



immerse

INTEGRATION MAPPING OF REFUGEE
AND MIGRANT CHILDREN

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS PAPERS ON REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN'S INTEGRATION

GREECE



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National recommendations paper – Greece: The socio-educational integration of migrant and refugee children in Greece: policy recommendations from IMMERSE H2020 project

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1. Executive summary

This policy paper reviews the indicators, the results of the analysed survey data, and consultation efforts from the IMMERSE project in Greece, highlighting good practices by macro, meso and micro level stakeholders in regard to the socio-educational integration of migrant children into Greek schools and other learning environments (informal educational settings). It aims at formulating policy recommendations on policy areas where the Greek government education authorities, educational institutions, international organizations' and NGO experts, and all stakeholders involved in working with migrant-background children, could enact changes to the benefit of the integration process.

2. The Greek context

According to the most recent census (2021), in Greece foreigners range from 810.000 to 940.000, and account for 7.4% to 8.4% of the population¹ and it is estimated that over 15% of migrants are aged between 0-14. An estimate of 75% of refugee children have access to pre-school, primary and secondary education (statistics of the improved 2021/2022 year²). The percentage is higher for the participation of first- and second-generation migrant children.

Governmental integration strategies in Greece aim to increase the participation of refugee and migrant children in the education system, while striving to improving the living conditions of all marginalised social groups³. Support in the form of additional specialised teaching staff is available to schools, who have high numbers of migrant students⁴.

However, 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 (AIDA, 2023)⁵. The

¹ According to resident permits issued in December 2022 from the Ministry of Migration, the percentage is higher. The total permits issued were indeed 755,806 (out of which 222,000 EU citizens and expats, 472,000 third country nationals, 61,907 recognized refugees). Adding to those numbers 197,855 pending asylum requests, 2,588 requests for renewal for international protection and 22,316 new requests for international protection, plus 22,280 Ukrainian nationals under temporary EU protection, then the total number is 1,000,845, which accounts for 9,54% of the general population (10,482,487) (Census, 2021).

² For more recent figures see UNICEF, Dec. 2022, showing a significant increase 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). 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.

³ See Integration Strategies, Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA). Social benefits are scarce. Since the end of the ESTIA programme in 2022, the Ministry of Migration covers a total of 5,120 applicants with CASH assistance (one third of needs) whereas accommodation is mostly camp based for newcomers. This is an important barrier to access to education.

⁴ See best practices and initiatives cited by the MoE, such as teachers4integrations, schools4All, Accelerated Learning Platform for non-linguistic courses etc., available at: <https://migration.gov.gr/en/migration-policy/integration/draseis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/mathimata-ellinikis-glossas/?fbclid=IwAR3CNi-cEalfewpTqjZCMWHUFzOhYz0EH8BTn-pHU-6N1JthmXg2SPXHZ8B0>; <https://www.minedu.gov.gr/ekpaideusi/refug-educ>

⁵ As from 2020/2021, school enrolment of refugee and migrant-background children raised from 8,637 to 14,423 children out of an estimated 20,000 eligible children. As for the 2021/2022 school year, and according to the data presented by the Minister of Education to the Parliament in February 2022, 26,015 students "born outside Greece, attend Greek elementary and high schools". See also AIDA, 2023 and UNICEF, 2022).



main barriers in enrolment include the limited school capacity in urban areas⁶ and the lack of information by school Directors that all children, even the ones without regular residence (i.e. who are not included in the official reception system or are homeless) and children arriving in the middle of the school year, have the right to enrol. Another key issue relates to the access to schools due to constant changes in accommodation of refugee children.

