SNAPSHOT

Ensuring access to education: What Solidarity Now (SN) teams achieved regarding the enrollment of refugee children in schools?

Do refugee children in their host country have equal access to school compared to students of native descent?

Worldwide statistics reflect refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than other children and that only 50 per cent of refugee children are enrolled in primary school[1]. SN experience during 2016-17 school year, has confirmed this trend by facing many challenges in enrolling refugee children in school such as drop outs, troubling behavior, parents' resistance due to the uncertainty about the legal status of their families, and some sporadic anti-immigrant sentiment. However, the level of interest by refugees themselves have started steadily increasing: 21.18% of the SN peer2peer helpline requests were regarding access to education issues. SN ambition is to see refugee children well integrated in public education, having an equal chance to succeed in school compared to students of native descent.

School enrollment rate

To overcome the gap in the education of refugee children during 2016-17, the Ministry of Education decided in April 2017 the establishment and operation of ZEP Reception classes in primary education school units. ZEP Reception classes are aiming at the participatory and effective education of primary education students who do not have the required knowledge of the Greek language so that they can be later integrated in the Greek Educational System.
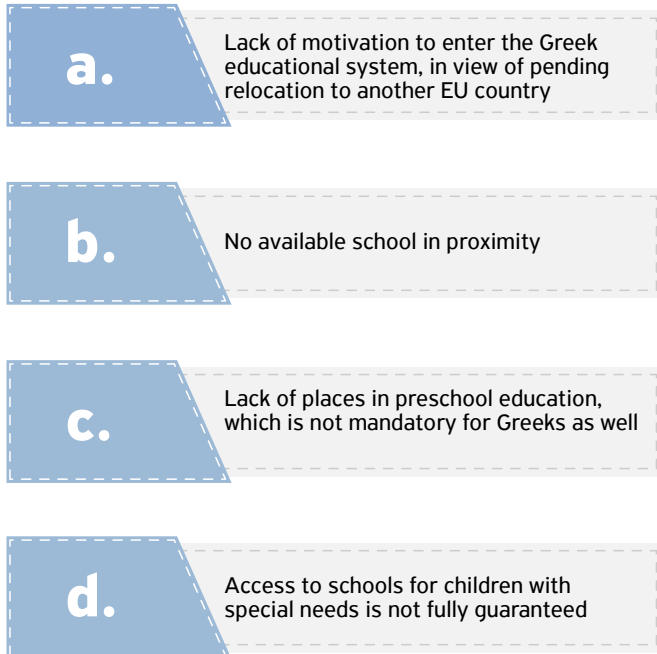
Working under this objective, SN teams intensified their efforts to support refugee children's registration in schools. In March 2017, only 21.45% of refugee children accommodated in SN structures attended public schools. In the light of the new school year, 158 out of 282 children are already enrolled in public schools, with 76 more being "on hold" of the administrative green light to proceed with registration.
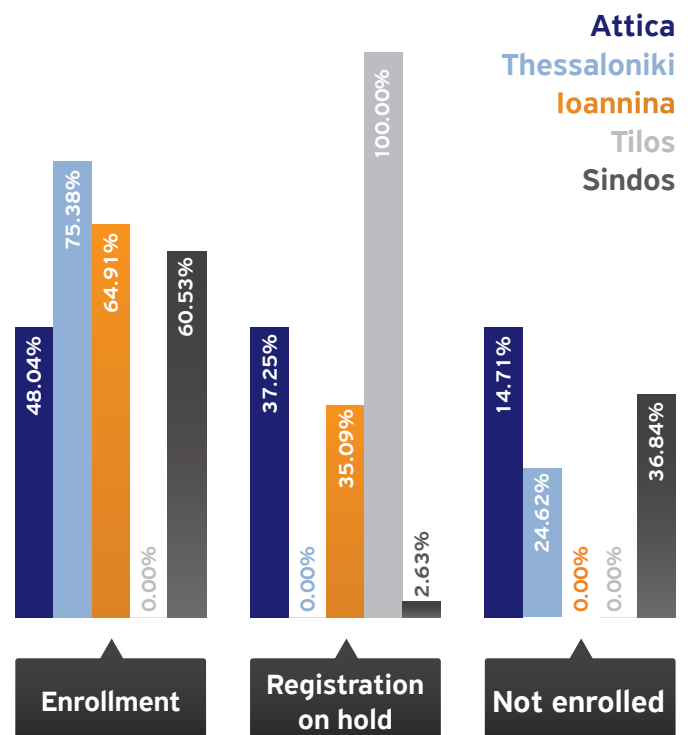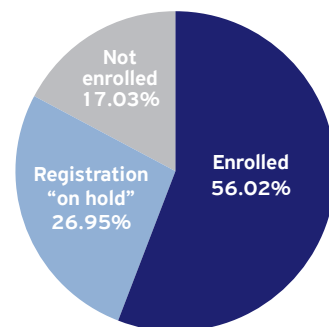
1 UNICEF (2017), Education Uprooted, https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Education_Uprooted.pdf

