Education and schools. Nevertheless, there were important gaps during the school year that prevented children from accessing school, like in central Greece-Ritsona.

The obligation of the state to provide the necessary and sufficient means to support and facilitate the attendance of children in the public education system includes the obligation to provide transport to school for those students who need it. In the case of child refugees and asylum seekers living in refugee accommodation structures (camps) and in Reception and Identification Centres (RICs), the transfer is necessary, as these facilities are often deliberately situated in remote - and often inaccessible - locations. In Greece, competent authorities for the transportation of students are the Prefectures. During the previous school year 2020-2021, in many areas of the country, transportation of children to school was not provided or did not work properly and smoothly, largely due to issues with transport contracts between the decentralised administrations (Ministry of Interior) and the bus companies<sup>13</sup>.

“ There are 80 children left out of school since the beginning of the year. Because they are enrolled in schools for which there are no buses. We face this problem every year. They announce that they have found buses for half of the schools. And what about the other children? Transportation is a big problem because camps are mainly built outside urban areas.

- Refugee Education Coordinator

<sup>13</sup> Greek Ombudsman, *Εκπαιδευτική ένταξη παιδιών που διαβιούν σε Δομές και ΚΥΤ του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης & Ασύλου* (in Greek), *op. cit.*

According to the Greek Ombudsman, during the school year 2020-2021, even as late as early January 2021, the necessary procurement procedure had not concluded or the tenders had failed in many parts of the country. Therefore, in many areas of Greece, pupils were not able to reach school even until February 2021 (e.g. Leros and Samos RICS, camps of Malakasa, Oinofyta, Ritsona, Filippiada)<sup>14</sup>. Also, the fact that DYEP classes of primary and secondary education were not functioning until the beginning of January 2021 due to delays in their staffing, transportation contracts for a number of these areas were not concluded since students were not attending school. The reluctance shown by bus companies to participate in tenders may also be due to the fact that there were cases of camps being completely shut down following ministerial decisions, and the tender was therefore a financially risky proposition.

During the school year 2021-2022 there were improvements from the previous year but some areas remained affected by the lack of transportation, such as Ritsona camp.

According to the MoE the main reasons for this include<sup>15</sup>:

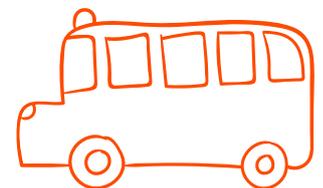
- ▶ Unsuccessful tenders for transportation.
- ▶ Related to this, sudden departures of refugees with the closure of structures continue to deter prospective transport contractors to participate in tenders, due to the risk of financial loss. MoE is often not consulted or notified of these closures.
- ▶ There is continued lack of escorts that are required during the transfer of students of the first two classes of primary school and of students of special schools. In cases, the competent authorities do not want or cannot hire and train a sufficient number of escorts.

The lack of or delays in transportation was cited by children and RECs as a continuing barrier to education this year.

**“ This school year, out of the 30 primary schools where our children are registered, school buses were found for only 12 of them. And for secondary education, I had to find a donation. That is, if no donation was found, no child could go to secondary school.**

- Refugee Education Coordinator

During the school year 2021-2022 there were improvements from the previous year but some areas remained affected by the lack of transportation.



14 Ibid.

15 Information provided 1 July 2022 by the Independent Department for the Coordination and Monitoring of Refugee Education of the Ministry of Education (MoE).

# Recommendations to improve transportation

The Greek government should:



Make all necessary arrangements and procedures so that all children residing in camps, RICs or urban areas that need transportation have this provided at the beginning of the next school year.



Recruit bus escorts for younger children before the beginning of the next school year.



Simplify and make the public tender procedure for school transportation more flexible.



Where tenders are unsuccessful, the government should provide other means of transportation as is the case with Greek children, i.e. by providing taxis, vans etc.



Consult all relevant actors prior to announcing closures of refugee camps and structures, and do not implement any such closures during the school year.