The situation has gradually improved thanks to a normalisation of both asylum procedures and educational integration efforts of the government in cooperation with UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM (AIDA 2023). However, despite the positive steps undertaken by the Ministry of Education (MoE) during the school year 2021-2022, and the announcements made at the beginning of the school year 2022/2023 for an upgraded education system and improved school integration of refugee students, numerous shortcomings remain in school enrolment, attendance, and transportation to and from schools (e.g. from camps to urban areas). At the beginning of the school year 2022/2023, Greek Refugee Education Coordinators reported that a significant number of children with their families have moved within Greece, due to the termination of the ESTIA accommodation programme. This forced students to leave their school and enrol in new schools in other regions, disrupting their education and integration into the school community. Moreover, the new asylum application system introduced on 1st September 2022, is another hindrance to school enrolment and attendance. Lack of proof of asylum applications lodged electronically, until official registration at one of the Reception and Identification Centers (RICs), make children and their families 'invisible' to the state. The lack of legal documents appears to either discourage or prevent some families from enrolling their children to schools⁷. Finally, families' fear of being deprived of their freedom of movement or arrested, deters parents from approaching public authorities generally, including schools (AIDA, 2023).

When it comes to unaccompanied minors, their situation has significantly improved in the last year. Positive developments include the launching of the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM), which operates under the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA)⁸, in April 2021, and the legislative abolition of 'protective custody' (i.e. detention) in 2020. However, UAMs still face challenges due to the lack of an effective guardianship system⁹. When it comes to education, relevant data statistics¹⁰ show that 8 out of 10 UAMs enrol in schools. However, when it comes to actual attendance, statistics are disheartening. According to focus group discussions by researchers, as well as studies (Anadoxoi Ekpaideytikoi, 2023) 6 out of 10 UAMs leave the shelter before the end of the school year and therefore discontinue education. Out of the remaining 4 in the shelters, only 1 continues school until the end of the school year, whereas 3 leave school eventually for different reasons.

6 The rate of school attendance was higher for those children living in urban areas, and in apartments provided by UNHCR accommodation scheme as part of the "ESTIA" programme which is no longer running (Emergency Support to Integration and [urban] Accommodation programme, funded by the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) since 2017-2021), as well as for unaccompanied children in reception camps (66-67% according to UNICEF, 2019). School attendance was especially difficult on the Eastern Aegean islands, when children were obliged to remain for prolonged periods – because of a mandatory geographical restriction that applied to their parents or for UAMs until an accommodation place was found (Council of Europe, 2018).

7 When children cannot prove the legality of their residence, they face difficulties in school enrolment, as an identity document and proof of vaccination booklet are usually requested during enrolment, despite not being a legal requirement.

8 Ministry of Migration and Asylum

9 GCR, Oxfam & Save the Children, Greece: Bimonthly Bulletin on Refugees and Migrants, October 2022, available at: https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/GCR_OXFAM_STC_Advocacy_Update_October_2022.pdf, pp. 9-10 and AIDA Report on Greece, 2022 Update, June 2023, available at: https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AIDA-GR_2022-Update.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3wGtKYGIBQLVQZmKyGje4IUKwAMdsAGXn5vKwK8BlI2JrAuNErWiuxmk, pp. 19-20, 53- 54.

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RSA, A Step backwards for protection and integration: On the termination of the ESTIA II housing programme for asylum applicants, 22 December 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/43vr3Y5>;

For the relevant data see MoMA, Situation Update: Unaccompanied Minors (UAM) in Greece, 1 July 2023, available at: https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SSPUAM_Statistics_2023_07_01.pdf.

10 The most recent ones by ANADOXOI EKPAIDEYTIKOI (surveys on UAMs in shelters, comparing 2018- 2022 school attendance), as well as by GCR, 2023 and AIDA, 2023.

Finally, not all of those who stay, manage to get promoted for the next class. Those who do are mostly enrolled at primary school.

Refugee children and especially UAMs are five times more exposed to Early School Leaving (ESL), compared to natives (Greece has one of the lowest share of ESL, 3%, (Psiphidou, 2022, Brown 2021).