Pie chart: Enrolled 56.02%, Registration "on hold" 26.95%, Not enrolled 17.03%

Bar chart legend: Attica, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Tilos, Sindos

Enrollment: 48.04%, 75.38%, 64.91%, 0.00%, 60.53%
Registration on hold: 37.25%, 0.00%, 35.09%, 100.00%, 2.63%
Not enrolled: 14.71%, 24.62%, 0.00%, 0.00%, 36.84%

Reasons for non-enrollment:

While the non-enrollment ratio is limited and even lower than the percentage of children that are under the relocation scheme pipeline, special focus needs to be paid on the main reasons parents/caregivers evoke for non-enrollment:

a. Lack of motivation to enter the Greek educational system, in view of pending relocation to another EU country

b. No available school in proximity

c. Lack of places in preschool education, which is not mandatory for Greeks as well

d. Access to schools for children with special needs is not fully guaranteed
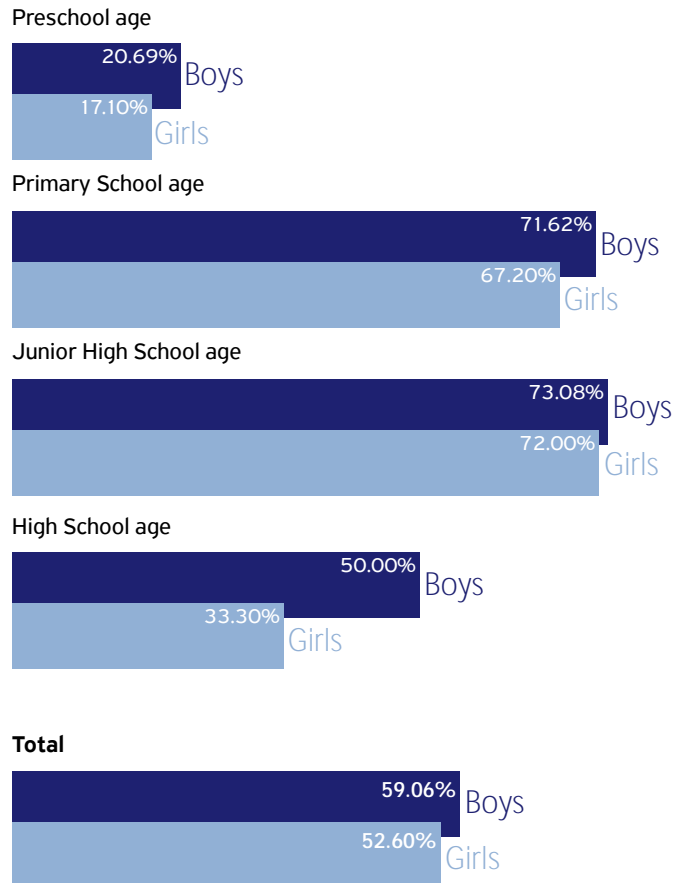
The effect of the optional education is also reflected in the school enrollment rate by age group, where the non-mandatory pre-school and high school education demonstrates the lowest achievements :

