



**"Multi-country Partnership to Enhance the Education of  
Refugee and Asylum-seeking Youth in Europe"** Acronym: PERAE

**SIRIUS**

**Multi-country Partnership to Enhance the Education of  
Refugee and Asylum – seeking Youth in Europe**

**Refugee Education in Greece**

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## Table of contents

SIRIUS .....	1
Multi-country Partnership to Enhance the Education of Refugee and Asylum – seeking Youth in Europe .....	1
Refugee Education in Greece.....	1
March, 2017.....	1
Table of contents .....	2
Table of contents .....	2
Table of contents .....	2
Table of contents .....	2
Table of contents .....	2
Table of contents .....	2
Table of contents .....	2
Table of contents .....	2
Table of contents .....	2
1 Introduction.....	5
1.1 The structure of the education system in Greece .....	6
1 Primary Education (4 – 12 years old).....	6
2 Secondary Education (12 – 18 years old) .....	6
3 Higher Education – Tertiary Education (18+).....	6
1. Primary Education .....	6
A) Pre – primary schools .....	6
B). Primary schools.....	7
2. Secondary education.....	7
A) Junior high school .....	7
B) Senior high school (Lyceum) .....	7
3. Higher Education – Tertiary Education.....	7

1.2 Refugee children's general access .....	8
2 Desk Research.....	10
2.1 Asylum in Greece .....	10
2.2 Legal setting.....	14
2.3 Institutional setting.....	16
1. Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (during afternoon schooling) .....	17
2. Reception Classes (Level I & II, exclusively in school structures) .....	17
3. Reinforcing Coaching Classes (exclusively in school structures) .....	17
1. Reception Facilities for Refugee Education: .....	17
2. Reception Classes .....	18
a) Level I .....	18
b) Level II .....	18
3. Reinforcing Coaching Classes .....	18
2.4 State of literature.....	18
3 Fieldwork .....	21
3.1 Introduction.....	21
3.2 Limitations of the study .....	23
3.3 Results.....	23
3.3.1 Social integration .....	23
3.3.2 Interaction with other students.....	23
3.3.3 Assessment of refugee education in Greece .....	24
4 Conclusion .....	25
5 References .....	26
6 Annex.....	28

## 1 Introduction

This report is conducted in order to contribute to the purposes of SIRIUS, the Policy Network on Migrant Education. SIRIUS has established the 'Multi-country Partnership to Enhance the Education of Refugee and Asylum-seeking Youth in Europe' that aims to address and highlight inadequate access to quality education for asylum – seeking and refugee youth throughout the European Union. For this purpose, our attempt is to show in the clearest possible way the educational support and policies for young refugees in Greece.

Greece has been for many years a “migrant-sending” country. In the '50s and '60s a significant number of Greeks migrated to Western European countries, as well as to America and Australia, looking for job opportunities and better living conditions. Only at the beginning of the decade of 1980 the country began to develop its first educational integration policies on the occasion of the return of repatriated Greek emigrants, particularly from the former Soviet Union countries. For this cause, the government of Greece established the institution of reception and tutorial (coaching) classes (Law no.1404/1983<sup>1</sup>). The Greek state traditionally has been a monolingual and monocultural society with a strong national identity, and for many years the Orthodox Church retained an influential role in the organization of education and curriculum design<sup>2</sup> (Palaiologou & Palaiologou, 2016: 129). In the 1990s, the collapse of communist regimes in the ex-Soviet Union and the countries that were influenced in the Balkans opened their borders and brought a wave of migration. At the time, Greece was considered to be one of the most developed countries in the Balkans, and consequently started receiving illegal immigrants seeking a better financial future for their families, mainly for the poorest countries of the Balkan zone (Palaiologou & Palaiologou, 2016: 130). The main waves of immigration came from Albania, Romania and Bulgaria. This wave of immigration continued during the 2000s. The large number of second and third generation migrants and the new waves of immigration from Eastern European countries in the early '90s were the reason for the adoption of the first law on intercultural education (Law no. 2413/1996<sup>3</sup>). The law set as purpose of intercultural education to organize and enable “primary and secondary school units to provide education to young people with educational, social or cultural inequalities” (article 34, paragraph 1<sup>4</sup>). Moreover, the geopolitical position of Greece made it a refugee reception country. Refugees were arriving to the country as a first stop, with the intention to relocate to Northern European countries.

The massive refugee crisis on 2015 forced Greece to respond to the new circumstances. With a series of legislative initiatives, the government tried to shield institutionally the education of refugees, in response

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<sup>1</sup> Law no. 1404/1983 Official Government Gazette 173/24.11.1983 entitled “Establishment of reception classes and tutorial classes” amended by Law no. 1894/90 Official Government Gazette A – 110/27.8.1990 entitled “Replacement of the article 45 of Law no. 1404/1983”

<sup>2</sup> Until now the Ministry of Education in Greece is called Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs

<sup>3</sup> Law no. 2413/1996 Official Government Gazette A – 124/17.6.1996 entitled “The Greek education abroad, intercultural education and other provisions”. It has now been replaced with Law no. 4415/2016 Official Government Gazette A – 159/6.9.2016 entitled “Arrangements for Greek language education, intercultural education and other provisions”

<sup>4</sup> Page 2450

both to the global humanitarian crisis and the European directives and commitments. Malfunctions emerged immediately: delays, lack of coordination, inhuman conditions in reception centers, lack of central policy planning. However, conscientious efforts were made that should be recognized. A flexible scheme for education of refugees has been developed (within and out of the limits of reception centers), teachers have been hired to work in the Reception Facilities for Refugee Education and non - governmental and international organizations offer their services by providing educational and creative activities to refugee students. So far, the results are encouraging.

In 2016 Greek Asylum Service received a total number of 51,091 asylum applications of which 14,806 were children aged 0 - 13 and 4,915 between 14 - 17 years old (Ministry of Migration Policy, 2016). In the above total are also included unaccompanied minors who are estimated to be 2,352. Despite the urgent need for education and integration for these young refugees it seems that the Greek Educational System was unprepared. The Greek government itself has characterized the school year 2016/17 as a “preparatory year”, focusing on the transition of refugee children from camps to school life and culture (Ministry of Education, 2016). That reflects both the lack of educational measures on refugee integration so far and optimism for more efficient policies during the next school year (2017/18).