# 5. Adequate staffing & timely scheduling

Grade:



INDICATOR	OBLIGATION	SCHOOL YEAR 2020 -2021	SCHOOL YEAR 2021 -2022
Adequate staffing and on-time scheduling of reception classes and DYEP	Reception classes and DYEP are fully staffed at the beginning of the school year and start on time	Significant delays in staffing reception classes (end of October) and an insufficient number recruited. DYEP classes understaffed until January.	An unclear number of reception classes, but 1,358 teachers recruited for reception classes both in primary and secondary school. 110 DYEP classes with 220 teachers recruited.

Reception classes and DYEP are often critically understaffed and unable to operate for much of the school year. Schools in Greece start in September, but reception classes and DYEP are often not fully staffed until the middle of the school year. According to MoE, in the school year 2021-2022, 97 RECs were appointed (with 86 currently active)<sup>16</sup> and 110 school units with DYEP classes functioned (83 in primary and 27 in secondary education). Also, 1,358 teachers were recruited for reception Classes of primary and secondary education and 220 teachers recruited for DYEP classes, in total 1,578 recruitments of teachers during school year 2021-2022. This is an improvement from the previous year.

**“ We would like to have projects that are inclusive and inspiring. Projects that help students create something.**

- A., 13 years old from Afghanistan

<sup>16</sup> According to the information provided on 1 July 1 2022 by the Independent Department for the Coordination and Monitoring of Refugee Education of the Ministry of Education (MoE), 47 RECs were appointed in Camps/ Accommodation Centres and 5 in the RICs of Samos, Chios, Lesbos, Leros and Kos.

It should be noted that this improvement comes after a particularly poor performance the year before. In January 2021 most of DYEP classes remained without staff and were not operational, leaving refugee and asylum-seeking children in a stressful limbo<sup>17</sup>. According to the Greek Ombudsman<sup>18</sup>, during the previous school year 2020-2021 there was a delay in many parts of the country, with reception classes staffing taking place only around the end of October. According to Ombudsman's report, the operation of DYEP in almost the entire territory had not started until the beginning of January 2021, due to a delay in the placement of the teachers, and even those that did eventually start were not enough to cover the needs.

Lack of an adequate number of reception classes and their timely staffing continued to undermine children's attempts to integrate in class.

**“ The kids who went to school and took lessons earlier than me are further ahead, especially in the Greek language... I feel I cannot catch up with them, as they are taught higher subjects than they teach me. The kids who are now in school learned the basics and from the basics they build their language. I don't have anyone to help me.**

- J., 17 years old from Syria

<sup>17</sup> Greek Council for Refugees / Save the Children, *Back to School? Refugee Children in Greece Denied Right to Education*, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Greek Ombudsman, *Εκπαιδευτική ένταξη παιδιών που διαβιούν σε Δομές και ΚΥΤ του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης & Ασύλου* (in Greek), op. cit.

## Recommendations to improve staffing and scheduling



The Greek government should:



Recruit more teachers for reception classes and DYEP and create adequate reception classes and DYEP to address the needs of children.



Urgently recruit additional Refugee Education Coordinators.



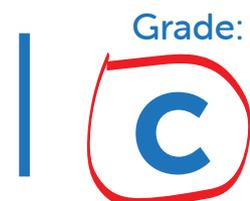
Schedule reception classes to ideally start before regular classes, and no later than the start of the school year.

The European Union should:



Simplify the process of applying for funding for reception classes and prioritise investments in refugee and migrant education in its overall funding allocations for Greece.

# 6. Efforts to end community hostility



INDICATOR	OBLIGATION	SCHOOL YEAR 2020 -2021	SCHOOL YEAR 2021 -2022
Efforts to end community hostility and ensure effective inclusion of refugee and migrant children	Authorities make efforts to ensure refugee and migrant families feel safe sending their children to school	Xenophobic & anti-refugee incidents. Alleged hate crimes & hate speech under investigation Negative attitudes from local communities remain.	Efforts from UNICEF's ACE project and the MoE, with informative sessions carried out gradually throughout Greece, which involve all the competent authorities and whose objective is to smoothen up reactions, raise awareness, remind of obligations etc. Critical issue remains racism, xenophobia and the general stigmatization of the refugee/migrant population and the lack of an adequate integration policy. Violence / bullying in schools, affect the most vulnerable children.

