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Multiplier event for project “Continugee”: A comprehensive overview and reflection

On March 10th, 2023, an integral Multiplier Event occurred within the framework of the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project “Ensuring Continuity in Education for Refugees” or “Continugee”. Hosted by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the event was an emblematic testament to the impact and vital significance of the project.

The event opened with a profound greeting from Napoleon Maravegias, the Scientific Manager of the project. Dr. Maravegias, an Emeritus Professor at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, emphasized the crucial role of such initiatives in enhancing the quality of education for refugees. His lifelong commitment to educational advancement for marginalized communities was reflected in his words and in his work on the project.

Theodoros Sakellaropoulos, Emeritus Professor at Panteion University and President of the Scientific Society for Social Cohesion and Development, followed Professor Maravegias's greeting. Sakellaropoulos drew from his extensive background in social cohesion studies to stress the crucial role of education in fostering integration and overall societal development.

The event then transitioned into analysis of good practices across various countries. Associate Professor Yannis Roussakis of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens focused on Greece's experience. Dr. Roussakis, recognized for his incisive understanding of Greek educational system dynamics, presented comprehensive findings not only about the effective strategies utilized within Greece, but also about the inexpediencies of the education system.

As part of the distinguished panel, Associate Professor Yannis Roussakis presented a thorough analysis of Greece's experience with respect to educational practices for refugees. Drawing from his extensive research and deep understanding of Greece's unique socio-cultural context, Roussakis presented an incisive account of the strategies that have proven most effective in the Greek education system.

Dr. Roussakis highlighted several key programs, policies, and initiatives implemented within Greece, demonstrating their real-world impacts on refugee education. His presentation included case studies on specific educational models and pedagogical approaches tailored to the needs of refugee students. Further, he shed light on how Greek schools have adapted to integrate these learners effectively, covering aspects such as language acquisition, cultural understanding, and trauma-informed education.

Roussakis's contribution was a robust testament to the power of localized strategies in addressing global issues. His insights served as a guiding beacon for other countries in the development and adaptation of educational practices tailored to the needs of their own refugee populations.

Dr. Roussakis' research highlighted the main shortcomings of the Greek education system, which are often an insurmountable obstacle for refugee students. With compulsory education starting at primary school, pre-school education provided to refugees is entirely voluntary. As a result the entry of refugees into primary school, many times comes without the necessary cognitive resources. Moreover, the fact that teachers are substitutes and change school environments at the beginning of each school year is a thorny problem. Consequently, the work of teachers becomes more difficult, while the climate of uncertainty

for the refugees themselves intensifies. Roussakis' case studies, lead to the conclusion that refugee parents refuse to send their children to school, either because of distrust in the education system, or because of a different cultural background. His remarks are of major importance for a deeper understanding of the factors that work as a deterrent in ensuring educational continuity for refugees. It is crucial to highlight the inexpediciencies of the educational system, so that the education provided will be improved and taken forward.

Christos Zisis, a PhD(c) at Fachhochschule Kiel, contributed an in-depth examination of Germany's best practices. Mr. Zisis, through his research, has become a leading voice on Germany's educational strategies for refugee integration.

Mr. Zisis' research is grounded in his extensive knowledge of the German educational system and its initiatives towards refugee education. During the Multiplier Event, Zisis detailed the practical measures Germany has implemented in its school systems, focusing on both pedagogical approaches and policy decisions. He drew upon specific case studies, underlining how these methods have effectively facilitated the academic progress of refugee students. He also discussed the challenges faced and how they were overcome or are being addressed, providing a holistic overview of Germany's approach.

Moreover, Mr. Zisis' participation was not limited to presenting his findings; he also actively engaged with his peers during the event, offering valuable insights during the discussions. His ability to contextualize Germany's experiences within the broader European and global landscape was a valuable addition to the discourse. Zisis' analysis offered a foundation upon which other nations might build, innovate, and modify according to their unique circumstances, driving the Continugee project's goal of global collaboration and mutual learning.

Providing insights from Italy was Dr. Gül Ince-Beqo, a respected researcher at the University of Urbino. Dr. Ince-Beqo, with her broad knowledge and practical experience in Italy's educational system, offered an invaluable perspective on the successful educational strategies deployed within Italy, while highlighting those frames that limit the further development of effective strategies.

Dr. Ince-Beqo's analysis was characterized by a unique blend of academic rigor and practicality, based on her extensive research and direct experiences within Italy's educational system. Her insights were anchored in a robust understanding of Italy's policy landscape, sociocultural dynamics, and pedagogical methods used in the context of refugee education.