### **1.1 The structure of the education system in Greece**

In Greece education is organized by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and is implemented locally by the regional directorates of primary and secondary education. Education is compulsory for all children aged between four and eighteen years old. The Greek education system is divided into three distinct steps (Law no. 1566/1985<sup>5</sup>):

#### **1 Primary Education (4 – 12 years old)**

#### **2 Secondary Education (12 – 18 years old)**

#### **3 Higher Education – Tertiary Education (18+)**

##### **1. Primary Education**

Primary Education comprises both nursery education (for children from 2 to 6 years old) and elementary education (for children from 6 to 12 years old). Primary education is provided in nursery and primary schools. It includes nursery stations (1 - 4 years old), day nursery (2 – 4 years old) and kindergartens (4 - 6 years old). Kindergartens may be part of centers that work together with state nursery schools (nursery centers).

##### *A) Pre – primary schools*

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<sup>5</sup> Law no. 1566/1985 Official Government Gazette A – 167/30.9.1985 entitled: “Structure and operation of Primary and Secondary Education and other provisions”

Pre - school life starts at the age of 2,5 years old. Toddlers attend a special day–care center or nursery schools that are state-run or private. Additionally, children may attend the Primary Day–Long School which functions within a larger time schedule (from 8.00 – 16.00) compared to the typical kindergarten that runs from 7.45 – 13.05. Pre-primary education is provided in kindergartens operated either independently or in care centers. Attendance lasts two years and an infant in order to be enrolled must have completed its fourth year of age. Kindergartens can be either one - seated (7 - 30 infants) or two-seated (31 - 60 infants).

#### *B). Primary schools*

Elementary schooling is compulsory. Attendance lasts six years and includes six grades. Students start at the age of 6 and finish at the age of 12. They are taught subjects such as Greek language, Mathematics, Science, Geography, Religion (from 5<sup>th</sup> grade), Physical Education, History, Foreign Languages (English, French, German), Computers, Art and Craft, Environmental Studies and more. Students do not take exams at the end of the school year to qualify for the next grade. School starts at 8.00 and finishes at 13.15 or 14.00 depending on the daily schedule. Besides there are all–day primary schools finishing at 16.00.

### **2. Secondary education**

Secondary education is organized for minors from 12 to 18 years old who have completed their six-year elementary education. There are two educational cycles in secondary education: junior high school (for students from 12 to 15 years old) and senior high school (for students from 15 to 18 years old). Each cycle lasts three years.

#### *A) Junior high school*

Secondary education attendance in junior high school is compulsory and is addressed to students aged 12 - 15. The duration of studies is three years and includes three grades (A, B and C). It can also operate in evening classes for working (must be at least 14 years old) or adult students. Students take written exams at the end of the school year in June, to qualify for the next grade. Students who do not succeed, retake an examination in September. Finally, the students who graduate are awarded a Junior High School Diploma that allows them to continue their studies in Senior High School (Lyceum).

#### *B) Senior high school (Lyceum)*

Students with a Junior High School Diploma can be enrolled in Senior high schools without exams. The duration of studies is three years and includes three grades (A, B and C). Senior high schools can also be divided in morning and evening classes (for working students). Students who graduate from Senior high school (General or Vocational) are awarded a High School Diploma and are entitled to take National Examinations at the end of the school year to enter Higher Education.

### **3. Higher Education – Tertiary Education**

Educational institutions of Higher Education can either be Higher Technological Institutes or Universities. Attendance at each of these lasts four years with the exception of Polytechnic Schools and Medicine Schools (where the duration is 5 years and 6 years respectively). A four-year university degree is equivalent to a Bachelor's Degree (Bologna Treaty) and allows students to continue their studies on a Master's Degree level



(two years minimum duration). Students who do not wish to take National Examinations can enroll in Vocational Training Institutes and practice technical professions.

## 1.2 Refugee children's general access

According to the formal procedure the parents of refugee children who wish to enroll their children in the Morning School, contact the local Directory of Education in order to direct them to a specific school. Education Directorates have the supervision, are informed and responsible to guide refugee parents to the appropriate school as well as inform them regarding the document procedure. The principals enroll the children and take the necessary actions to the Ministry of Education in order to create Reception Classes or other supporting educational structures in the school. For a foreign secondary student to be enrolled in Secondary Education schools in Greece, he/she needs to hold a diploma or proof of study or any other relevant document of educational status (Circular 108457/D2/4-7-2016). For registering underage citizens of third countries in Greek schools of all levels certain respective documents are required from the nationals.

In exceptional circumstances, with insufficient documentation students can be enrolled in public schools as third countries children if they (Law no. 4251/2014<sup>6</sup>):

*a) are protected by the Greek State as beneficiaries of international protection or under the protection of the UNHCR United Nations,*

*b) come from areas where the situation is unsettled,*

*c) have applied for asylum,*

*d) are third country nationals residing in Greece, even if their legal residence has not been regulated (article 21, paragraph 8<sup>7</sup>).*

The school director indicates the bodies to which the person can apply to supplement the relevant documents and support the procedure as far as possible. For this purpose the school may request the assistance of a social service of the nearby municipality or any other relevant administrative authority. By completing the documentation the student enrolls at the school with the information stated by his/her guardian.

Although this is the normal procedure provided by Greek law, in reality the access of refugee students in Greek education system is not that easy. In many cases, Directorates of Education do not have trained staff or interpreters to direct parents of refugee children appropriately. In addition, some school principals refuse to enroll refugee students due to incomplete documentation. In several cases (Oreokastro, Filippiada, Kos), when the afternoon classes for refugee students were about to start, there were reactions from some minorities in local communities against the newcomers (Brattou, 2016). The main arguments were that the newly arrived refugees would create an instability at public schools or that they could create a negative

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<sup>6</sup> Law no. 4251/2014 Official Government Gazette A-80/1.4.2014 entitled "Immigration Code, Social Inclusion and other provisions"

<sup>7</sup> Page 26

impact on the education of native students. These negative reactions, although limited, had a massive media coverage and received a lot of public attention, but admittedly, the majority of Greeks showed hospitality and solidarity to the refugees.

The role of Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs) has been particularly important in facilitating an easier access for refugee children in the school system. RECs are permanent teachers who were already working in public schools and were appointed by the Ministry of Education to undertake the coordination of educational activities in Refugee Education Facilities. But most of all, they were required to function as intermediaries, bring together the refugee population and the Greek education system and create bridges between the school and society (Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, 2017: 62).

