

Iceland
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**Active
citizens fund**

CONFERENCE

INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION

March 20th – 21st, 2024
Athens, Greece

Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation n
Auditorium




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This conference is a regional initiative in the context of the Active Citizens Fund programmes in Greece and Bulgaria funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway as part of the EEA Grants 2014-2021.

The conference at a glance

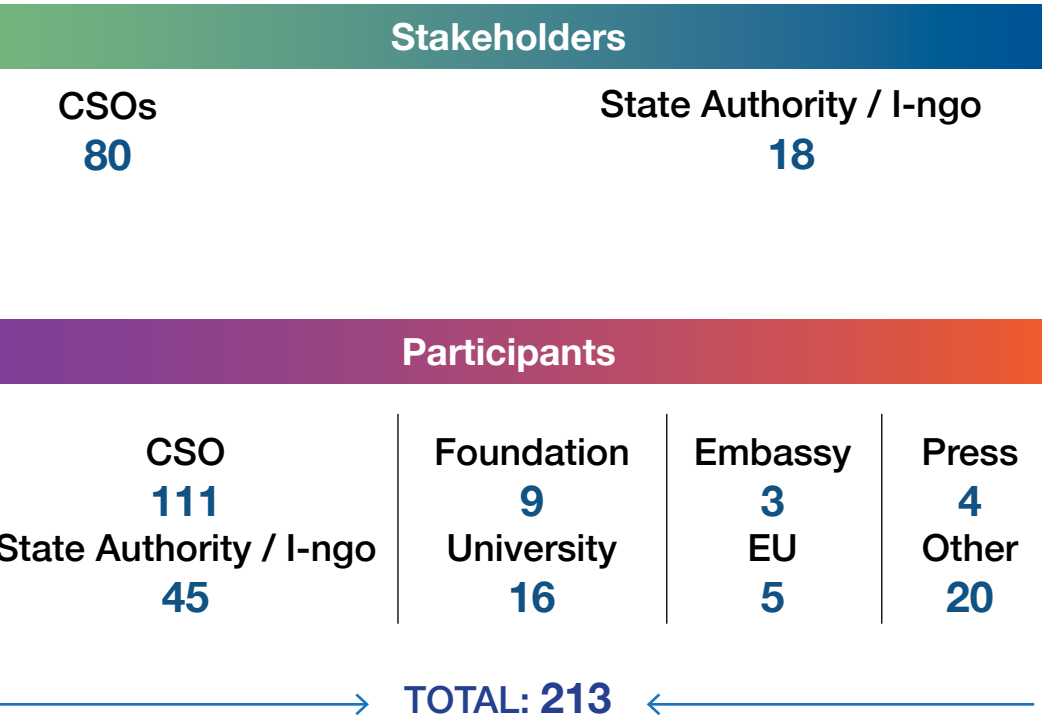
The Active Citizens Fund (Acf) Operators for Greece and Bulgaria jointly organized a regional conference on “Inequalities in Education” in the context of ACF Regional Cooperation Initiatives. It took place 20-21 March 2024 at the Basil and Elise Goulandri Foundation in Athens. The conference brought together fund operators, civil society organizations, and national, regional, European, and international actors and stakeholders. It features keynote speakers, panel discussions, and interactive workshops. All Acf Fund Operators were invited to participate, and 7 out of 13 sent relevant participants and speakers (Malta, Croatia, Estonia, Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Greece).

Objective

The event aimed to share good practices and innovative approaches for achieving inclusive education and eliminating inequalities in educational access and outcomes, with a focus on refugee and migrant children, Roma children, and children with disabilities.

Participants

The participants included fund operators, CSOs, and state or international actors who have a role in combatting educational inequalities. The latter consisted of state agencies like Ministries of Education and international organizations in the educational field, such as the Fundamental Rights Agency, and UNICEF. Actors working with specific marginalized groups (e.g., refugees, migrants, Roma, and people with disabilities) will also be invited to participate. The participants’ average level of satisfaction was 4.46%.





Speakers

The conference included key opening remarks, keynotes, expert presentations, and a panel discussion. 34 speakers from 7 countries took the stage: 3 University staff, 17 CSO representatives, 6 state authorities, 3 I-NGOs, and 5 European institutions.

All presentations and panels can be found in Greek on the platform of Bodossaki Foundation, Blod Lectures on Demand: <https://www.blod.gr/events/anisotites-stinekpaideysi/>



Key takeaways

/1/

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IS THE SMARTEST WAY.

A school where all the children learn together and develop their potential is the threshold for our societies. It builds on the Child Rights Convention, responds to the needs of all children, contributes to social inclusion, and ensures economic development.

/2/

WORKING TOGETHER AND LEARNING TOGETHER MEANS GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER FIRST.

To include everyone in school and work with different actors for education means that we take the time to learn about each other, develop curricula promoting intercultural learning, and strengthen settings for learning from each other.

/3/

THERE IS NO DEFICIT, THERE ARE JUST DIFFERENCES.

Every child, family, and community bring knowledge and skills to school. We must create an environment for them to benefit from the richness and opportunities to learn through, with, and for our differences.

/4/

CHILDREN SHOW US THE WAYS.

The best way for the school to respond to the children's needs is to ask them and involve them. Trusting the children as co-creators in education strengthens their participation and learning.

/5/

THERE IS NEVER ENOUGH DATA AND RESEARCH.

Data on educational outcomes and analysis to understand why children are not adequately included and benefiting from quality learning are insufficient. Better data could feed comprehensive understanding and discussions to achieve equal access for all children.

/6/

INCLUDE "INCLUSION" IN THE FUNDING AND PLANNING.

Inclusion means universal design, ensuring access for all. Funding and relevant activities must be planned and provided for every project, every program, and every school.



20 March 2024



Opening Remarks

The opening of the conference was marked with greetings by Sofia Voultepsi, the Deputy Minister of Immigration and Asylum, Lajla Brandt Jakhelln, the Ambassador of Norway, and Stelios Zavvos, the Founder and President of Solidarity Now.

The Deputy Minister for Migration and Asylum, Sofia Voultepsi, said that the leading cause of inequalities is that not all people have the same starting point. The Minister listed the challenges refugee children face from their arrival to the moment they join education. At the same time, she spoke of the steps that have been taken in Greece. More specifically, the Minister referred to the All Children in Education program as a motto and an assumption, a success story, and the flagship of refugee education, as she called it. The programme is a bridge between non-formal and formal education and public schools. As of 09/2021 over 22,000 children have benefited. The Minister then spoke overall about children's education and the strides made in recent years in child protection.