3. IMMERSE project: evidence-based considerations and critical issues

IMMERSE Dashboard of indicators

IMMERSE (*Integration Mapping of Refugee and Migrant children in Schools and other Experiential environments in Europe*) is a Horizon 2020 project, managed by 11 partners from 6 European countries – Belgium, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain. It aimed to map children's integration in education across a range of indicators identified during the first phase of the project. Integration indicators include factors associated with language and culture, well-being and social connections. Whereas barriers and facilitators identified include those associated with school organisation, mental health services, negative attitudes and learning supports. A key outcome of the research is the development of an interactive dashboard built applying a co-creative methodology that included iterative consultations of children and other relevant stakeholders at different stages. The indicators allow a comparative overview of the degree of integration experienced by children in different countries, monitoring its evolution in time and identifying areas of future intervention in a given context¹¹.

Data collection results for Greece

Three thousand two hundred seventy-three surveys were completed in Greece, including 2,336 completed by children of refugee and migrant background, including UAMs¹². Out of these, 26,4% were attending primary school, 46,4% secondary school, 3% attended classes but not in regular secondary school, 1,7% declared they were not in any education at the time of the survey. When it comes to country of birth, around 65 countries were recorded, the majority 19% were born in Albania, 16,3% in Afghanistan, 10% in Somalia, 5% in Pakistan, 4,2% in Egypt and 3,7% in Congo. In the last phase of the project, several questionnaires were also completed by children from Ukraine (2,6%). Moreover, researchers collected data from 105 sites of formal education and 42 sites of non-formal education (in NGO premises or UAM shelters, mostly in Athens and Thessaloniki (76%), in 21 towns or suburbs (14%) and in 14 rural areas (10%). Additionally, 3 focus group discussions were held with UAMs and migrant children. Survey data indicated that migrant-background children in Greece expressed high levels of integration across a range of integration indicators: happiness, trust in schools, health services and justice services, but with some concerning trends regarding language, intercultural values at school, bullying, and the variables of age and gender.

Integration outcomes

Language and culture

Refugee and migrant children in Greece reported high and medium levels of competence in Greek (57% high and 32% medium), lower than in other IMMERSE countries (73% high and 21% medium), mainly because of the difficulty of the language. The percentage of high competence is lower in first-generation migrant children as compared to second generation and native children.

More than one-third of migrant-background children in Greece (36%) feel close to both their cultures of origin (parent's country of origin, language, or religion) as well as to other groups of people. This is well

¹¹ The interactive dashboard is in progress. Please visit the following link to discover the indicators: <https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/selection-and-creation-of-dashboard-of-socio-educational-integration-indicators/>

¹² Among children participants, 41,9% were 1st generation migrant children, 31,2% 2nd generation, and 27% non migrant children. 51,6% children identified themselves as male, 43,9% as female and 1,6% as "in another way". When it comes to their developmental stage at time of survey, 31,7% were in childhood (7-10 years old), 26,4% in early adolescence (11-13 years old), 29,6% in their middle adolescence (14-16 years old) and 11,6% in their late adolescence (17-18 years old). 0,4% were beyond the initial scope of the IMMERSE study (18+) but still attended schools or non formal education.



below the average (45%) and among the lowest values in IMMERSE countries, besides Italy. In contrast, almost half of them (49%) do not feel close to their cultures of origin, while only 15% feel close to their cultures of origin exclusively. Both percentages are above the average (44% do not feel close to their cultures of origin and 11% only feeling close to people from their culture) and among the highest values in IMMERSE countries, besides Italy.

Well-being

Eighty-four percent of migrant-background children reported being happy or very happy; the second highest across all countries surveyed (81%), together with Ireland (88%). Still 16% report not being happy or not at all happy, in line with the pattern across other IMMERSE countries (average 19%). However, feelings of happiness across participants in Greece differed by age and gender. As children grow, the proportion of them reporting happy feelings decreases (starting at 90% for 7 to 9-year-olds and finishing at 77% for 16 to 18-year-olds). Moreover, the participants in Greece that identified their gender in another way reported feeling less happy than their cisnormative peers (71%, versus 29% of male and female).