## 2 Desk Research

### 2.1 Asylum in Greece

Greece has been traditionally been an emigration country for many decades. Nevertheless, over the last decades, due to its geographic location (crossroad between the countries of northern and central Europe and the countries of Asia and Africa) it has been turned into a country of destination and entry to the EU. Therefore, a reliable asylum procedure as part of a comprehensive management system of migration flows is essential. Greek legislation on asylum seekers is established under two basic laws:

a) Law no. 4375/2016<sup>8</sup> *“On the organization and operation of the Asylum Service, the Appeals Authority, the Reception and Identification Service, the establishment of the General Secretariat for Reception, the transportation into Greek legislation of the provisions of Directive 2013/32/EC 'on common procedures for granting and withdrawing the status of international protection (recast)' (L 180/29.6.2013), provisions on the employment of beneficiaries of international protection and other provisions”.*

b) Law no. 3907/2011<sup>9</sup> *“Establishment of an Asylum Service and a First Reception Service, adaptation of the Greek legislation to the provisions of Directive 2008/115/EC 'with regard to the common rules and procedures in Member States for the return of illegally staying third – country nationals' and other provisions”.*

The Asylum Service was established under Law no. 3907/2011. It is the first autonomous institution in Greece that is in charge of the examination of international protection claims. It forms part of the Ministry of Migration Policy and started operating on 07/06/2013. The Asylum Service, as part of its mission, is responsible especially for the following (Ministry of Migration Policy, n.d.):

- ☐ supporting the planning and drafting of a national policy on granting asylum or other forms of international protection, as well as monitoring and evaluating the implementation of this policy,
- ☐ receiving, examining and deciding upon international protection claims in the first instance,
- ☐ informing international protection claimants on the examination process of their claims, as well as on their rights and obligations during that process,
- ☐ collecting and evaluating information regarding the economic, social and political situation in the countries of origin of the third country nationals, as well as continuously monitoring any developments occurring in these countries, in cooperation for this purpose with Greek and other authorities, especially pursuant to international agreements,

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<sup>8</sup> Law no. 4375/2016 Official Government Gazette A – 51/3.4.2016

<sup>9</sup> Law no. 3907/2011 Official Government Gazette A - 7/26.1.2011 entitled “Establishment of an Asylum Service and a First Reception Service, adaptation of the Greek law to the provisions of the 2008/115/EC Directive 'relating to the common rules and procedures applied by the member states regarding the return of illegally resident third country nationals' and remaining provisions”. It has now been replaced with Law no. 4375/2016

- ☐ supplying international protection claimants, as well as beneficiaries of international protection, with all necessary legal and travel documents as provided by law,
- ☐ processing of refugee family reunification claims,
- ☐ facilitating asylum seekers regarding material reception conditions in collaboration with other co – responsible actors,
- ☐ preparing legal texts and administrative acts on issues of its competence and
- ☐ cooperating with local actors, independent authorities and non – governmental organizations, EU organs and organizations, as well as international organizations in order to accomplish its mission in the most efficient way.

Finally, the Asylum Service provides administrative support to the Appeals Authority, which was also established by Law no. 3907/2011. It is composed of the Central Service, situated in Athens, and Regional Asylum Offices and Asylum Units around the country that have gradually been put into operation. Due to the rapid increase in the numbers of asylum seekers in Greece and in an attempt to safeguard their status as asylum seekers, the Asylum Service is currently realizing a program for their pre–registration with the support of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

In 2015 the Greek Asylum Service registered 13.195 applications for international protection. This number is estimated to be 40% higher than 2014. In 2016 there is a great increase of international protection claims, partially due to Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's change in policy, according to which the country decided to gradually refuse to allow the passage through its territory of refugees and migrants (Ministry of Migration Policy, n.d). In addition, following the Common EU – Turkey Statement there was a mass submission of international protection claims (approximately 8,500 claims in a period of two months).

*Table 1: Asylum Applications in Greece, June 2013 – January 2017*

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
<b>Total</b>	4814	9432	13195	51091	6346	84878
<b>Monthly average</b>	688	786	1100	4258	6346	2021

Source: Ministry of Migration Policy, Asylum Service (Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service from 7.6.2013 to 31.1.2017)

Moreover, as far as the countries of origin are concerned table 2 demonstrates that the vast majority of refugees comes from Syria (with a rapid increase between 2015 and 2016), following by Afghanistan.

***Table 2: Asylum Applications – Leading ten countries of origin, 2013-January 2017***

	2013	2014	2015	2016	January 2017	Total
SYRIA	252	773	3492	26692	2288	33497
AFGHANISTAN	803	1709	1720	4371	1198	9801
PAKISTAN	610	1618	1823	4695	638	9384
IRAQ	107	174	661	4812	724	6478
ALBANIA	419	569	1003	1420	106	3517
BANGLADESH	230	634	739	1215	106	2924
IRAN	131	361	242	1096	128	1958
GEORGIA	342	350	386	688	69	1835
PALESTINE	17	74	60	852	413	1416
ALGERIA	76	187	131	889	84	1367
OTHER COUNTRIES	1827	2983	2938	4361	592	12701
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4814</b>	<b>9432</b>	<b>13195</b>	<b>51091</b>	<b>6346</b>	<b>84878</b>

Source: Ministry of Migration Policy, Asylum Service (Statistical Data from 7.6.2013 to 31.1.2017)

In 2013 a total of 437 asylum applications were submitted to the Asylum Service by applicants aged between 0 – 13 years old and 309 applications by applicants aged 14 – 17 years old. In 2014 a total number of 695 refugees aged 0 – 13 years old and 660 refugees aged 14 – 17 years old also applied for asylum, while the corresponding numbers in 2015 were 1,713 (aged 0-13) and 784 (aged 14-17). The rapid increase in numbers in 2016 is demonstrated in table 3 (unaccompanied minors included).