The Ambassador of Norway in Greece Lajla Brandt Jakhelln highlighted the right to education for all children and the responsibility to fulfill the Convention of Child Rights. Most European countries have high access to education, but certain groups remain excluded and do not benefit from quality education. This is not for our societies' benefit, as people's education level impacts society's development. For instance, World Bank research showed that the fiscal benefit for East Europe and Balkan countries from the inclusion of Roma children is 3-9 billion Euro per year. A good practice through the funding of EEA grants is the "All Children in School" and the work of the Union of Ladies of Drama, a mobile school for Roma children. It is essential to include successful practices of inclusive education in national policies.

The president and founder of SolidarityNow, Mr. Stelios Zavvos, welcomed the representatives of the State, the speakers, and the conference participants. Mr. Zavvos noted that education is at the heart of the organization's activities. To this end, education is and will be one of the critical areas of SolidarityNow's interventions in the coming years, as it is fundamental to achieving peaceful coexistence, social inclusion and capacity building and sustainable development. The organisation has developed educational programmes to improve and provide access to quality services for refugee children and their families, and also supports Roma communities. To date, 7568 children have benefited from non-formal education activities, with 47% also supporting access to the public education system throughout the implementation of the All Children in Education Programme. Meanwhile, 3647 adults have participated in Greek language courses through HELIOS programmes.

Inequalities in Education



The percentage of children enrolled in schools in European countries is very high. However, there are still inequalities in access to inclusive quality education and learning outcomes, particularly for vulnerable groups of children. Why is inclusive education beneficial for children and society? What are the barriers to benefiting from opportunities to thrive in school and learn in European countries? These are the questions to investigate through different experiences and good practices.

“Fostering equity and inclusion in education across OECD countries.”

Ms. LUCIE CERNA / OECD Senior Analyst in Equity, Inclusion & Transitions, Directorate for Education and Skills

Ms. Cerna presented insights and results acquired through the OECD “Strength through Diversity project” (2017-2022), which examined how best to support learners’ success from diverse backgrounds. Six groups of pupils have been identified: 1. Ethnic groups, national minorities, and indigenous people; 2. Migration; 3. Gender, 4. Special education needs; 5. Giftedness; 6. Gender identity and sexual orientation. The intersectionality between these groups is also important to consider. There is a significant variation in the terms for different groups of learners across education systems. To address inequity, there are key areas to focus on: governing, resourcing, developing capacity, promoting school-level interventions, and monitoring and evaluation. It is highlighted that most systems do not promote diversity in the education staff. Moreover, adapting the teacher’s approach is as vital as adapting the curriculum to address the needs of different groups. She also noted that there is not enough data on the well-being of learners. Finally, she mentioned that enhancing inclusion in education systems requires developing a policy framework, ensuring flexibility and responsiveness, including equity and inclusion as principles in resourcing, engaging all relevant stakeholders, developing capacity for equity and inclusion, and responding to individual student needs.

“Inclusive education in the EU”

Mr. STEFAAN HERMANS / European Commission, DG EAC, Director for Policy Strategy and Evaluation

Mr. Hermans said inclusive education is the cornerstone of education in the EU. Ensuring the right to education is a challenge. The European Area of Education aims to tackle barriers to education. That is why it is necessary to focus on the different needs of groups. He focused on the development of skills, as in Europe, we are far from the goal of 50% of the students reaching the minimum level in basic skills. EU has worse results in PISA assessment than 10 years before. If this negative trend is not changed, there will be a negative effect on the medium- and long-term competitiveness of our economy. Today, 30% of students do not reach the minimum required level in maths. 1/4 does not reach the minimum level in reading. This means that they could not understand a contract. COVID contributed negatively, but the trend has been going on for years. The economic situation defines the possibilities for success. For instance, the barriers for Roma children are very. Specific actions have been taken: the framework “pathways to skill success” has been set, and a group of experts will develop recommendations for well-being, including bullying. He also highlighted the role of education staff. There is an issue of attractiveness for the profession. However, there are few comparative data. The EU has different funding instruments, including Erasmus +, the Next Generation fund support Education, and the Technical Support Instrument. Finally, there has also been an initiative to improve data.

“Child-rights-based Inclusive Education”

Mr. GHASSAN KHALIL / UNICEF Representative in Greece

Mr. Khalil focused on the importance of a common understanding of what inclusion means, mentioning that we talk about inclusion because exclusion results from discriminatory practices. The Convention on the Rights of the Child offers a framework for thinking about prejudices. Child Rights must be in our minds to prevent exclusion, requiring a robust culture of child rights. The All Children in Education program in Greece is an excellent example for migrant and refugee children. UNICEF in Greece aims to create 13 centers on child rights in the regions of Greece. He also noted that the main role of education is the development of the child’s personality. This covers a brighter area than Education. To ensure access to quality education, many aspects must be considered beyond the knowledge of basic subjects.

Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusive Education



“The challenges to quality education for all in Greece”

Ms. THEONI KOUFONIKOLAKOU / Deputy Ombudswoman for Children’s Rights in Greece

Ms. Koufonikolakou spoke about the challenges of quality education for all children in Greece. The state is obliged to consider the best interests of children, which demands a holistic approach and the opinions of children. Their right to be heard is above being informed. The children are also agents who advocate for human rights. She noted that the goal of education is not only knowledge acquisition; it is also about being heard. The goal is to build empathy and genuine expression, not only knowledge acquisition. The ombudsperson has highlighted the importance of including children in decision-making in schools. Through this approach violence, including bullying, can be prevented. In Greece, the schools respond by overbuilding curricula. Not all forms of intelligence are recognized and developed. The prevention and identification of cases or victims of violence is an issue to approach holistically and not to focus only on the case/incident. She also mentioned a series of gaps—the lack of sexual education. During the Covid, only 14 % of children in refugee camps were out of school. The delay of reception classes jeopardises the participation in school for children with special educational needs. Transport to school is still a challenge for some refugees and children with disabilities. Schools with 80% Roma still exist. Lack of capacity building on inclusion of children with different backgrounds. She concluded that some challenges are complex to address due to funding constraints. However, the questions to be focused on are: is there a medium-long-term strategic plan? Are we moving towards democratic education? Are we properly considering children’s views?

