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"Ensuring Continuity in Education for Refugee - Continugee". A report of the 1st Learning Teaching Training Activity

On 28 July 2021, the 1st Learning, Teaching, Training Activity (LTTA) of the Project "Ensuring Continuity in Education for Refugee - Continugee" took place. Continugee is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme Key Action 2. The partners of the project are National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA Greece), the Scientific Society for Social Cohesion and Development (EPEKSA Greece), University of Urbino Carlo Bo (Italy) and University (Fachhochschule) of Kiel (Germany).

The aim of the project is to create a partnership which will focus on the continuity of education for migrant and refugee children and adolescents, from the reception areas / countries to the places / countries of permanent settlement, and develop a needs-based curriculum and an in-service training program, and implement it in schools and education institutions of participant organizations, taking into consideration the local conditions and aiming at maximizing the European value along with refugees linguistic and cultural background of such interventions.

The "Continugee 1st LTTA" was held as an online event, due to the COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions. It was organised by the team of the University of Urbino Carlo Bo, coordinated by Professor Eduardo Barberis who welcomed all partners and gave the floor to the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens team. In his short address, the Professor Napoleon Maravegias, Scientific Coordinator of the Project and the NKUA Team, referred to the problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the development of the project, which fall under three categories: First, travel restrictions, urged the partners to communicate online, even at Transnational Project Meetings. Meetings in person are always preferable, especially in the beginning of such projects, because they provide partners with an opportunity to meet both scholarly and socially and discuss in depth the project issues. Second, the Pandemic hindered the financial and management processes of the project, as most employees of the financial services of the partner institutions have been working from home. This slowed down interactions between partner institutions and made coordination even more difficult. Third, refugee children were heavily affected by the Pandemic, as for many months they were taught via emergency remote teaching, in the difficult circumstances of the Camps or in their homes. This created a whole new situation for teachers, making the continuity of their education even more difficult. However, professor Maravegias pointed out the excellent cooperation of the Greek National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme, which allowed the Project to move forward and to being implemented to the maximum level possible.

In his brief address, the coordinator of the second Greek partner, Emeritus Professor, Theodoros Sakellaropoulos, President of EPEKSA Governing Board, explained the reasons that led EPEKSA to participate in this research project. First, because the theme of the project, the transnational perspective on the education of refugee children, falls within the social and educational initiatives supported by EPEKSA. In addition, the project offers EPEKSA the opportunity to contribute its expertise on projects for social cohesion and intercultural development and collaborate with experts and researchers from leading European universities, contributing with a team of scientists to the development of the project, building on.

The LTTA also hosted the Coordinator of Key Action 2 of the National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme, Anastasios Barmpas, who, in his brief salutation, highlighted the interest of the Greek National Agency for the project, as “Continugee” addresses such an important issue, as the integration of young migrants and refugees into the education systems of countries of first reception and final settlement.. He also underlined the importance of the project, for the acquaintance of young migrants and refugees with European values.

The LTTA continued with presentations from the partners on the Intellectual Output 1 of the Project, the State-of-the-Art Review.

The NKUA contribution was presented by NKUA Assistant Professor Yiannis Roussakis. The NKUA was the leader of IO1, and Prof Roussakis started by referring to the aim of IO1, which was to overview and review educational policies, pedagogical and teaching practices and approaches for the integration of refugee children and adolescents in the formal education systems of the participant countries, of other countries and international organisations. The State-of-the-Art review was carried out using a desk research / systematic review strategy, including National Case Studies / Reviews from the Partners’ countries and notes on exemplary cases from other countries / regions within and outside EU and International Organisations

The NKUA team, among others, reviewed the Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals, and especially how its educational provisions were adapted to the local circumstances and needs of several EU member states. He argued that in Greece the educational rights of migrants are violated in practice, because of inadequacies in the legal framework and reluctant administration responses. He also reported that the research revealed that, overall, migrant and refugee children school experience in Greece and other European countries is subject to considerable levels of discrimination. They leave school having experienced low school attainment and performance, multiple discrimination, and segregation. This makes the need for change an imperative, not only in Greece but also in most EU member states.