**Table 3: Asylum Applications – Age and gender ranges**

Age ranges	2016			January 2017		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total

<b>0 - 13</b>	7691	7115	14806	985	927	1912
<b>14 -17</b>	3531	1384	4915	380	156	536

Source: Ministry of Migration Policy, Asylum Service (Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service from 7.6.2013 to 31.1.2017)

## 2.2 Legal setting

Greek government since the summer of 2016 (the hot summer of refugee crisis<sup>10</sup>) embarked on a series of legislative measures for the education of the children of refugees which can be summarized in three main legal settings:

*Law no. 4415/2016<sup>11</sup>: “Arrangements for Greek language education, intercultural education and other provisions”,*

*Joint Ministerial Decision no. 152360/CD4<sup>12</sup>: “Establishment, organization, operation, coordination and reception facilities training program for education of refugees, criteria and recruitment process”,*

*Ministerial Decision no. 131024/D1<sup>13</sup>: “Settings on Educational Priority Zones - Establishment of Reception Classes - Reinforcing Coaching Classes and Reception Facilities for education of refugees in school units”.*

In addition to the above, the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs issued in the same year (2016) two explanatory circulars to the school units of Secondary Education regarding the terms and conditions for registration of foreign pupils to Greek public schools:

*a) Circular no. 108457/D2/4-7-2016<sup>14</sup>: “Circular on the registration of foreign pupils with insufficient documentation to schools”*

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<sup>10</sup> Modification of the phrase “the long summer of Migration” by Kasperek, Bernd/Speer, Marc (2015): Of Hope. Hungary and the Long Summer of Migration, (9.9.2015)

<sup>11</sup> Law no. 4415/2016 “Arrangements for Greek language education, intercultural education and other provisions” OGG A – 159/6.9.2016

<sup>12</sup> Joint Ministerial Decision no. 152360/CD4 “Establishment, organization, operation, coordination and reception facilities training program for education of refugees, criteria and recruitment process” OGG B - 3049/23.9.2016

<sup>13</sup> Ministerial Decision no. 131024/D1 “Settings on Educational Priority Zones - Establishment of Reception Classes - Reinforcing Coaching Classes and Reception Facilities for education of refugees in school units” OGG B – 2687/29.8.2016

b) Circular no. F1/143733/D2/7-9-201615: “Foreign pupils registration”.

Among others, special emphasis was placed on cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and non-governmental organizations for the education of refugee children. Specifically, the Greek Ministry of Education invited every international organization and non-governmental organization that wished to provide educational activities in refugee reception centers. These activities are part of the non-formal education and are implemented at different hours and days of the program of nursery and reception classes for the refugee pupils. The organizations that were interested had to fill out (until 15 September 2016) an online form in order to obtain relevant certification from the Educational Policy Institute. It is estimated that until now more than 32 non-governmental organizations and 36 voluntary groups are providing educational activities in more than 40 reception centers (Scientific Committee to assist the work of the Committee of Support of Refugee Children, 2016).

Having mentioned the legislative framework we will now focus on specific amendments introduced. Law no. 4415/2016 (article 38<sup>16</sup>) stipulates the establishment of reception facilities for refugee education as well as the organization, operation, coordination and training programs on them. According to the Joint Ministerial Decision no. 152360/CD4 (article 1, paragraph 1<sup>17</sup>), in every school unit located near reception centers an independent Reception Facility for Refugee Education is established, which may include more than one class, depending on the number of refugee pupils. Furthermore, for children aged between 4 – 5 years old staying in accommodation centers, reception and education facilities are established as nursery schools' departments that will function within the limits of accommodation centers (article 1, paragraph 2<sup>18</sup>). The minimum number required for a reception facility class is 10 pupils and the maximum 20 pupils (article 1, paragraph 5<sup>19</sup>). A management team is responsible for the coordination and monitoring of educational programs in the reception facilities. The team also coordinates the implementation of school operations through the Asylum Fund (article 1, paragraph 6<sup>20</sup>). The process of schools that are hosting classes for refugee pupils is based on two criteria: a. reasonable distance from the hosting center and b. available and suitable classrooms for refugee pupils.

The Ministerial Decision no. 131024/D1 defines as Educational Priority Zones all Primary and Secondary Education Regional Directorates that include Primary Education School Units, where Reception Classes and

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<sup>14</sup> Circular no. 108457/D2/4-7-2016: “Circular on the registration of foreign pupils with insufficient documentation to schools”, available in [http://dide-a-ath.att.sch.gr/new/images/stories/ekp\\_data/egkl\\_eggr-allod-math\\_el-dik\\_5-9-16.pdf](http://dide-a-ath.att.sch.gr/new/images/stories/ekp_data/egkl_eggr-allod-math_el-dik_5-9-16.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Circular no. F1/143733/D2/7-9-2016: “Foreign pupils registration” available in [http://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2016/eggrafes\\_allodapwn.pdf](http://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2016/eggrafes_allodapwn.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Page 8436

<sup>17</sup> Page 32081

<sup>18</sup> Page 32081

<sup>19</sup> Page 32081

<sup>20</sup> Page 32081

Reinforcing Coaching Classes for refugee children can be hosted (article 1, paragraph 1<sup>21</sup>). The establishment and operation of Educational Priority Zones aims to support education of refugee children through: a. Learning Greek as a second language, b. organizing programs, educational interventions and activities. Finally according to the Circulars mentioned above, foreign pupils can be enrolled in secondary schools in the country anytime during the school year.

### 2.3 Institutional setting

The Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, in order to fulfill the educational needs of refugee children set up a Scientific Committee (under the Ministerial order of 18/03/2016), which provided specific recommendations for refugee education (June 2016). The proposal was fully endorsed by the Ministry, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Migration as well. The proposal concerned actions needed to be implemented under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs for the children of refugees residing in Greece and has been submitted for evaluation and final approval (by the Ministry's leadership). The results are expected to be published in the next school year (2017/18).

The proposals are divided according to the time frame of their implementation. In the first phase, actions are proposed for the summer months within the camps (creative activities, learning elements of the Greek language etc.). In the second phase, scenarios are presented for the operation of pre-school education areas within the camps for the gradual integration of children aged 7 – 13 years old in the Greek education system (reception classes, afternoon classes) as well as educational activities for older adolescents (Scientific Committee to assist the work of the Committee of Support of Refugee Children, 2016: 148).