Our Challenges to Learn and Fulfil Our Dreams

Youth panel

Four children from the 2nd EPAL Egaleo in West Athens participate in the panel. The children come mostly from families with a low socioeconomic profile. Many students are second or first-generation immigrants from over 6 countries of origin. There are several children with learning difficulties. The school also accepts unaccompanied children from a shelter for minors in the area. It cooperates and has joint activities with the Unified Special Vocational High School - Lyceum. Finally, it participated last year in the “Schools for All” project funded by EEA grants, which you will learn more about tomorrow.

Elda, Alicia, John, and Melina shared their experiences and challenges in their student careers with their classmates, teachers, and the courses. Each of them faced difficulties in feeling and being accepted for different reasons, such as being new in the school, from a different country, having dyslexia, needing more time and silence to perform, and not knowing the school language. At the same time, they talked about the support of their family and some teachers but also complained about not being heard by other teachers and being attacked by classmates’ parents. All of them faced violence at different levels, including physical and psychological violence. They provided, through their experience, palpable examples of how xenophobia, stereotypes, bullying, violence in school, and acceptance of neurodiversity affect the development and educational progress of children. They asked parents to support and listen to their children and the school to prevent violence and measures against bullying, provide more language learning opportunities, and provide opportunities for nonformal education and extra-curricular activities.

Education of Refugee and Migrant Children

In the last decade, there have been considerable influxes of refugees and migrants in Europe. Some countries are seen as a passage, while others as a destination. All of them must provide quality education to the children, no matter their legal status, from the emergency response to the integration phase. Different state approaches and programs by civil society have been developed to ensure access to and retention of education. Still, inequalities in accessing quality inclusive education persist, requesting innovation and, in some cases, revision of practices.

OPENING BY THE GENERAL SECRETARY FOR VULNERABLE PERSONS AND INSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION, Mr. HERACLES MOSKOFF

Mr. Moskoff said that In recent years, a lot of children have come to Greece, among them unaccompanied children, some of them without accommodation or living in precarious situations. The Secretariat aims to address these issues under a political mandate but with the support of NGOs and other stakeholders. There are 2500 accommodation places and a strategy and framework to guarantee their rights and needs. The program of guardianship started. Regarding education, the main concern is the education of the actors supporting these children. The General Secretary noted that integration starts with us. Xenophobia, racism, and stereotypes are the first things to focus on. What are the local children, the teacher, and the parents doing? We are not satisfied with the access of unaccompanied in school. The mentors of the ministry work as mediators supporting these young people. There is a need to support these children through Non formal education, informal education, apprenticeships, vocational training, and soft skills development.

“Refugee and Migrant Children’s Access to Education”

Mrs. MARIA CLARA MARTIN / UNHCR Representative in Greece

Mrs. Martin said that today, there are 15,000,000 refugee children worldwide. Of them, only 50% are in school, 68% in primary, and less than 40% in secondary. In Europe, there is no comprehensive data about refugee children in school. There were about 800,000 before the beginning of the war in Ukraine, and 2,000,000 children from Ukraine have been added. Many children are out of the host country system because parents rely on digital learning or for mobility reasons. In Europe, less than 50% of children are out of school. This negatively affects the prosperity of people. Education is not a choice; it is a fundamental right. It is crucial in refugee responses. School is also essential for integration. The EU states must include children in their education system 3 months after the family applies for protection. Moreover, support in learning the host language must be provided. She noted that unaccompanied children rejected for asylum applications must also be in school. The school is a safe space. At the same time, the children must be supported through supportive measures to catch up, such as programs bridging between systems and certified programs. Finally, she mentioned that only 6% of refugees go to university.

Inclusion of Refugee and Migrant Children in Education Panel discussion

Moderation: Mr. GIANNIS PAPADOPOULOS, Journalist

- ▶ **MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS AND SPORTS - GREECE**
Dr. GALINA ALTCHOVA, Chief of Unit for the Coordination & Monitoring of the Education of Refugees
- ▶ **MELISSA NETWORK - GREECE**
Ms. NADINA CHRISTOPOULOU, Director
- ▶ **SOLIDARITYNOW - GREECE**
Ms. EVA MELLOU, Project Area Manager
- ▶ **ASSOCIATION FOR SHARED LEARNING ELA - BULGARIA**
Dr. IVA BONEVA, Founder and President of the Board

Mrs. Altchova presented the Ministry of Education program. She mentioned that developing an inclusive environment aims to create a space where children feel safe and can have dreams. 16000 refugee students are enrolled in Greece based on myschool. The number changes constantly, and this constitute a challenge for the MoE. The MoE has three pillars: the Reception Centers for Refugee Education, the Reception Classes and the Refugee Coordinators. The number of children in mainstream schools doubled last year. For a refugee child to get into school, 10 ministries must deliver and cooperate. Most of the Refugee coordinators are in urban areas, where most of the refugees live. They mediate between the school and the family, and different actors support inclusion in school. She noted that education is not happening in the Reception Class but in school. Each child brings skills, dreams, and potential in school.

Mrs. Christopoulou focused on the ways the communities support their children. Communities and nonformal education can address gaps in access and inclusion in school. She said the Ukrainian community supported the Ukrainian refugees who arrived in Greece. The community schools, which used to teach the mother tongue and the culture, start working daily. They created a bridge connecting newly arrived children and families with the school. It was a therapeutic space in which the mother tongue and the culture played a crucial role. She noted that this “third” space –between the one left and the new one - strengthens the children’s ability to move between different spaces. The education system cannot operate without the community and the children. The children also have more opportunities and develop through mediating between the community, their parents, and the school.

Ms. Mellou noted that refugee families demand access to school and education activities from the first day of arrival in refugee camps. In this environment, a child is only immersed in the host language in school, which must be considered when assessing their progress in school. The children have gaps while arriving at school, but they also acquire gaps while in school. Support for the families is also necessary. For instance, an important step was to bring the parents to the school. Communication between teachers and parents influences children’s learning progress. She also noted the importance of the feeling of belonging. Finally, non-formal education can empower children and support their participation in school activities. She highlighted that going to school every day is a victory for these children; sometimes, it demands that they exceed their limits.

Mrs. Boneva spoke about the summer camps involving children from different groups organized by the association ELA. The motto is “learn the world of the other” through building friendships and learning from each other. Children from different communities participate, including Bulgarian, Turkish, Roma, and university students. Even without sometimes a common language, they succeed in building friendships. Based on children’s feedback at the end of the summer, they report that the main takeaway is that there is no reason to be ashamed of themselves. The children continue to contact the summer camp friends from other communities, showing the strength of relationships formed during the summer camp.