Assistant Professor of Panteion University (Athens), Nikos Kourachanis, representing EPEKSA, shed light upon the aspects of Greek education policies for refugee children. He stated that the main issues of concern found during the review can be categorized under four (4) central clusters. The operational-administrative issues, the pedagogical-educational problems, the synergies and cooperation initiatives and practices, and the training of teachers. He argued that access of refugee children to formal education is not always obligatory, leading to a substantially low degree of integration of refugee children into the Greek educational system.

Prof. Kourachanis also stated that refugee education is characterized by significant early school leaving and dropout rates in Greece. Subsequently, the children of refugees and migrants in Greece are susceptible to various hazards, and it is estimated by UNICEF that they have lost an average of two years and six months of schooling due to conflict episodes, violence, and displacement even before their relocation. He also highlighted the fact that a severe lack of training and expertise regarding the teaching personnel of refugee children exists in the Greek educational system, due to the limited working experience of teachers regarding both intercultural education and the efficiency when working with a multicultural class.

Moving on to the proposals, Prof. Kourachanis concluded that the analysis of the existing scientific literature showed that refugee education in Greece can be in the right direction only if certain conditions are met. Firstly, if the Greek language is authentically and in depth instructed to refugees and minors. Secondly, if there is constructive communication between education stakeholders and, lastly, if the parents of refugee children are enabled to be more actively in-

volved into their children school life. To achieve this, the local communities need to respond and collaborate with the state, as there are instances that these minorities feel unwanted.

Christos Zisis from the Fachhochschule Kiel presented the aspects of educational policies for refugee children, implemented by the German state. He reported that the Länder Ministries of Culture and several individual schools are working on school reforms, new curricula and teaching methods for either principal or often pragmatic reasons. Still, a general and systematic implementation of intercultural principles and equal opportunities is far from being realized. Even if migration issues are considered, the dualism between 'them' and 'us' still seems to dominate the process. Many social researchers and critical educators would plead for integration policies that not only focus on the individual migrants but put high emphasis on the institutions of the 'majority society' and the support of individual figures in their intercultural competence.

Consequently, he stated that, apart from implementing social equal opportunities, there is a need for better and compulsory intercultural teacher training and supportive supervision, criteria for school quality, monitoring and evaluation processes with practical consequences for schools and individual educators.

Concluding his presentation, Mr. Zisis stated that there is a clear need for inclusive, participatory and democratic education which combats structural racism, institutional racism, discrimination and stereotypes. Not only intercultural education, but critical to racism and anti-racist education.

Professor Eduardo Barberis from University of Urbino Carlo Bo stated that the literature and data review aims at the development of a conceptual framework to be used for describing, understanding and analyzing policies and practices of education for the refugee children, focusing on the issue of European values and the European way of life and on the arrangements for the continuity of educational provision.

The review of the Italian case is based on the categories used in the policy and scientific debate analyzed in the literature review, and on data included in scientific articles and books, reports, statistical sets, institutional reports produced between 2014 and 2021 in Italy and/or on the Italian case.

Reviewing the Italian case, he argued that refugees and subsidiary protection holders have similar rights and are eligible for public and private funded scholarships. Humanitarian protection holders are allowed to be in the country for a shorter period than refugees and subsidiary protection holders. They are also entitled to a limited set of rights in relation to government scholarships, for which they are not eligible. Asylum seekers have not yet received international protection but have submitted an asylum claim and are waiting for a decision from government.

Concluding his presentation, he mentioned that the Italian educational institutions have different levels of readiness – but suffer a general stress caused by structural problems, such as:

- School segregation for social class and immigration status is quite widespread, and almost not debated as a policy issue.
- Schools are understaffed – and with limited or no specific training for the inclusion of foreign students and asylum seekers.
- Anti-immigration stances have been growing in recent years, creating a context in which integration and education are hard to achieve.
- There are biases and prejudices (often implicit ones) in the education system, with a negative impact on its efficacy.

The first LTTA of Continugee Project highlighted the issues of education of young refugees and migrants in EU and especially in partner countries, Greece, Italy and Germany. Presentations of countries State-of-the-Art reviews indicated that there is an urgent need to work for restructuring the educational systems of reception and permanent residence countries to achieve social and educational integration of migrant and refugee children. The project partners committed themselves to working together towards a plan for a quality education, worthy of European values and traditions, for migrant and refugee children.

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