Some of the basic recommendations made by the Committee include:

*a) Special care for teaching the mother tongue to children which have a high possibility of returning to their home country. Alongside the teaching of the Greek language, the Committee suggests that lessons of the mother tongue should be provided by teachers from the refugee community or other native speakers of the mother tongues of children and monitored preferably by an international organization (Scientific Committee to assist the work of the Committee of Support of Refugee Children, 2016: 149).*

*b) Attendance of study programs in other European languages, provided by a recognized body that will ensure the certification of their studies and the parallel teaching of Greek (Scientific Committee to assist the work of the Committee of Support of Refugee Children, 2016: 149).*

*c) Reception or afternoon classes in school for most children, integration of a limited number of refugee children with basic knowledge of the Greek language in the morning program and small interventions in the morning program wherever possible (Scientific Committee to assist the work of the Committee of Support of Refugee Children, 2016: 148).*

It is essential to clarify that Greek educational legislation does not provide official assessment at immigrant students' languages at the period of their arrival, before they attend the Greek public schooling.



First official data about Refugee children were announced very recently by the Secretary General at the Greek Ministry of Education (Kathimerini newspaper, 21 December 2017). The Secretary General Mr. George Aggelopoulos who is Head of the Scheme for the Education for Refugee Children announced that “approximately 5.000 refugee children attend the Greek school system. Specifically, approximately 3.000 refugee children attend morning school classed at public schools together with Greek children. For these children, Reception classes are functioning where they are taught Modern Greek Language, aiming at their gradual inclusion within mainstream classes. He goes on, pointing out that “These children, i.e. 3.000, attend the morning program during school year 2017-2018, because last year they started attending lessons at the afternoon programme at the Reception Facilities for Refugee Education, i.e. separate afternoon classes”.

The Secretary General continues saying that “On the contrary, this school year, i.e. 2017-2018, at the Reception Facilities for Refugee Education attend 2.000 refugee children, and the 500 refugee children attend Nursery School”. He concludes saying that “as numbers show, the 60% of the refugee children attend the morning school program and the 40% the afternoon programme”. According to the Secretary General this is an improvement, since last year only 15% of the refugee children attended lessons at the morning program, while the majority, i.e. the 85% attended afternoon classes”.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the Secretary General announced (op.cited) the Nursery School is functioning for the refugee children who live at the accommodation center of Eleona, while from 21<sup>st</sup> December 2017 starts the installation of Early Childhood Education Units-Nurseries at other 17 accommodation centers in Northern Greece. At the same time, there is planning for the functioning of two nursery units, which have been placed at the accommodation centers at Kara Tepe in Mytilini and at Vathi in Samos. It is about 30 units of two classrooms. More specific, the nursery school at the accommodation center of Eleona started to function with two classrooms. Very soon, the classrooms were adequately formatted to meet the needs of small refugee children with library, toys, recreation and resting places. In total, it can accept 47 refugee children”.

Following we will present the educational scheme for refugee education that is provided in Greece since 2016.

The educational scheme for refugee education included the following three basic types:

**Reception Facilities for Refugee Education** (RFRE<sup>22</sup>, English acronym, Greek acronym DYEP): during afternoon schooling, functioning from 14:00-18:00.

**Reception Classes** (Level I & II, exclusively in school structures)

**Reinforcing Tutorial/Coaching Classes** (exclusively in school structures): these are the tutorial classes at public schools, functioning until now only in Primary Schools. At these reinforcing classes, refugee children stay with their families at houses provided to them in urban cities. Supervisors of Refugee Education supervise these classes.

### **1. Reception Facilities for Refugee Education:**

The establishment of Reception Facilities for Refugee Education is an unprecedented factor for the Greek education system and the school year 2016/17 is considered a transitional year (as mentioned above) during which the first integration steps will begin (Ministry of Education, 2016). The Reception Facilities for Refugee Education were established and operated in educational districts where have been Reception Accommodation Centers (RACs). These units were attended by 2,643 schoolchildren (Primary and Junior High School) and so far, it is estimated that 111 RFREs are in operation running 145 classes, covering 37 RACs in all regions of the country apart from the islands (Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, 2017: 38).

*Reception Facilities for Refugee Education: these can have the following scheme:*

a) as nursery school units (ages 4 -6 years old), within the limits of reception centers, functioning from 8.20 – 13.00. Such an example is the case of Nursery School in Diavata, in Thessaloniki in Northern Greece, where Early Childhood Education is offered to refugee children within the refugee camps, i.e. Diavata camp.

b) as primary education school until (ages 6 – 12 years old) and high schools (ages 13 – 15 years old), within the limits of reception centers. These are functioning from 8.30 – 12.30. In Northern Greece there is not such a provision yet,

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<sup>22</sup> The first Reception Facilities for Refugee Education started operating in October 2016. Until the time this report was being written, limited data were available for the evaluation of the educational results

c) within the school units (primary and high schools) close to reception and accommodation centers. These are functioning at the afternoon program, from 14.00 – 18.00.

The establishment of Reception Facilities for Refugee Education is an important, new provision for the Greek education system. The school year 2016-2017 has been considered a transitional year.

In particular:

**a) Pre – primary education** (Nursery Schools, age range 4 – 6):

Refugee children who live in reception centers attend nursery classes within the limits of every center, in order to stay close to their parents. For this purpose the Ministry of Education hires nursery school teachers with funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). The timetable of these nursery schools is from 8.20 until 13.00. These nursery schools follow the regular timetable and curriculum of the common Greek all-day nursery schools and function as their departments. At the same time, non-governmental and international organizations provide educational programs and creative activities for the children.

**b) Primary education - Secondary education<sup>23</sup> (Junior high school)**

This is the case of the Reception Facilities for Refugee Education that function as school units' departments close to a Reception Accommodation Center (afternoon classes). They are supervised by the Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs). The timetable is from 14.00 to 18.00 (4 teaching classes). Lessons taught are: Greek language, English, Mathematics, Physical Education, Computers and Art (for primary schools) and Greek language, English, Mathematics, Physical Education, Informatics and Civics (for junior high schools).

For students aged 15 years and older, intensive Greek language courses combined with sporting and artistic activities are provided, as well as technical and vocational training programs. After learning the Greek language they are able to continue their studies at technical, professional and other relevant schools of the country or to continue their education in the Greek Lyceum.

## **2. Reception Classes**

*a) Level I*

Reception Classes' program includes two circles of lessons as part of school's timetable. Pupils with little or zero knowledge of Greek language can enroll in Reception Classes I where they attend an intensive Greek language learning course and also some courses in their “regular” class, such as: Physical Education, Art, Musical Education, Foreign Language (or another relevant course, according to Teacher's Board in cooperation with the School Counselor). The duration of attendance is one school year or more.