Inclusion of Refugee and Migrant Youth in Education

Panel discussion

Moderation: Mr. NICHOLAS RANGOS, Senior Project Coordinator

▶ IOM

Mr. HARRY SMITH, Head of Policy and Programme Development

▶ NETWORK FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS - GREECE

Mr. PANOS CHRISTODOULOU, Director

▶ ARSIS - GREECE

Mrs. KATERINA POUTOU, Legal Representative

Mrs. Poutou mentioned that the school must offer knowledge and skills for emancipation. The inequalities can be hidden in small details, such as criteria to justify absences. The approach of interrelation is crucial. Based on ARSIS experience with adolescents, adolescence is the age of opportunity as transitional to adulthood. Without segregation, a school that works as one can also include unaccompanied children. Their experience with nonformal education centers for refugee children has proved the importance of also being open and including the local children. Finally, she mentioned that funding must take care of the transition between programs to ensure sustainability.

Mr. Christodoulou noted that it is not easy to focus on the right to participation when other challenges in accessing education have not been fulfilled, including practical and administrative obstacles to access to education at every level. Among the challenges to access to education are accommodation, transport, placement in school, and operation of Reception Classes, as well as the concentration of a large number of refugee children in some areas. He also mentioned the importance of promoting different cultural identities and the absence of apprenticeships or recognition of previous competencies and skills. A lot of adolescents in third countries work. Specialized programs are needed to connect participation in school and work. The Network for Children's Rights supported refugee girls to create a newspaper that continues after 7 years to be published with stories about adolescents and young adults from local, refugee, and migrant communities.

Mr. Smith said that many displaced people reside in urban places. The displacement can take more than 10 years. So, the children will receive education outside of their country of origin. To create a parallel system is very costly. However, a lot of adolescents do not have good learning outcomes. They need supportive measures. The challenges must be approached through different axes: educational, social, and emotional needs. As part of the pedagogical approach, the development of social competencies and their emotional needs must also be considered. It must also be noted that unaccompanied children do not have parental support. They do not understand the language and lose motivation. They need to take care of administrative issues, which leads to several absences from school. Finally, they want to work and earn money. Therefore, employability and learning must be seen together. These young people must also build skills for the future, such as digital skills.

Mrs. Titerova shared experiences from the preparation classes to support newly arrived children of third countries in the Czech Republic. For a year, the children receive support to learn the language as an organism that contains meanings aiming to express themselves naturally in everyday situations. She also mentioned that there are different ways to be adapted, for instance, learning the language, using it for school, and advocating for the inclusion of children from third countries. It is also essential to include them in this process to create space for adolescents to express their experiences and get empowered. META organized youth participative research through picnics with a thematic focus. In one of them, teachers participated, which allowed the adolescents to understand that the teachers also needed support. Based on the findings, the children made a campaign with three videos about the language barrier, intercultural identity, and the support of teachers. Finally, the participants exchanged information with the Commissioner of Human Rights and a Member of Parliament. She mentioned that such an approach also has a therapeutic impact.



21 March 2024



Opening / Ms. Fay Koutzoukou, Deputy Director of SN

The conference's second day they coincided with the International Day for the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination and World Down Syndrome Day. The speeches focused on access to education for Roma children and children with disabilities.

Ms. Fay Koutzoukou welcomed the audience to the second day of the conference, introducing the themes. Two themes are crucial to ensuring equal access to education and respect for children's rights. Ms. Koutzoukou the European Economic Area (EEA) Financial Mechanism, the so-called EEA GRANTS, and the Active Citizens Fund programme through which this transnational conference is being implemented. The EEA GRANTS represent the financial contribution of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein to reducing economic and social disparities and strengthening bilateral relations with 15 countries of the European Union, including Greece.

For Greece, financial support to civil society is provided through the €15 million "Active Citizens Fund". The programme aims to strengthen civil society's sustainability and highlight its role in promoting democratic processes, enhancing citizens' participation in public life and defending human rights. The Active Citizens Fund's Grant Manager in Greece is the Bodossaki Foundation and SolidarityNow. To date, 7 calls for expressions of interest have been completed for civil society organisations, institutions, and their partners. Through these, 128 projects have been selected and are being implemented until April 2024 by 177 organisations across Greece.

Education of Roma Children



The Roma are among the most marginalized groups in Europe, with their rights systematically infringed throughout their history, including the right to education. Segregation, low participation in Early Education, and a high percentage of early leavers indicate inequalities in access and opportunities related to their needs. As of today, a significant number of Roma children do not benefit from quality inclusive education, even though it is fundamental to provide the young Roma with skills to succeed and thrive in society.

OPENING BY THE GENERAL SECRETARY FOR SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY, MR. PRODROMOS PYRROS

Mr. Pyrros addressed the event, stressing that equal access to education is a matter of rights, but not only. Equal opportunities in education benefit not only children but society as a whole. Access for Roma children is a social wealth that should be exploited. It is a priority for the government to reduce school dropouts and create an environment where they can attend school without hindrance. Education is also a key pillar of the national Roma strategy. Significant steps have been taken in recent years. According to myschool data, there has been an increase in school attendance from 13,000 to 15,000 in three years, also due to the introduction of school attendance as a precondition to social benefits. A significant challenge is the attendance of Roma girls and continuing their education from primary to secondary school, which is also a matter of cooperation between different ministries. Finally, he set the targets for the next period to strengthen inclusion and reduce discrimination. To ensure there are no differences between Roma children attending school and other children.

“Challenges for the Education of Roma Children”

Mr. ANDREY IVANOV, European Agency for Fundamental Rights - Head of Roma Inclusion Sector

Mr. Ivanof presented the EU policy framework for Roma inclusion and the data for Greece and the EU that the Agency has conducted over the years. Compared to the previous EU strategy on Roma equality, inclusion, and participation, what has changed is that, for the first time, we have a framework that links the actions and the seven objectives to be achieved with measurable indicators. For this reason, data is essential as it feeds into the indicators. Comparative data from the FRA surveys for 2016 and 2021 were presented about Greece. The number of children in primary school increased, but not in all countries. The percentage of Roma pupils who have completed 6 to 15 years of schooling is satisfactory but should increase by 15% by 2030. This is not the case for secondary education in Greece, where the percentage is extremely low and should be increased. The link between the quality of housing and living conditions in relation to school drop-out is important. The importance of the data has been noted, but there are limitations. Qualitative research could complement this by providing insights to understand the context better. It is also essential to combine data with what is happening in practice.