For those children in Greece enrolled in schools and surveyed, results indicated that 48% of migrant children expressed high levels of belonging in school and another 47% medium level of belonging in school.

On interconnections more than half of the migrant-background children in Greece (58%) declare a high level of support from friends and peers. This is above the average result across IMMERSE countries (54%). Almost sixty percent of migrant and refugee students declare a high support from teachers, being the second higher percentage among IMMERSE (average 57%), along with Spain (68%).

When asked about their degree of trust in teachers and the educational system, 72% of migrant-background older participants in Greece reported high level of trust. This is above the average result across IMMERSE countries (66%).

Data shows that most migrant-background children have a high degree of trust in doctors and hospitals (76%). Police and the justice system were trusted less (64%) and levels of trust are impacted by age with older migrant children being much less trustful of the police/justice system.

Qualitative data from the focus groups emphasised further the importance of friendships and family as sources of securing and belonging to refugee and migrant children. However, along with this was the negotiation of tensions arising out of cultural and religious differences and norms which the young people had to negotiate.

Integration barriers and facilitators

School organisation and teachers

In Greece 51% of school principals¹³ declared that intercultural values (e.g., appreciation of diversity, cultural awareness, openness, and tolerance) are one of the insignias of their schools and 44% that it is a very important issue, when presenting the schools to parents. Differently, according to teachers' intercultural values are an insignia for less than half (40%) of the sites in Greece, and intercultural values are very important for 57% of them.

According to both principals and teachers, in Greece schools promote parental involvement, however this is not necessarily adapted to parents' specific needs (language, culture, etc). Most schools (65%) do not offer channels allowing for parental involvement adapted for parents' needs.

Considering bullying experiences, 70% of both non migrant and first-generation migrant children reported they have never been bullied. The percentage was 62% for the second generation. Still when in workshops researchers asked, there was a general admittance of children having experienced racism. This might explain why they answered that they avoided places for fear of being treated badly (45% first generation, 40% second generation, 37% non-migrant children).

¹³ 61 principals completed questionnaires (more than half in relation to the 105 sites) and 68 teachers, which are high and significant numbers but still not representative of the principals and teachers' population in Greece..



Language and Psychosocial Support

According to the survey, the lack of language skills deters migrant-background children from attending school. Although children would prefer enrolment and receiving public school support within formal education, they often receive language support in non-formal education environments (NGOs, shelters, etc), through language support classes (68%) and extracurricular activities (61%). There were no differences in the percentage of children who attend extra-curricular activities by migrant background, with 64% of non-migrant background children attending such activities compared to 66% of first-generation and 57% of second-generation migrant children.

When it comes to full-time or part-time psycho-social or counselling staff, in Greece 71% of the interviewed school principals indicate that they do provide such kind of support in schools (49% part time, 22% fulltime).

Qualitative insights

Researchers in Greece organised focus group discussions with two groups of children from migrant backgrounds, who were participating in non-formal education (with a mix of recently arrived refugee and asylum-seeking children and unaccompanied minors, with an age range between 14 to 17 years old). School experience was discussed, as well as relationships within family, friends, experiences of racism, bullying.

According to the interviewees, school and education create a sense of belonging, provide opportunities for children to make friends, develop language skills and experience 'childhood'. However, UAMs shared their difficulties accessing appropriate education, whereas they have experienced discrimination, and even racism in (and outside) education settings. As main challenges, the difficulties to obtain appropriate legal documents (e.g. residency), and the strict rules of accommodation centres. For UAMs, friends and peers provide a sense of security and belonging. According to those who had experienced school education, they confirmed that school had been central to building these peer relations. The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on participants in terms of unsatisfactory virtual learning experiences was inescapable with some participants lacking essential requirements and support structures for remote learning, and many speaking of loneliness and loss of interaction with school friends but also family because of restrictions on travel and school attendance.