*b) Level II*

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<sup>23</sup> Detailed timetable and teaching time per subject in the Annex

Reception Classes level II can be attended by pupils with moderate level of Greek language, who still face difficulties in attending courses in the regular classroom. Classes level II provide to those pupils additional support in Greek language learning or any other module, either within the classroom (with an extra teacher) or outside the classroom. The duration of attendance is up to three years. The integration of the student to the regular class following a decision by the teachers council in collaboration with the school counselor is possible, if found that he is able to attend all courses with no difficulties

### **3. Reinforcing Coaching/Tutorial Classes**

Reinforcing Coaching Classes can be attended by Romani children, foreigners, repatriated, refugees, coming from socially vulnerable groups that have not attended reception classes and face language difficulties during their entrance to regular class.

## **2.4 State of literature**

By establishing (for primary and compulsory secondary education) special reception classes in the afternoon hours the aim of the state is to provide psychosocial support and gradual integration for refugee children in the Greek education system. This happens after a preparation period, for the benefit of schools and refugee pupils as well. A transition from life in the camps to integration into the Greek educational system is essential in order to grant refugee children the opportunity to learn the language and fill any gaps they might have in their education. Reception classes provide English and Greek language lessons, mathematics and information technology in order to achieve either the inclusion of children in the Greek educational system from the next school year, or their integration into the school system in another European country, in case of relocation of their families (Scientific Committee to assist the work of the Committee of Support of Refugee Children, 2016). This way a flexible institutional and didactic intervention scheme is formed for the total support of newcomers. Attendance lasts up to one academic year with the possibility of extension or subsequent inclusion in regular classes of Greek public schools.

For an easy transition to the Greek school environment and a gradual familiarity with the Greek language the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) developed and formed a material for refugee students in primary (age groups 6 - 12 years old) and secondary (age groups 12 - 15) education for Greek language learning<sup>24</sup>. This material is based on curricula of 2012 adapted to new learning needs. These are textbooks designed for teaching Greek as a second language (i.e. for non - native speakers) in the context of the intercultural education programs of the Ministry of Education: a. Muslim children education program (courseware: "Where is the fuss?", "The footprints", "Let's go to the market" and "Have a nice trip", for ages 7 – 9) and b. "Integration of repatriated and foreign students in Primary Education ("Hello 1", "Hello 2", "My little dictionary 1", "My little dictionary 2", for ages 10 - 12). The proposed materials are based on the main principles of intercultural education: equality (equal opportunities in education) and recognition of diversity (linguistic, cultural, and religious). Their common goal is to develop skills and abilities for refugee students aimed at their personal development. The teaching materials have also taken account of the communicative language lessons dimension, which is consistent with the basic theoretical principles for the teaching of a language as second: the student learns more effectively when taught in an authentic communicative environment and language stimuli are directly associated with the experience, knowledge, interests and

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<sup>24</sup> The material is available at IEP's site: <http://www.iep.edu.gr/el/component/k2/content/5-ekpaidefsi-prosfygon>

desires of children (Institute of Educational Policy, 2016). The common assumption is also that learning a foreign language is easier and more effective when there isn't a single "object teaching" but also a medium of teaching other subjects – lessons (i.e. art, mathematics etc.) that can also work supportively to the language lesson.

The educational goals are common in all age groups for children who attend reception and education facilities. For ages 10 – 15 are set additional goals taking into account the different experience of children (background of formal education in their home country schools, in the camps etc). In conclusion, the expected learning outcomes are basically common to all ages.

### **Communication skills** (Institute of Educational Policy, 2016: 4)

#### Students will be able to:

- Understand and use everyday expressions and basic phrases to express daily needs,
- Present themselves through repeated language patterns (e.g. I am Fereste, I am 8 years old and I come from Afghanistan),
- Formulate basic questions,
- Recognize and name items of his/her environment (school, residence, neighborhood, food),
- Do simple items and people descriptions,
- Understand simple rules and orders.

### **Understanding spoken language** (Institute of Educational Policy, 2016: 5)

#### Students will be able to:

- Perceive intuitively that the form of the spoken word depends on the relationship between the participants, topic and speaker's purpose (ages 10 – 15),
- Ask simple questions in order to understand information that he didn't notice,
- Understand and implement simple spoken instructions,
- Be familiar with non - linguistic factors (gestures, facial expression, body language) and paralinguistic (intonation, pauses, pronunciation, tone, voice intensity ) phenomena in order to understand the communicative function in conjunction with the words that accompany it.

### **Reading comprehension** (Institute of Educational Policy, 2016: 6)

#### Students will be able to:

- Recognize letters of the alphabet (in plain text or individually) words and basic phrases,

- 📖 Understand individual words, simple verbally sets and texts, such as brief descriptions, instructions etc.,
- 📖 Read and understand a short simple text to derive information or perform certain activities.

### 3 Fieldwork

#### 3.1 Introduction

This fieldwork was conducted in a period of 4 months (from December 12<sup>th</sup> 2016 until March 20<sup>th</sup> 2017) via online questionnaires that were distributed to teachers who work in refugee education, with a central coordination and supervision from the Regional Office of Primary and Secondary Education of Central Macedonia – Greece. The fieldwork focused on refugee education in Central Macedonia (Northern Greece), where there is the biggest number of Reception Accommodation Centers (12). According to the Scientific Committee's Report for the Support of Refugee Children, the total number of refugees in Northern Greece is estimated to be 15,637 of which 5,581 are underaged from 0 to 18 years (2016: 15). In the above numbers the refugee camp of Idomeni (a small village close to Greek borders with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) was not included. The aforementioned camp was the most populated refugee camp in Europe in 2016 after the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's decision to close its borders for refugees and migrants (Asylum Service, 2016). Therefore, the region of Central Macedonia is particularly important for refugee education provision. Apart from Northern Greece, there is a representation of a reception center in Leros island (Dodecanese, Southern Aegean Sea), another important refugee destination.