Inclusion of Roma Children in Education
Panel discussion

Moderation: Dr. CHRISTOS ILIADIS, Postdoctoral Researcher/Co-founder “ActRom”

- ▶ TRUST FOR SOCIAL ACHIEVEMENT - BULGARIA
Mr. OGNYAN ISAEV, Program Director Educational Achievement
- ▶ AMKE REVMA - GREECE
Ms. GEORGIA KALPAZIDOU & Ms. CHRISTINA KOKKONI, Co-founders
- ▶ COMMUNITY-BASED ROMA RESOURCE CENTER – CROATIA
Ms. ELISABET TAKAČ, Roma activist

Mr. Isaev said that it is important to consider the pathway from home to school for a Roma child and consider all the barriers to overcome. It is easy to think that the Roma are not interested in Education, knowing the challenges to be faced. Education systems consider the needs and background of the dominant social groups and do not take into account other groups, for example, those of Roma communities. Access to education must result from primary socialisation within the family and secondary socialisation, i.e. within communities and neighborhoods. Access to education starts from the development of neighborhoods and ensuring transport to school. It is also about the knowledge of language and the cultural representation of Roma in schools and schoolbooks. A positive change to be noted is that there are 6 times more Roma with a university degree who are role models for the community. One measure contributing to this change has been scholarships. However, there are cases of Roma with degrees who have difficulties finding a job.

Ms. Kalpazidou mentioned that the issue of Roma bilingualism is ignored. The knowledge of Romani must be approached as an opportunity and not as a barrier. However, there is no knowledge of the relationship between the Romani language and the Greek language and other Balkan languages. The two languages influence one another. Teachers must learn more about Romani and use it to create a more friendly environment and a sense of belonging for Roma children. Language creates the condition for inclusion. A new linguistic approach is necessary, as this will also benefit the children of the general population. Some children end up in school with very low literacy skills. To reverse this, the schools need support from families who often live under challenging conditions. Therefore, cooperation at the local level is essential. Ms. Takac said the Roma children in the area where she resides in Croatia do not speak Romani. Before the '90 the Roma were more included and had more opportunities to work. After the war, the community has been poorer. School is compulsory, and there are no issues with transport, meals in schools, or free books,

but dropouts still exist, especially for children after the age of 15 years. She highlighted that there is not one solution to ensure inclusion. Many people mixed inclusion with assimilation, which means knowing and acknowledging the culture. She admitted that some teachers try to build bridges. 8 April is the day of Roma. In all schools in Croatia, some events are organised for all groups and minorities. Regarding Roma children with educational difficulties, there are not enough experts to support the teachers. Finally, she talked about their work with the pedagogical academy, preparing future teachers on sensitization to Roma culture.

Ms. Kokkoni said that inclusion is essential, but the meaning is unclear. It is about revising the difficulties of accessing through an inclusive approach. The number of children accessing school is much larger. However, there are issues in certain localities. Relations with teachers are not always easy. The teachers do not mention absences, as this is connected to social benefits, and they are under pressure from the parents.

Education of children with disabilities

Mr. Ioannis Katsaros, the Secretary General of Primary, Secondary Education, and Special Education of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, addressed the conference, expressing his enthusiasm for its organization and the participation of representatives and experts from other countries. Greece has many steps to take, and we aspire to develop our plans for an inclusive school. The conclusions will also feed our thinking.

“The Journey to Inclusive Education: State of Play and Challenges”

Ms. RACHEL VAUGHAN, European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)

Ms. Vaughan presented the current situation and the challenges of the inclusive education journey. She reported a discrepancy between Member States regarding inclusion based on a survey conducted by EASPD. The key challenges relate to legislation and strategic policy, unsatisfactory inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools combined with a focus on special schools, the need for multidisciplinary teams, the need for funding for additional learning support and proper use of resources, and the use of flexible curricula. She noted that enhancing inclusive education in mainstream schools is more cost-effective. A crucial issue is the attitudes towards inclusive education. Society has a specific perception of where people with disabilities can go and what they can do. She highlighted the need for change, including pedagogical models and qualified teaching staff in mainstream schools. Finally, the challenge in the digital transition was made clear during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is an opportunity to increase access and accessibility for all children with and without disabilities, parents, and teachers.

Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Education
Panel discussion

Moderation: Mr. GIANNIS CHATZIBEIS, Paralympian

- ▶ KNOW HOW CENTRE FOR ALTERNATIVE CARE AT THE NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY
Ms. EVGENIYA TONEVA
- ▶ ESAMEA - GREECE
Mrs. FOTEINI ZAFEIROPOULOU
- ▶ ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH (SKEP)- GREECE
Ms. ATHENA KRITIKOU, SKEP Founder and President
- ▶ ELEPAP - GREECE
Mrs. ELENA DIMOPOULOU, Head of the Early Educational and Therapeutic Intervention Programme of ELEPAP
- ▶ ASSOCIATION FOR THE CARE OF AUTISTIC PERSONS - CROATIA
Ms. NEVIA KRUPLJANIN, Program Manager

Ms. Toneva, Expert at the Centre of Expertise for Alternative Care at the New Bulgarian University, talked about the Bulgarian model, where there are no longer special schools, but they have developed an inclusive framework in general schools, how this reform is implemented and what are its results, positive dimensions, and challenges.

Mrs. Zafeiropoulou provided data for Greece, where 7% of the country's total student population are children with disabilities and special education needs, excluding school dropouts and those out of school. Among them about 107,000 and 88% are integrated into the general education system and 12,500 in special schools. However, there is no data evaluation and qualitative research. She noted that it cannot be said that inclusion is achieved. For instance, the inclusion classes in mainstream schools face multiple issues and are not functioning effectively. The same applies to the parallel support measures, which also linguistically refer to a discriminatory approach. She highlighted the need for an inclusion assistant, as well as training of teachers by category, improvement of the infrastructure, and flexible and accessible materials.

Mrs. Demopoulou spoke about ELEPAP's innovative pedagogical and therapeutic programs. They emphasize individualized intervention for preschool children and skill development and socialization. The broader objective is to strengthen the inclusive culture in society at large. Most children participating in the programme are enrolled in general education schools. The support is holistic and involves multiple levels of assistance and inclusion. She also spoke about the need for the state and society to strengthen the inclusive culture.