Good practices

From September 2020 to June 2021, the IMMERSE research partners collected 60 good practices, whose features were reported in a database to facilitate a comparative analysis¹⁴. Panteion University identified ten best practices included those initiated from within both the formal and informal education sector and within the community. Almost all (9) targeted newly arrived migrant children and refugee and asylum-seeking children and their families (8). Half (5) included unaccompanied migrant children in their target population while principals, teachers and social workers were targeted by almost all of the initiatives. Most of the best practice projects collected by Greece have multiple objectives aimed at achieving the integration of migrant children (some also include their families). They support both formal and non-formal settings, organise teacher training activities, handbooks and resources. Most are funded by the EU, or the EEA grants. The importance of involving children, as well as teachers in the education was a main pillar of these activities.

Among the projects identified, there were the Schools for All – Integration of Refugee Children in Greek Schools and the SEDIN Project - Creative Methods for Successful Inclusion in Multicultural Schools. Even if not mentioned in the IMMERSE database, a three-year long UNICEF project started operating during school year 2021-2022, named All Children in Education (ACE). The project aims to facilitate integration of refugee and migrant children in formal education through non-formal education services, such as interpretation services in schools, Greek language courses, and psychosocial support for students.

¹⁴ All 60 good practices can be found on IMMERSE's Online Digital Database <https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/online-digital-database-of-good-practices-and-resources-in-social-integration-of-refugee-and-migrant-children/>



All three projects (Schools4ALL, ACE and SEDIN) have as a main objective the integration of refugee children in Greek schools through support for teachers, as well as building a safe and inclusive school environment. Most training projects aim to equip school directors and teachers with the tools, competence, and confidence to manage controversy and deal with issues concerning intolerance, discrimination, racism and hate speech in school and the local community. The project Schools4All is implemented under the “Local Development and Poverty Reduction” programme in Greece, by the European Wergeland Centre (EWC), under the auspices of the MoE and Religious Affairs and with the support of the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP). ACE is implemented by UNICEF, the MoE and NGOs. The Erasmus+ project SEDIN was implemented from December 2017 until February 2020 in Greece, among other partners from Bulgaria, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Turkey. The consortium consisted of NGOs, universities, education and vocational training centres, and state institutions and was based on the idea that mainstream school environments of host countries and the traditional cognitive teaching models are often inadequate to address the needs of children with a migrant background. There is a growing need to introduce in the school environment, in cooperation with different stakeholders, alternative methods that cultivate the fantasy of the children and that promote emotional aspects of learning and positive interaction between migrant children and children belonging to the mainstream communities. SEDIN project developed an e-learning training – an asynchronous online course for teachers including relevant theory as well as practical examples.

A number of other projects coordinated by stakeholders in Greece, especially those working on the protection of children (such as UNICEF, UNHCR, Metadrasí, ARSIS and others) had as a common framework building trust and self-esteem through activities within non formal education which led to the highest number and percentage of refugee and migrant students enrolled and attending schools in 2021/22; and a significant improvement of quality non formal education, as a result of specialised training for staff working with UAMs in vocational orientation and employability guides were organised by MoMA, UNICEF and other experts (Unicef, 2022).

4. Policy implications and recommendations

Based on the insights of IMMERSE research activities in Greece, we formulate the following recommendations addressed to policymakers and the education system, to promote a more cohesive and inclusive society for migrant-background children.

We recommend the Government:

- to improve statistics and data collection on education, to make the necessary adjustments in the roll-out of the 2021 census that would allow to capture disadvantaged populations, such as Roma and refugee and migrants, and help inform evidence-based policies. In that respect the Government may foster the collaboration between UNICEF and the National Statistics Office (ELSTAT) in the framework of an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)
- to welcome and implement adequate solutions to the recommendations addressed by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), which reported that in Greece there is a continuation of racist violence cases against immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers and that hate speech and gender-based violence is particularly widespread on the Internet and in Greece, including against youth.
- to enhance and support new promising practices of synergy among Universities, IOs, Stakeholders and State Authorities.
- to address the obstacles the new asylum application system introduced on 1st September 2022 poses to school enrolment and attendance for children whose parents cannot prove the registration of the asylum claim that they lodge electronically.

