

THE MiCREATE PROJECT

Policies for immigration and refugee education on the lens during COVID-19 times

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The effect of the pandemic on refugee education in Greece

Key facts:

- Six out of nine months of the school year 2020-21 in Greece spent in remote learning
- Refugee Hospitality Centers' (RECs) children worse affected
- Reception and Identification center in Lesbos : out of 2.090 school aged children, only 178 enrolled in state schools and only 7 managed to attend
- 850 students of Ritsona Refugee camp stayed out of school for 11 months
- Vagiochori Refugee camp near Thessaloniki went into lockdown earlier than local society
- Delays in staffing and establishing of classes meant most refugee children did not form bonds with school community before closures

The case study of Skaramagas refugee camp

- Skaramagas held good practices for refugee education: Hired transportation; Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs); Bridging of the gap between the refugee community and the local education community; Non-formal afternoon education activities

BUT during the pandemic:

- Delayed staffing of schools meant that schools closed before many refugee students began school
- Lack of data provision at camp hindered access to online learning
- NGO Danish Refugee Council assisted Non-Formal Education students with access to online learning
- Once schools re-opened, very few students returned
- Result: Very small number of refugee students actually attended school during the school year 2020-21

Digitalization of education in Greece (prior to the pandemic)

Greece's digital competences' levels received low scores in OECD assessments

Since 2000, Governments prioritized digitization of school environments:

- a) Routine use of smartboards and online environments in class
- b) Curricula and resources digitized
- c) Photodendron: Entire formal education curricula digitized online, with complementary material, activities, videos, simulations, virtual visits, online exercises, storylines, quizzes, links to reference material etc.
- d) Online learning environments (e-me, e-class, moodle, Webex, sch.gr etc.)
- e) Teachers trained on digital equipment tools use, during undergraduate / postgraduate training and professional development courses

(Digital Education Plan 2021-2027)

Extent of digital divide during the pandemic

Key facts:

- 64% of refugee students attended formal education prior of the COVID-19 lockdowns
- 11% continued education through distance learning during the lockdowns
- Enrolment rates to state schools fell from 12.867 in March 2019 to 8.637 in March 2021
- 82% of the refugee camps in Greece reported lack of access to equipment and data

Conclusion

- The digital divide between local and refugee population worsened during the pandemic

Reasons for digital divide during the pandemic: the physical aspect

Key facts:

- Migrant children, refugee children and ROMA children, systematically have less access to connectivity and digital services
- Mobile phones are used instead of laptops/ terminals
- Data most expensive item for refugee families
- Family size (usually large) affected quality of connection, as data shared
- All family members forced into house isolation used the same line (data overload, lack of private space)
- Refugee students in Refugee Hospitality Centers often had only mobile phone data

Reasons for digital divide during the lockdowns

- Lack of familiarization and awareness of necessity regarding use of digital tools
- Delay in starting refugee education live classes
- Digital skills varied among refugee students / Lack of instruction
- Lack of parental supervision : online participation harder to monitor than live participation
- Lack of motivation/stress of the pandemic

Online Safety

- Refugee/Migrant children sensitive to bullying/ cyberbullying
- More likely for refugee students living in refugee camps
- Efforts to prevent online bullying, with awareness campaigns, such as 'Mila', created by 'Internet 4 kids' by the Greek Center for Safe Internet and collaborations with NGOs, such as 'The smile of the child', Universities etc.
- Suspiciousness about students from refugee camps exacerbated, as lockdown restrictions held longer for refugee camps than for the general population
- This did not manifest to online bullying, but it translated as unwillingness by local communities to accept refugee children back to live schooling, once schools re-opened

Parental involvement

- Migrant parents show lower digital skills than average native parents (similar to pre-covid era)
- When parents possess digital competences, it affects positively the learning process of their children (help with access, translate materials, look into resources, connect online with class material and classmates)
- Parental low digital skills mean little involvement with children's online education
- Children acquired new skills, through peer teaching, rather than parents –but not feasible during isolation
- Parental digital competences have been attempted to be supported through special programs, such as 'The land of hope'

Initiatives to improve access to online learning in refugee camps

The Greek government funded free internet connection in refugee camps, but speed of connection compromised

NGOs allocated USB data sticks, but not sufficient for total number of children

NGO Elix provided:

- data and equipment to refugee students
- instructions for online learning platform use
- activation of vouchers for the purchase of digital equipment
- translation regarding the use of self-tests and the process of live schooling restart
- mediation with state schools regarding homework
- helpdesk operation regarding questions about the pandemic

Non-formal education activities in refugee camps during lockdowns

During March-May 2020 (first national lockdown):

- 77% of children participated in at least one of the distance learning activities organized by UNICEF NFE actors and/or through self-learning
- Overall rating by children positive for all distance learning tools
- Homework packages most used (72%)
- Girls have overall a higher participation rate in distance learning activities
- Lowest rate of participation was among 6-11 year-olds not enrolled in NFE (13%)
- Only 11% of the children enrolled in formal education participated in distance learning tools of the Ministry of Education

Future directions to bridge digital divide

- Preparations for similar situations in the future
- Provision of digital equipment
- Provision of data connection
- Monitoring of attendance / mediation
- ‘Zerorating’ Internet connection in refugee camps
- Encouragement of refugee students to attend
- Facilitation with translation

Thank you for your attention!