Ms. Krupljanin focused on an innovative programme designed and implemented by her organisation for the education of children in schools, so that they can get to know and see what the needs and everyday life of people with disabilities are. The children develop assistive panels for their school and the neighborhood. They learn not to be afraid of children with disabilities and not to be scared due to their ignorance. As she said, the borders are in our minds, and fear makes us put people aside. It is about implementing common actions to see our commonalities and our differences and not to be afraid of differences because we are all part of a community.

Ms. Kritikou from the JRC spoke about the need for an inclusive mindset, empathy, and acceptance of uniqueness, as well as a different approach to everyday life in relation to accessibility, limitations, and barriers. This attitude and context imply education and the need for the state to take measures so that civil society does not need to cover up.

Common Challenges – Joint Solutions



“Sustainable School-Parent-Community Relations for Authentic Inclusion of Disadvantaged Children: Reflections from Lived Experiences”

Prof. CARMEL BORG - University of Malta

Professor Borg from the University of Malta presented a strategic method for Sustainable School-Parent-Community Relationships to include children from disadvantaged backgrounds authentically. Mr. Borg noted that there is no gene for inclusion; we need to learn how to include everyone. He highlighted the importance of interacting with parents for sustainable results in schools. There is a deficit orientation to parents in the education community. However, it is not possible to develop an inclusive attitude when the culture focuses on deficits. Inclusive education and democracy are about power dynamics. We need to intervene in the school's culture, or we will reproduce the existing social status quo. The school must act

as a counter-example to show the proper representation of power. The school must be a place of memory, collective care, and restorative justice. He presented how teachers are trained to act as agents of social change and how important the parallel development of emotional intelligence is.

“Activities to foster Inclusion in School - The case of a primary school in central Athens”

Assistant Prof. PETROS CHARAVITSIDIS - National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Mr. Charavitsidis presented Inclusive actions in a school context, using a primary school in the centre of Athens as an example. He spoke about the Grava school complex and its mode of operation. Since the beginning of 2000, this school has had more than 3000 children, with almost 80% of children of the migrant population. The school saw this reality not as a problem but as an opportunity that can be exploited for both majority and minority children. It is creating democratic structures and procedures that regulate daily life and an adapted programme that responds to needs. He talked to us about the basic pedagogical principles for inclusive education, the use of language, and respect for identity. The results of this long-term effort are very optimistic: improvement in inclusion and attendance, reduction of school dropout and tensions, connection with institutions and organizations, and the development of teachers' know-how.

“Schools for All” – The European Wergeland Centre

Dr. ANGELOS VALLIANATOS, Teacher Trainer, Ms. MARIANTHI ANTONIOU, Project Manager

Mr. Vallianatos and Ms. Antoniou of the School for All project of the European Wergeland Centre noted that the program “School for All” showcased the importance of cooperation with the community and developing a democratic culture in school. Mr. Valianatos pointed out that creating a community with teachers, schools, and students was the most prominent result. The people involved in this project have changed. He emphasized how important the issue of visibility is to equity. Visibility has different forms; for instance, the use of the family language of students so that they feel that they belong in the school space also belongs to them. We all have a shared dream of peace, but our peace can contribute to overall peace.

“Inclusive Education and Schools”

Mrs. DIMITRA KANELLOPOULOU, European Commission, DG EAC, Education Policy Officer/Country Analyst for Cyprus & Greece

Mrs. Kanellopoulou focused on the role of the European Education Area for inclusive education. It aims to remove barriers to learning and improve access to quality education for all. The EU has set some indicators and targets to track progress and gaps. One of the leading indicators is access to early childhood education for three years. It is even more critical for populations such as the Roma, where significant disparities are observed. The performance in PISA is another indicator. There again, vulnerable groups face more challenges. It was noted that there is a lack of contact with civil society. Moreover, it is vital to strengthen and empower teachers and education workers. The issue is not only a student's access but also how the school welcomes a student. The funding of education systems must be strengthened. Finally, she noted the need to learn about sustainability and link it to social issues and issues of resilience and continuity of education systems.

I Program

CONFERENCE INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION March 20th – 21st, 2024 • Athens, Greece Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation • Auditorium



20 MARCH

09:30-10:00 Registration

OPENING REMARKS

- Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports
- Deputy Minister of Migration and Asylum, Mrs. SOFIA VOULTEPSI
- Ambassador of Norway, Mrs. LAULA BRANDT JAKHJELIN
- SolidarityNow, Founder and Chairman of the Board, Mr. STELIOS ZAVVOS

10:30-11:45 **INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION**

Fostering equity and inclusion in education across OECD countries

Ms. LUCIE CERNA, OECD Senior Analyst in Equity, Inclusion & Transitions, Directorate for Education and Skills

Inclusive education in the EU

Mr. STEFAAN HERMANS, European Commission, DG EAC, Director for Policy Strategy and Evaluation

Child-rights-based Inclusive Education

Mr. GHASSAN KHALIL, UNICEF Representative in Greece

11:45-12:00 BREAK

12:00-13:15 **CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES TO INCLUSIVE QUALITY EDUCATION**

The challenges to quality education for all - Greece

Ms. THEONI KOUFONIKOLAKOU, Deputy Ombudswoman for Children's Rights

The challenges to quality education for all - Bulgaria

Ms. DENITSA SACHEVA, Member of the Parliament, former Deputy Minister of Education

Our Challenges to Learn and Fulfill Our Dreams - YOUTH PANEL

13:15-14:30 LUNCH

14:30-16:00 **EDUCATION OF REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN**

Opening by the General Secretary for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection, Mr. HERACLES MOSKOFF

Refugee and Migrant Children's Access to Education

Mrs. MARIA CLARA MARTIN, UNHCR Representative in Greece

Inclusion of Refugee and Migrant Children in Education - PANEL DISCUSSION

Moderation: Mr. GIANNIS PAPADOPOULOS, Journalist

- Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports - Greece, Dr. GALINA ALTCHOVA, Chief of Unit for the Coordination & Monitoring of the Education of Refugees
- Melissa Network - Greece, Ms. NADINA CHRISTOPOULOU, Director
- SolidarityNow - Greece, Ms. EVA MELLOU, Project Area Manager
- Association for Shared Learning ELA - Bulgaria, Dr. IVA BONEVA, Founder and President of the Board

16:00-16:15 BREAK

16:15-17:30 **Inclusion of Refugee and Migrant Youth in Education - PANEL DISCUSSION**