Xenophobic and hostile incidents towards refugees are not uncommon in Greece and they negatively impact children's access to education. There has, for example, been continued community opposition to the establishment of reception classes and DYEP. In some cases, this opposition even resulted in investigations by prosecutors of alleged hate crimes. In other instances, parents requested courts to annul the establishment of classes<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Attends the 1st class of senior high school. Our conversation took place during a group discussion in Lagadikia camp.

<sup>20</sup> Greek Council for Refugees / Save the Children, *Back to School? Refugee Children in Greece Denied Right to Education*, op. cit., p. 5.

**“ I believe it is because we are refugees. They don't want us to be in their class because they believe that we are dirty, and that we are thieves. So, they try to keep their stuff away from us.**

- B., 16 years old from Iraq<sup>19</sup>

According to a report by the Greek Ombudsman in 2021, children in more than half of the camps and RICs stated they encountered negative attitudes and reservations from the local communities, and that this negatively affected the inclusion of children in school. Ritsona camp is such an example, where until early 2021, the majority of children in primary school were not able to register in the local school on the grounds that a DYEP class was about to start inside the camp, something that never happened<sup>21</sup>.

It also affects refugee and migrant children's relations with other pupils, and their ability to enjoy their right to education.

More broadly, during the current school year 2021-2022, bullying and violence in schools remains a critical issue for all children in Greece, with the most vulnerable particularly affected.

**“ We had an excursion, but they did not inform me. I went to school and saw that the other children were gathered. All the children were given the paper (for the excursion). They did not give it to me.**

- A., 13 years old from Afghanistan

The lack of a clear national integration policy means that there is no systematic governmental effort to address these issues. However, this year the MoE together with UNICEF has taken steps to address the problem, organising field visits to different regions to change how local communities react to the educational inclusion of refugee and migrant children, and to mobilise local mechanisms and actors like the National Public Health Organisation (NPHO / EODY) and MoMA site managers<sup>22</sup>.

21 Greek Ombudsman, *Εκπαιδευτική ένταξη παιδιών που διαβιούν σε Δομές και ΚΥΤ του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης & Ασύλου* (in Greek), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

22 Information provided during an NGO meeting with ACE UNICEF, 31 March, 2022.

## Recommendations to improve efforts on ending community hostility and ensuring effective inclusion of refugee and migrant children



The Greek government should:



Develop an improved national policy on integration and inclusion and a plan for its implementation in all schools in the country.



Run school-based, and out-of-school activities for all children and their families with the local communities and cover costs for children who cannot afford to participate.

# 7. Children's recommendations

During the course of interviews and focus group discussions with children in Greece, they made a number of recommendations to the Greek government and schools regarding their education. These include:



**We love school, but we would like a more welcoming environment from the side of the other students and from the teachers. We also have dreams: to become doctors, dentists, artists, engineers, computer programmers, actors [...]. But we need a school to accept us for what we are.**



**We would like the other teachers (except the ones of Greek language) to help children who don't understand very well.**



**We would try to learn to the children to get along well with one another, not to insult one another. And to take care of each other.**



**We would like lessons with interaction and collaboration among the students. To show them what we know and for them to teach us what they know.**



**We would tell students that refugees are also humans, like everybody. You are human. I am human. In case we do something wrong, they can teach us, they don't need to fight with us.**



**The teachers need to be taught the way to create a positive atmosphere for all students. And to understand that excursions are important for us and that common activities with Greek children in or outside school help us make a strong bond; make friends.**



**School needs to be changed. Children should love one another and not accuse others because of their nationality. Many times, they don't say it, but they imply it with their behaviour. We are in the classroom and during the lesson, they look at us, point at us and laugh with us. In the end, we had to change class.**