We recommend the Ministry of Justice

- to guarantee effective implementation of the 2021 *National Action Plan (NAP) Against Racism* aimed to strengthen educational environments and address bullying in schools and discrimination

against LGBT children and migrants.

We recommend the Ministry of Education

- to acknowledge schools as a key institution in the long-term promotion of intercultural values
- to hold information days on the issues of racism and xenophobia, adapted to the respective age groups to which they are addressed.
- to guarantee funding for integration programmes.
- to adopt measures to protect young people, especially in school, from online hate speech.
- to provide funds and sponsor programs for higher education institutions and various organisations in order to conduct surveys on integration and xenophobia issues and to favour cooperation between different stakeholders.

We recommend the Ministry of Migration and Asylum

- to support a special legal status for children having reached adulthood and being left without documents and secure stable and continuous funding.

We recommend the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and the Ministry of Education

- to jointly work to promote the integration of refugee and migrant children through education, promoting good practices of socio-educational in schools and non-formal education setting, involving all relevant stakeholders, such as IOs, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, NGOs, Local Authorities, in coordination with the Ministry of Education, to increase the capacity of schools in urban centres of Athens and Thessaloniki, and provide transportation to and from schools and areas where refugee children and UAMs are living. Furthermore, to issue strict instructions to school directorates that all children must be enrolled, regardless of their residence or legal status, or time of arrival and provide funding for more qualified teachers and increased training in intercultural integration.

We urge the Ministry of Digital Transformation

- to create an effective network for the prevention and effective treatment of hate speech and relevant phenomena with special importance given to the internet.

We recommend school principals

- in case of children that cannot prove the legality of their residence, to facilitate their enrolment until their identity documents and proofs of vaccination are ready.
- to organise training sessions for school bullying as well as inter-cultural values for all (principals, teachers, children, parents) to mainstream relevant policies (see differences in replies by children on school bullying, and principals and teachers on inter-cultural values).
- including parents in the school life should consider and adapt to parents needs and ensure a two-way information sharing (see channels of communication results).
- part-time psychologists should establish trust with children in Schools (one day /week might not be sufficient).



Children's recommendations for inclusive schools and societies

During policy consultation activities, children formulated recommendations that could improve the socio-educational integration process of migrant-background children. Here are their proposals for an inclusive school and society:

- To develop more fun activities at school (like games, music, athletics, dancing) to strengthen social participation and inclusiveness.
- Teachers should listen and support more migrant-background children.
- To run an information campaign on school enrolment which reaches all refugee and migrant families, as well as school authorities. 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.
- To create a special legal status for children having reached adulthood and being left without documents.
- Children's voices should be taken into account in co-creating policies that affect their future. For example, youth committees can take part in initiatives of MoMA and the SSPUAM², with the support of NGOs working in the field.

5. Conclusions

The IMMERSE Project has proved to be essential in documenting the reality faced by refugee and migrant children in schools and non-formal educational settings in Greece. The dashboard of indicators, the data collection survey, the qualitative activities, with the direct participation of children, revealed the existence of good integration results, as well as numerous shortcomings, some evident, others difficult to detect, such as how we can reconcile the trust children show to their teachers with high school dropout rates for high school refugee children and UAMs. The data show the importance of synergies among relevant ministries, the need to connect housing benefits and educational realities in school enrolment, and the importance of streamlining migration policies with a view to achieving quality education for all. Moreover, it is fundamental to have targeted National Action Plans (NAPs) (not only for UAMs but for all refugee and migrant children; favour the coordination among NGOs and other IOs efforts at municipal and regional level; and guarantee funds to support long term projects. Recent initiatives and legislative changes have improved the situation of some groups of migrant children, such as UAMs, but specific actions are required to improve holistic integration.



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