Unfortunately, we only managed to gain a limited number of respondents (sample (N): 9 teachers and 6 students). An unofficial explanation could be the lack of experience in refugee education of most of the teachers that led them to avoid sharing their personal insights. But still, the results can be considered useful and indicative of the current situation; even these limited outcomes, which of course cannot be generalized, depict a first direction of the preliminary initiatives and policies in Greece for refugee education.

Following, at table 4 analytical information is provided about the sample of the study and the relevant schools.

**Table 4: The sample of the study, location of the schools**

School	Location	Type	Grade/class or Age range	Total number of students	Number of refugee students	Sample/Number of teachers interviewed	Sample/Number of students interviewed
2 <sup>nd</sup> primary school	Thessaloniki	Afternoon class at school place	Primary Education, 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	15	15	1	
Reception Center Diavata	Diavata (Thessaloniki)	Preparatory class within the limits of reception center	Primary Education, 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	55	13	1	2

Reception center	Leros	Morning class within the limits of reception center	6-18 years old	130	130	1	
Reception center Vasilika	Vasilika (East Thessaloniki)	Informal education by NGO within the limits of reception center	6-9 years old	75	75	1	3
Reception center Vasilika	Vasilika (East Thessaloniki)	Reception Center	6-9 years old	60	60	1	1
12 <sup>th</sup> Primary School Neapoli	Neapoli (Thessaloniki)	Afternoon class at school place	Primary Education, 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	30	30	1	
Public Primary School Alexandria	Alexandria (Imathia)	Regular Class	Primary Education 1st & 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	25	3	1	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Primary School Siatista	Siatista	Regular Class	Primary education	23	1	1	
Lagadikia	Lagadikia	Regular Class	Primary Education, 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	20	7	1	



### 3.2 Limitations of the study

This is a very first mapping concerning refugee education in Greece. Education of refugees in Greece presents some significant differences compared with other European countries. These differences need to be taken into account for a better understanding of the results. That said, two basic factors are relevant:

*a) All types of refugee education facilities are subject to constant changes, modifications/alterations and there is a constantly changing number of refugees in reception centers.*

*b) School year 2016/17 is considered (by Greek Ministry of Education) as a preparatory (or transitional) year for the education of refugee children in order to achieve in school year 2017/18 their smooth integration into the Greek educational system. So far, the education provided in Reception Accommodation Centers is largely based on volunteer work and non-governmental organizations' contributions.*

There is an ongoing process by the Ministry of Education concerning refugee children's education that has not been implemented yet (Ministry of Education, 2016).

### 3.3 Results

#### 3.3.1 Social integration

The data of this study point out a problematic integration due to the new school environment, previous school experience (or lack of school experience) and language difficulties faced by the refugee students.

For the need of this report, we will focus mainly on teachers' replies.

To start with, teachers who work at reception centers classes admit that they assign tasks depending on student's level or his/her familiarity with the school context and degree of readiness.

*"Many students didn't attend school on a daily basis, so I had to assign more tasks to those who were more consistent",* says a teacher (teacher 2) who works in a reception center. The determining factor of participation seems to be the language barrier.

All six students who participated in the research mention as main difficulty in school *"the language"* or say that *"Greek is a difficult language."* At the same time, they mention that they do enjoy school lessons such as: computers, mathematics and physical education.

Teachers also try to apply different methods during classes based on intercultural approaches, such as experiential exercises, role play and cooperation within the students. *"Students with a common mother tongue sit together to help each other. Those who speak the Greek language become my assistants and translate to the others. They enjoy it"* (teacher 8, at reception center).

### 3.3.2 Interaction with other students

Interaction amongst students at the beginning is characterized by hesitation at the start of the school year. Gradually, there is a tendency of getting together only with the same cultural groups (e.g. Kurds Syrian Arabic speaking, Syrians and Afghans), but over time students seem to overcome their hesitation.

At the same time, there seems to be an instant bonding between refugee students and teachers, who are being treated as symbols of trust and admiration during class and break time.

*“They felt a strong need for learning and had a strong need for reward, even for the simplest things. They gained power from 'well done' and waited for the teacher in the school entrance”* (NGO Teacher 7, at reception center). He adds that refugee students *“sought the companionship of the teacher. They were discussing with me exercises they had, they were speaking Greek and were showing great interest in learning new things. During breaks they were also looking at the world map, asking me to show them Greece on the map, trying to understand the distance between Syria and Greece.”*

The same tendency is evident at student's answers. A student (student 3) from Syria said: *“I like when the teacher is happy when we learn things and tells us “excellent!”. Also I like when the teacher makes me her assistant and puts me to translate the other children during the learning process.”*

### 3.3.3 Assessment of refugee education in Greece

The vast majority of respondents consider refugee education in Greece being in an early stage or in *“it's infancy”*, while at the same time underlining the need for a reorganization of refugee education policy in Greece with special regard to improving living conditions in reception centers, teacher training and intercultural education.

Teachers also underline the total lack of training of teachers who teach in classes with refugee students and express their personal worry for inefficient teaching methods. *“The urgent need for teachers in the reception facilities didn't leave much space for adequate training. However, from now on it would be very useful to have specialization courses in order to provide refugee students with efficient and accurate education”* (Teacher 5, at reception center).

## 4 Conclusion

Once again we will repeat that school year 2016/17 has been characterized by the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs as a “transitional year.” This assumption explains, but does not necessarily justify the lack of preparation of the Greek State on refugee education.

The Reception Facilities for Refugee Education is the educational policy scheme chosen as an emergency solution and a temporary measure to fulfill refugee children's educational needs. The reasons for their establishment were:

1. The need to implement a project under time pressure conditions, since the massive arrival of refugees did not leave room for delays,
2. The fluidity of refugee population (new arrivals, constantly changing numbers, relocation requests, feeling of precariousness),
3. Different social and cultural characteristics among refugee populations.

In addition, a large number of refugees live in Reception Accommodation Centers, outside the urban area. Therefore, their attendance at Morning Reception Classes requires their dispersal in many schools, given the lack of sufficient number of classrooms in nearby schools.

Assessing RFREs' results so far, we recognize the necessity of their establishment, but we have reservations about their outcomes.