Her segment of the event started with a critical assessment of the current state of education for refugees in Italy, shedding light on both the strengths and areas of improvement within the system. Dr. Ince-Beqo then moved on to present concrete examples of good practices observed in Italy, providing a comprehensive overview of the initiatives, projects, and policies that have demonstrated positive results in ensuring educational continuity for refugees.

She specifically highlighted collaborative and integrative educational models that foster social cohesion, multicultural understanding, and promote the psychosocial wellbeing of refugee students. Dr. Ince-Beqo's deep exploration of the subject also drew attention to the importance of teacher training and the use of technology in facilitating learning for refugees, aspects that Italy has invested in considerably.

Dr. Ince-Beqo pointed out the main difficulties that the Italian education system faces. The biggest issue occurs between the ages of 16 and 18. Refugee children who arrive in Italy at this age, without any knowledge of the language, are called upon in a short period of time to cover the cognitive gap to be able to attend High School. Another critical issue indicated

from her research is the ineffectiveness of mixed classes. A measure that appears to promote the integration of refugees, due to interaction with the native students. However, in the long run the gap widens as different learning speeds prevail. She also noted that opportunities for education vary geographically. It appears to be more in Northern Italy rather than Central and Southern Italy. Moreover, the following adversity was found, despite the fact that the funding in the North is greater, in the South better utilization is taking place for the educational process. Critical challenges regarding the education of refugee children emerge from her analysis. Her contribution was instrumental in bringing to light invisible issues, including time and space, that is age and geography, that must be taken seriously into account.

Contributing to the discussions around the Good Practices Guide was Dr. Christoforos Skamnakis, a researcher at the Scientific Society for Social Cohesion and Development, and Associate Professor at Panteion University. Skamnakis, with his rigorous research and academic acumen, provided a comprehensive analysis for the guide, further highlighting its importance in the project's context.

In the context of the Multiplier Event, Dr. Skamnakis made significant contributions to the Good Practices Guide, a fundamental resource developed within the Continugee project. The guide aims to outline successful strategies and tactics for integrating refugees into education systems, drawn from international case studies and expert insights.

With his extensive knowledge and expertise, Dr. Skamnakis was able to provide a comprehensive and incisive analysis of the guide. He emphasized its essential role as a tool for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in better understanding the challenges faced by refugee students and identifying the most effective ways to support them. His analysis also addressed how the guide's implementation could foster greater social cohesion and integration.

Dr. Skamnakis' contribution went beyond mere analysis; he also proposed practical steps for further improving and expanding the guide. Drawing on his wealth of experience and research, he suggested innovative ways to further refine the guidelines to ensure they remain relevant and effective in the ever-evolving landscape of refugee education. His input will undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping the project's future direction and its capacity to make a lasting positive impact on refugee education.

His input is remarkable because it integrates the guide into the Greek reality. He presents the three pillars that affect the education of refugees, the education system, social policy and immigration policy and points out their weaknesses, formulating proposals to overcome them. Then, he analyses in depth the issue of refugee school dropout. It was found that the family environment plays an important role, in addition to the teachers and school environment. Dr. Skamnakis' observations are more than essential for ensuring the educational continuity of refugee students.

Representing the Greek state, Dr. Gelly Aroni, Head of the Unit for Integration in the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors at the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, reported on the state's perspectives and commitments. Dr. Aroni's insights, gathered from her frontline work in policy making and implementation, underscored the crucial role of government support in ensuring continuity in refugee education.

The Multiplier Event illuminated the importance of the Continugee project and highlighted the value of international cooperation and exchange of best practices in addressing the educational needs of refugees. The event marked a significant step forward in the ongoing pursuit of ensuring quality and inclusive education for all, regardless of their backgrounds. The Event also

proved to be a profound platform for dialogue, exchange of ideas, and collaboration among the participants. As an outcome of the event, there was a deeper, shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities in providing quality education for refugees.

Insights from Greece, Germany, and Italy provided a comprehensive understanding of the varied approaches and experiences across Europe. The discussions sparked new ideas and reinforced the importance of tailoring educational practices to each country's unique socio-cultural context.

The event also highlighted the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration, with inputs from academia, research institutions, and government representatives. The presentation by Dr. Gelly Aroni from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum underscored the critical role of policy and state support in realizing the goals of projects like Continugee.

The Multiplier Event has significantly contributed to enhancing the Good Practices Guide's content, making it a more valuable tool for educators, policy makers, and practitioners. This guide is set to influence strategies and practices, which will hopefully result in improved educational outcomes for refugees across Europe.

Furthermore, the event strengthened the network of stakeholders engaged in the project, fostering a stronger sense of community and shared purpose. It is anticipated that this will lead to more robust cooperation and coordination in the future, catalyzing further progress in ensuring continuity in education for refugees.

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