Pre-school age (3-5) — 18.75%

Primary school age (6-12) — 69.56%

Junior High School age (13-15) — 72.55%

High School age (16-18) — 44.84%
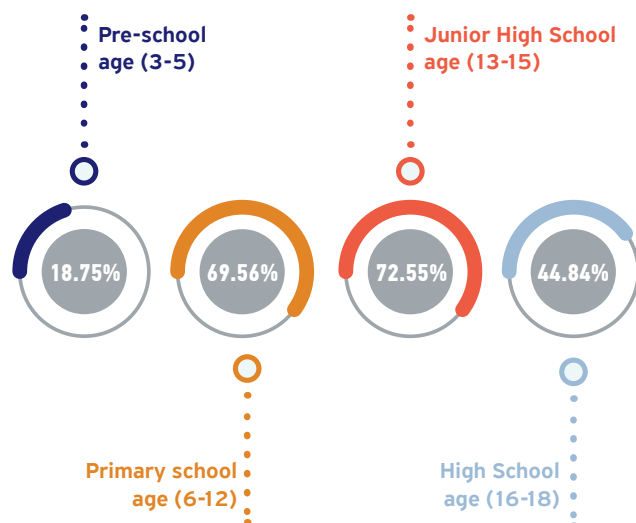
Gender gap

The overall numbers do not demonstrate a statistically significant difference between boys and girls enrolled in school (59% to 52.6%). An alarming finding, though, is that in the age group 15-18, only 1 girl out of 3 has been registered in school (33%), whereas the corresponding ratio of boys is 50%.

Preschool age
- Boys 20.69%
- Girls 17.10%

Primary School age
- Boys 71.62%
- Girls 67.20%

Junior High School age
- Boys 73.08%
- Girls 72.00%

High School age
- Boys 50.00%
- Girls 33.30%

Total
- Boys 59.06%
- Girls 52.60%

How SolidarityNow supported access to education so far?

Besides the administrative and psychosocial facilitation provided by the teams in order to ensure that all children are enrolled in the educational system, SN tried to frame an additional strand of activities that would ensure the right of refugee children to access education, both in the urban and camp context:

Since 2016, SN teams organized 1481 non-formal educational activities with an average attendance of 7.6 children per activity (UNHCR/ECHO funding)

Provided a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from Arabic and Greek courses to computer skills training and geography (UNHCR/ECHO funding)

Through Children Friendly Spaces in camps and urban centers enhanced protection and informal pre-school education activities for 1519 children (Unicef/ECHO funding)

Worked with local communities and schools in order to increase acceptance by classmates and parents, with emphasis in small localities

Success stories paving the way

Sindos

As early as 2016, SN Sindos team helped 18 children join public school morning classes, working on the links between access to education and interaction with the local community. With the major concern being the fear of anti-immigrant sentiments, SN team tried to respond to potential counter-arguments by organizing vaccination sessions for refugee children with the cooperation of Doctors of the World. In close interaction and frequent meetings in order to understand local population's concerns, Sindos team managed to register all 18 children, warmly welcomed by the parent's association when they arrived at school for the first time. Within few days of attendance, children showed a high level of motivation and participation.

> Little S., a 6 years old girl located in Sindos shelter, walks almost an hour to go to school, accompanied by her father

Tilos

SN Tilos project, the successful model of coexistence which became known worldwide, also demonstrates successful integration of refugee children into mainstream education. The pre-registration of 13 refugee children at the primary school for the school year 2017-18 has led to a ministerial decision increasing the number of teachers teaching in the multi-graded school of Tilos from 3 to 4. This is one of the major achievements of the SN Tilos project.

> 8 year-old Hassan was a war-traumatized boy when he arrived on the island of Tilos, demonstrating troubled behavior toward his teachers and classmates. Through continuous support, he managed within a 4-month period, to overcome his fears and became the best student in his class.
> He wants to be a doctor

Our agenda for change

➤ Ensure that all refugee children are integrated into the educational system

➤ Develop curricula and methods that help refugee children overcome language and cultural barriers

➤ Provide continuous training and support to teachers and educational staff in terms of cultural awareness   and changing needs of multicultural classes

➤ Organise supporting activities aiming at limiting the drop-out risk of low performers

➤ Provide opportunities for all children, boys and girls, to unfold their learning and professional potential

➤ Pave a way for access of refugees to university education

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This is our common ground