Moderation: Mr. NICHOLAS RANGOS, Senior Project Coordinator

- IOM, Mr. HARRY SMITH, Head of Policy and Programme Development
- Network for Children's Rights - Greece, Mr. PANOS CHRISTODOULOU, Director
- ARSIS - Greece, Mrs. KATERINA POUTOU, Legal Representative
- META - Czech Republic, Ms. KRISTYNA TITEROVA, Program Director

17:30 **CONCLUSION Day 1**

21 MARCH

10:00-10:10 **OPENING REMARKS**

Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family, etc

10:10-11:45 **EDUCATION OF ROMA CHILDREN**

Opening by the General Secretary for Social Solidarity and Fight Against Poverty, Mr. PRODROMOS PYRROS

Challenges for the Education of Roma Children

Mr. ANDREY IVANOV, European Agency for Fundamental Rights - Head of Roma Inclusion Sector

Inclusion of Roma Children in Education - PANEL DISCUSSION

Moderation: Dr. CHRISTOS ILIADIS, Postdoctoral Researcher/Co-founder "ActRom"

- Trust for Social Achievement - Bulgaria, Mr. OGNAN ISAEV, Program Director Educational Achievement
- ELLAN PASSE - Greece, Mr. VASILIS PANTZOS, President
- AMKE Revma - Greece, Ms. GEORGIA KALPAZIDOU & Ms. CHRISTINA KOKKONI, Co-founders
- Community-based Roma Resource Center - Croatia, Ms. ELISABET TAKAC, Roma activist

11:45-12:00 BREAK

12:00-13:45 **EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

The Journey to Inclusive Education: State of Play and Challenges

Ms. RACHEL VAUGHAN, European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)

Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Education - PANEL DISCUSSION

Moderation: Mr. GIANNIS CHATZIBEIS, Paralympian

- Know How Centre for Alternative Care at the New Bulgarian University, Ms. EVGENIYA TONEVA
- ESAMEA - Greece, Mrs. FOTEINI ZAFIROPOULOU
- Association of Social Responsibility for Children and Youth (SKEP) - Greece, Ms. ATHENA KRITIKOU, Founder and President
- ELEPAP - Greece, Mrs. ELENA DIMOPOULOU, Head of the Early Educational and Therapeutic Intervention Programme of ELEPAP
- Association for the Care of Autistic Persons - Croatia, Ms. NEVIA KRUPJANIN, Program Manager

13:45-14:30 LUNCH

14:30-15:45 **COMMON CHALLENGES - JOINT SOLUTIONS**

Sustainable School-Parent-Community Relations for Authentic Inclusion of Disadvantaged Children: Reflections from Lived Experiences

Prof. CARMEL BORG - University of Malta

Activities to foster inclusion in school - The case of a primary school in central Athens

Assistant Prof. PETROS CHARAVITSIDIS - National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Schools for All - The European Wergeland Centre

Dr. ANGELOS VALLIANATOS, Teacher trainer, Ms. MARIANTHI ANTONIOU, Project Manager

Inclusive Education and Schools

Mrs. DIMITRA KANELLOPOULOU, European Commission, DG EAC, Education Policy Officer/Country Analyst for Cyprus & Greece

15:45-16:00 **CONCLUSION AND CLOSURE**

*Simultaneous interpretation in Greek, English and Greek Sign language will be provided at the event.





Evaluation Questionnaire

The questionnaire QR code was shared with the participants in the conference's informational folder. Following the completion of the two-day event, an invitation was distributed to the participants in order for them to evaluate the conference by filling in the respective questionnaire. In total, 23 participants provided feedback. The following are the results per question:

- On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with the Conference?
Πόσο ικανοποιημένοι/ες/α είστε από το Συνέδριο από το 1-5;
4,6
- How satisfied are you with the Keynotes?
Πόσο ικανοποιημένοι/ες/α είστε από τις κεντρικές ομιλίες;
4,3
- How satisfied are you with the panel on “Education of Refugee and Migrant Children”?
Πόσο ικανοποιημένοι/ες/α είστε από τη συζήτηση...
4,3
- How satisfied are you with the panel on “Education of Refugee and Migrant Youth”?
Πόσο ικανοποιημένοι/ες/α είστε από τη συζήτηση...
4,4
- How satisfied are you with the panel on “Education of Roma Children”?
Πόσο ικανοποιημένοι/ες/α είστε από τη συζήτηση πάνελ για την...
4,6
- How satisfied are you with the panel on “Education of Children with Disabilities”?
Πόσο ικανοποιημένοι/ες/α είστε από τη συζήτηση πάνελ...
4,4
- How satisfied are you with the panel moderators?
Πόσο ικανοποιημένοι/ες/α είστε από τις συντονίστριες/ες των πάνελ;
4,3
- How satisfied are you with the venue and catering?
Πόσο ικανοποιημένοι/ες/α είστε από το catering;
4,7
- How satisfied are you with the information provided before the regional event?
Πόσο ικανοποιημένοι/ες/α είστε από τις πληροφορίες που...
4,6
- Did you learn something new from your participation in the event?
Μάθατε κάτι από τη συμμετοχή σας στο συνέδριο;
86% YES, 13% NO



Communication

The two-day transnational conference was accompanied by a comprehensive communication plan, compatible with the theme and attractive to participants. Essentially through the use of vibrant colors, symbols and materials, the aim was to highlight that despite existing inequalities in education, there are ways and solutions to overcome them and ensure that all children have equal access and treatment. And this is not just a matter of optimism but of will, focus and practical measures on the part of all stakeholders. The venue stage was ‘dressed’ in unevenly colored pencils, which was the dominant visual of all the communication material produced including: tote bags, pencil cases, pens sharing the message education for all, informational folders, visit cards (in three different colors for the participants, speakers, SN personnel).

Furthermore, after the conclusion of the conference, the organization sent a press release to the media, summarizing all its highlights with special mention to all the distinguished speakers and conclusions. Also, the press release was shared on the organization's website, social media pages and e-newsletter.

Press release, March 27th, 2024

Successful completion of the regional conference, aimed at sharing good practices and innovative approaches to inclusive education

The conference was held on March 20 and 21 (World Day Against Racism) in Athens by the operators of the Active Citizens Fund program in Greece – SolidarityNow and Bodossaki Foundation – and in Bulgaria – Open Society Institute Sofia, Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation, and Trust for Social Achievement. Among the speakers were representatives from the European Commission, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Ministry of Education, Religion, and Sports, and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, academic institutions, embassies, institutional bodies, and European and local Civil Society organizations actively engaged in combating educational inequalities, supporting vulnerable social groups, and defending human rights. More than 40 speakers and participants represented 9 countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic).