A transition from life in the camps to integration into the Greek educational system is essential in order for refugee children to acquire the ability to learn Greek and fill in any gaps in their education due to the lengthy removal of many of them from their home country's schools (Scientific Committee to assist the work of the Committee of Support of Refugee Children , 2016). To achieve the integration of refugee children in the Greek education system prerequisites include:

- a) Greek language learning,*
- b) The organization of intensive courses for any children who have been out of school for a long time and have knowledge gaps,*
- c) The planning of the support of refugee children who become integrated into the Greek school.*

The integration into the Greek education system should be planned in a way that supports the refugee children's chances of success so that they stay in school and do not drop out early. The educators, pupils, families and local communities (Greeks and refugees) should also become involved in the education of refugee children, in the best possible way.

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## 6 Annex

In Diavata Thessaloniki, one of the host camp structures for refugees in North Greece, there has been an attempt to show the number of NGO's that are involved in refugee education and the kind of education and activities they provide (**source:** Scientific Committee to assist the work of the Committee of Support of Refugee Children, 2016: 119 - 124). An overview of the results is shown below:

Diavata Thessaloniki							
Organization	Timetable	Working Status	Educators participating in every action	Activities	Outdoor activities	Children covered by the action	Actions separation
Crazy Balloon	Tuesday 16.00-19.00	Volunteers	18-20 people alternately in a total of 25 people	Team ball games, music and movement education, painting, constructions	No	80 people, 8-10 children aged up to 6 years old, 70 people aged 7-13, 20 children aged 14-16	Addressed to all
Humanity Crew	Every day, weekends included, from 11.00 until 18.30, 1 hour break at noon	Volunteers	3 educators: 1 psychologist, 1 art therapist, 1 factotum.  They don't provide education, but recreational, educational activities	1. psychosocial support  2. entertaining games that include Arabic language teaching  3. social activities (cooking, discussion, gifts, educational games)	No	From 8 – 17.  1. Psychosocial support for ages 8-17.  2. Psychosocial support for teenage girls aged 12-16.  3. Art therapy for young children	Separated

				4. psychological support to unaccompanied children			
I.R.C	Every day 9.00 – 17.00	Salaried	12	Health education (personal cleanliness, proper use of premises)	No	10 – 20 children aged between 7 – 15 years old	Addressed to all
ANTIGONE- Information and Documentati on Centre on racism, ecology, peace and non violence	Monday, Thursday and Friday 16.00 – 19.30	Salaried	At least 1 educator and 5-6 volunteers (usually students of paidagogy)	Music and movement activities, sports, chess lessons, painting, cartoon movies translated in Arabic and Farsi	-	- 20-30 children up to 6 years old  - 40-50 children 7 years old  - 15 years old  - 10-15 children 16 – 18 years old who also help at the translation and coordination of activities	Addressed to all
Independent Artists' Group	Saturday 10.00 – 13.00	Volunteers	23 people at the beginning, 15 people now	Painting	No	60-80 children, 12-15 children aged 4-6 years old, 40-55 children aged 7-12 years old and less 13-18 years old	Separated
Independent English Group	Every Thursday 10.00-13.00	Volunteers	1 coordinator, 10 students	1. English lessons, 2. communicative activities	No	50 children from all age range, playful form	Addressed to all

				for English learning		for ages 3-6, regular lessons with playful form for 6-9, regular lessons for 9-15 (girls), 15 adults (men) separated	
Coperti	2 hours every day	Volunteers	10-14 alternately from a total of 30	Creative activities (painting, theater, movement activities)	No	250 children up to 12 years old	Separated
Pedagogical Faculty Group, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	Twice a week until Easter. After 1 <sup>st</sup> May once a week	Volunteers	2-3 coordinators, 10 students	Music and movement activities, musical percussion instruments	No	60-80 children, mostly girls	Addressed to all
SOS Children's Villages	1. Monday, Wednesday, Friday 10.00-13.00 creative activity, gymnastics for teenagers, 2. Tuesday, Thursday gymnastics for teenagers, 3. Saturday afternoon gymnastics for teenagers (football)	Salaried	Initially 50 volunteers and 5 salaried (1 coordinator, 1 gymnast, 1 philologist, 1 early childhood educator, 1 art teacher), 2 translators (Arabic, Farsi). In total, in every activity participating at least 10 volunteers	1. socialization activities 2. painting 3. constructions, puppetry, handicraft without scissors 4. musical, movement, mimetic games 5. cooperation with Clowns Without Borders	No	80-120 children. Boys' football team. 6-12 years old: participate in handicraft without scissors activity and puppetry	Addressed to all



Volunteers Association For the Support of Minors and Youth	Tuesday 10.00 – 13.00	Volunteers	8 educators	Creative Workshops (painting, constructions, music and movement activities)	No	20-50 people. 8-15 children up to 6 years old, 15-35 children up to 13 years old	Addressed to all
The Greek Guiding Association	Wednesday 11.00-13.00	Volunteers	4-15 people alternately from a total of 25 people	International games, songs from Scouts, Guides	No	80 children up to 12 years old	Addressed to all
The Smile of the Child	Monday 16.00 – 18.30	Salaried	7-9 people	Creative workshops (games, painting, constructions), ground games (snake, lame etc)	No	40-50 children up to 10 years old	Addressed to all
Young Men's Christian Association (UMCA) Thessaloniki	Tuesday and Sunday, 10.00 – 13.00	Volunteers	10-15 volunteers each time, in a total of 70-80 volunteers alternately	Sports, painting, musical & movement activities, team games	Not at the moment, but is scheduled	80-150 (maximum number on Sundays), 10-20 children up to 6 years old, 60-110 between 7-15 years old, 10-20 children between 16-18 years old	Addressed to all

Primary and high schools (within school units, near reception centers ), have an afternoon timetable as follows:

14:00 – 14:15	15'	Welcoming Pupils
14:15 – 15:00	45'	1 <sup>st</sup> teaching period

15:00 – 15:15	15'	Break
15:15 – 16:00	45'	2 <sup>nd</sup> teaching period
16:00 - 16:15	15'	Break
16:15 – 17:00	45'	3 <sup>rd</sup> teaching period
17:00 – 17:15	15'	Break
17:15 – 18:00	45'	4 <sup>th</sup> teaching period

In primary schools teaching time per subject is formed as follows:

Courses	Hours per week
Greek language	6
English	4
Mathematics	3
Physical Education	3
ICT	2
Arts	2

In high schools teaching time per subject is formed as follows:

Courses	Hours per week
Greek language	6
English	4
Mathematics	4

Physical Education	2
Informatics	2
Civics	2