The conference was opened by the Deputy Minister of Migration and Asylum, responsible for Inclusion, Vulnerable Citizens, and Unaccompanied Minors, Mrs. Sofia Voultepsi, the Ambassador of Norway to Greece, Mrs. Lajla Brandt Jakhell, and the Founder and President of SolidarityNow, Mr. Stelios Zavvos. Mrs. Sofia Voultepsi stated that the main cause of inequalities is the fact that not all people have the same starting point, a fact that is multiplied when discussing refugee children. Additionally, the Deputy Minister spoke about the inclusion steps that have been taken: “‘All Children in Education’ program is a motto and an acknowledgment, a success story and the flagship of refugee education. The program acts as a bridge between formal and non-formal education and the public school, benefiting since September 2021 to date more than 22,000 children.”

On her part, the Ambassador of Norway, Lajla Brandt Jakhell, representing the donor countries of the EEA Grants, emphasized: “Every child has the right to education, and this is a fundamental right. Inclusive education is not only the right thing to do but also the smartest.”

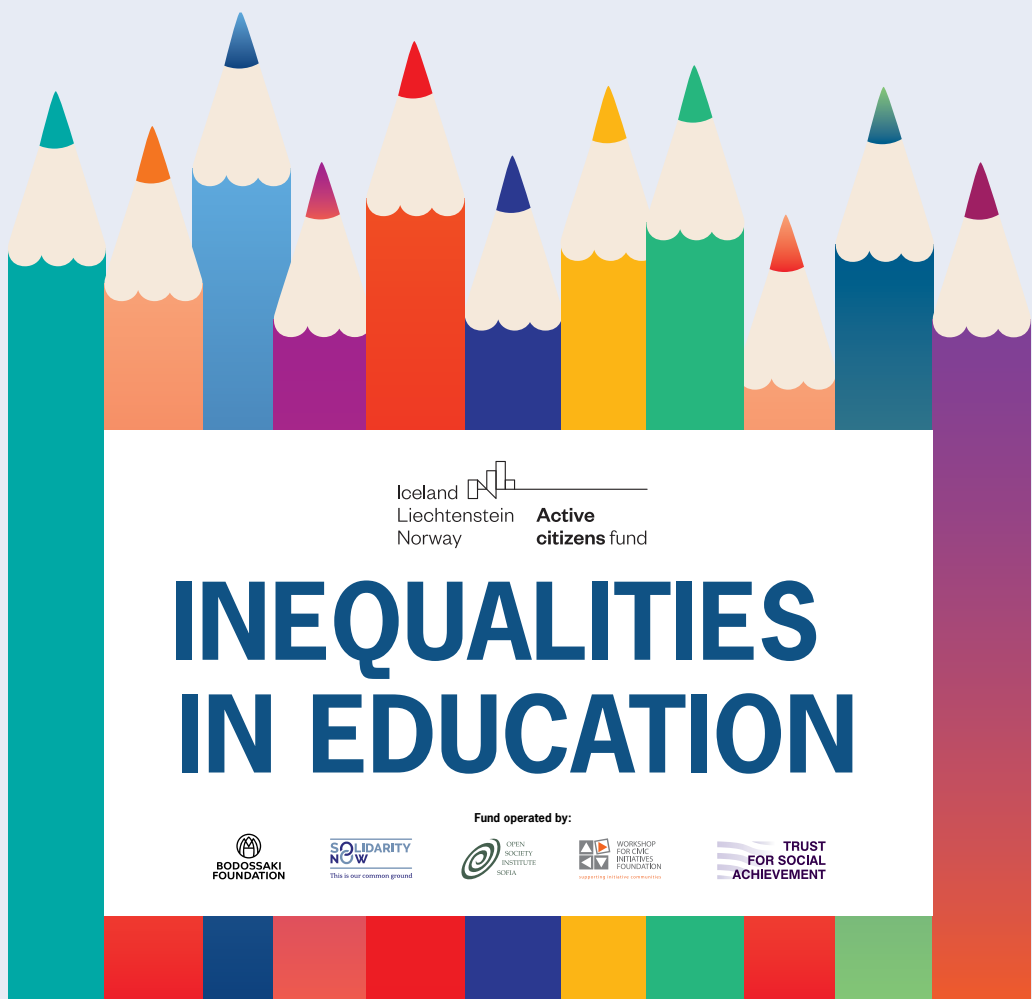
The founder and President of SolidarityNow, Stelios Zavvos, noted that education is at the heart of the organization's actions, being of fundamental importance for achieving peaceful coexistence, social inclusion and sustainable development. “The organization has developed multiple educational programs to improve and provide access to quality services for refugee children and their families and for Roma children, envisioning a society with equal opportunities and without exclusions.”

Through the experiences of four children attending Greek public schools, the 215 participants had the opportunity to realize the importance of inclusion in practice, where every child, regardless of nationality, disability, gender, linguistic, and other skills, has their place and must feel an equal member of the school. Data shows that although the enrollment rate of children in European countries is very high, there are still inequalities in access to quality education and learning outcomes, especially for some vulnerable groups of children, such as refugee and migrant children, Roma children, and children with disabilities. Throughout the conference, over a series of presentations, discussions, and statements, the need for more documentation, the importance of the participation of children, families, and their communities in their education, the value of highlighting or recognizing cultural and linguistic diversity, the debunking of stereotypes about educational capabilities, and above all, the need for an inclusive way of thinking were highlighted. The common theme was that the inclusion of all children in education is an issue that concerns every society.

You can watch the speeches made in the context of the conference [here](#). We thank [blod.gr](#) for the video recording.

*The conference is a regional initiative in the context of the Active Citizens Fund programmes in Greece and Bulgaria funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway as part of the EEA Grants 2014-2021.

The Active citizens fund in Greece is supported through a € 15 m grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway as part of the EEA Grants 2014 – 2021. The programme aims to develop the sustainability and capacity of the civil society sector in Greece, and to strengthen its role in promoting and safeguarding democratic procedures, active citizenship, and human rights. The Fund Operator for the Active citizens fund in Greece is Bodossaki Foundation in consortium with SolidarityNow.



Iceland
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Active
citizens fund

INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION

Fund operated by:

