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# HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERCULTURAL ISSUES IN GREECE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### ***The main educational system***

Greek main educational system is divided in two levels: Primary school (Dimotiko), 6 years compulsory (6-12 years old) and secondary school which has two tiers: the lower secondary school (Gymnasium), 3 years, compulsory (12-15 years old). The upper secondary school (Lyceum), 3 years non compulsory (15-18 years old). There are two choices of upper secondary school. One is the academic Lyceum and the other is Vocational Schools.

### ***Current strategies promoting integration at school***

During the decade of '90s that Greece has received many immigrants we established special schools called "intercultural". In practice they have worked in marginalising the students who attended them. Other than that there are numerous projects that are run all over the country in schools on a voluntarily basis.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

### ***Methodology implemented***

Five schools from the district of Central Macedonia were chosen. In fact more schools have been informed with a call of participating in the survey. A translated information paper about the project "I Have Rights", has been sent to different schools and teachers asking for their participation. In the end considering the bureaucratic procedures of conducting a survey in Greek schools we sent the list of schools in the department of the ministry of education and waited for the approval.

The first two schools were two private (Anatolia College of Thessaloniki, German School of Thessaloniki) and a public secondary school. Afterwards we went to schools situated in Chalkidiki. The hours of the survey's conduction were chosen in cooperation with the teachers. For example at Anatolia College the time we conducted the survey was in the context of the subject "Civic and Social Study", which offered a suitable ground for developing the arguments of the project "I Have Rights".

Student questionnaires were exclusively distributed in printed form, therefore the online link were not used at all (legal restrictions on distributing questionnaires to under aged after parental acceptance). Teacher questionnaires were distributed in printed and online form. In details 94 teachers filled the questionnaire online the rest are from the schools we visited but also from two schools situated in Lesvos island. After the gradual collection of questionnaires, two excel sheets for each target group were created for the data importing and analyzing. Information was codified and statistical results were extracted. Based on these data a national report was created with the most interesting findings. Some of them presented in the following paragraphs.

### ***Students and teachers involved***

A total of 150 teachers have filled the questionnaire. The great majority, 73.3% are female and a much smaller percentage, 26.7% male. The age of the teachers range from 1950-After 1990, but two groups of birth dates overwhelmingly consist the majority (33.3 % born 1960-1969, 40.7% born 1970-1979). Teachers come from different school districts. Most of them are teachers in Thessaloniki (45%), in Athens (16.9%), in Lesvos (15.5%) and in Chalkidiki (4.1%). An online link was sent to all teachers, even to those of the schools we visited, because it was easier for them to dedicate an amount of time filling the questionnaire than the printed one (they shared the link with their colleagues also). 29 questionnaires were sent by post to/from Lesvos island. The rest 45 in printed form are from the schools we visited.

The majority of teachers hold a post bachelor degree. A PhD degree is obtained by 11.6% of the teachers. A master degree is obtained by 44.9% of the teachers while 43.5% have finished level 6 education. There is a balanced dispersion on the years of experience. A slight majority of 21.3% have 11-15 years of experience, 19.3% have 16-20 years and 18% have 6-10 years. The least experienced (1-5) years have a percentage of 13.3%. Teachers with experience 21-25 years are 14% and over 25



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years are also 14%. The disproportion between ages and years of experience is a result of the slow procedure of hiring the teachers in schools through a national exam. Some teachers are also hired temporarily. Teachers change schools and cities many times in their career until their tenure. A fact that is revealed also from the majority (66.4%) of teachers is that they haven't worked always in schools in the same city.

The intercultural skills of teachers through intercultural educational courses or training courses for education without discrimination during the last year, does not apply to the majority (some teachers participated in more than one). Intercultural courses last year attended by 24.6% of the teachers. The same percentage remains for training courses for education without discrimination. However, most of them (50.8%) have participated in other training courses which concern other didactic methods and intervention in class. Of course, there is a percentage of 28.7% who selected the option "none", meaning they didn't participate in any training course. Except mother tongue there is a distinctive frequency of English speaking teachers by 6/7 of teachers but also two other European languages (less frequently) such as French, German and Italian.

Considering the consistence of their classroom now or in the past, the great majority (71.8%) has now students coming from other countries, a smaller percentage (22.8%) had in the past and only 5.4% never had. The origin of these students is usually from other European countries non members of EU, Asia, Africa, North America, Central and South America and last Oceania. In social context most of the teachers have relations with people/families from other countries, either frequently (51.3%) or very often (31.3%). A small percentage had in the past (10.7%) and an even a smaller group have never had (6.7%). The context in which these relations were developed was mainly in circle of friends (82.7% of the respondents). Another context of the relations between teachers and people/families from other countries is being neighbors. Again, the great majority has now (51.7%) or had in the past (32.9%) neighbors from other countries and rates the relationship with them from good to very well. A conclusion of deep interaction in different contexts is obvious.

In the second target group of the survey (students), girls are also the majority with 57.7% but boys are represented also by a percentage of 42.3%. General age shows a range birth date from 1997-2005, but the majority (76.8%) are born between 2000-2002. The majority of ages comes from students of the last year of lower secondary school and the first year of upper secondary school. The rest are either from the first class of Gymnasium and a small percentage from the last class of Lyceum. A small percentage (5.5%) of the respondents are born in another country (41.9% in Albania, 19.4 in Germany, 9.7% in Russia and 9.7% in England) and the rest in Thessaloniki or Chalkidiki (some in other Greek cities). Students born in other countries are situated by majority in public schools, for example most of them attend Chalkidiki's schools and live there for the last 10 years (67%).

Parents of foreign origin or born in other countries are a respectable percentage (mothers of foreign origin or other country of birth, 22.9%, while fathers, 13.8%). The countries of birth mostly are Albania, Georgia, Germany and Russia (but there are more on which at least one parent is born). Whether their parents have the Greek citizenship or not, students responded that half of their fathers have not (or they don't know if so) the Greek citizenship. Meanwhile, slightly less than half of their mothers have not or they don't know if so the Greek citizenship. The majority of parents attended a level 6, 7, 4 education institution, the rest attended level 8, 5, 3 and an insignificant number attended only level 1 or 2 education institutions.

The question about the activities of students during last summer reveals that the great majority (81.6%) went on vacation with their family/relatives. Vacation with friends was the second choice (56.2%), stayed home came third (53.1%). Some went in a summer camp (31.2%) while 38.8% said that studied and 21.4% that worked. A very small percentage (4.2%) had language courses in other countries. Examining the choice of having visited their parents' country half of them responded negatively. Concluding, students passed more time with relatives/family and friends by going on vacations or staying at home.



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### 3. MAIN FINDINGS

#### 3.1 TEACHERS

##### ***Implementation of human rights at school***

To begin with teachers' opinion on either the CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child) is a well known document or not, percentages bend to negative responses. The CRC as an international legal instrument is also perceived as not useful in schools. Their point of view can be explained by examining their opinion on the main goals of education. They rated as more relevant the goal of providing basic knowledge and less relevant the provision of specialist knowledge. The development of citizenship skills and the capabilities of each student are not rated as relevant. So, CRC is possibly perceived as special knowledge outside the basic role of the school.

Moreover, regarding their responses on whether human rights education is already included in some subjects, the great percentage responded positively. The subjects referred as the most relevant are the so called "humanistic" subjects such as legal and social sciences, languages and literature. The least relevant to humans rights education are the so called "sciences". Therefore, the options of "none of the above" and "all of the above" are rated both negatively with an inclination in the first option. Since teachers in secondary schools teach different subjects according to their field of specialization, a conclusion on how they perceive human legal instruments can be produced. Teachers of "humanistic" subjects perceive humans rights education as part of their teaching activities, in contrast to teachers of "sciences" who offer a more technical, practical and specialized education.

In addition, teachers rated the relevance of different options on the main objective of human rights education. The development of individual attitudes comes as the most relevant objective. The options of affecting the group dynamics in the class and encouraging integration are rated relevant. The option "to provide knowledge of domestic and international legal instruments" is rated less relevant. It is also interesting the teachers' agreement on the basic standards for the protection of children and adolescents' rights. Pretty much all the options are characterized by equivalent ratings. So in this case a reverse examination of negative ratings instead of positive will be made. The option of non-discrimination has the least relevant ratings, then follows the option of the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to education and last the prohibition of all forms of violence. Summing up, a very high percentage of teachers agreed on children's right to be heard in any context in which they experience social and family life.

##### ***Multicultural issues at school***

Teachers actually do think that teaching in a multicultural context requires specific skills. Among the options of "intercultural competences" given in the questionnaire, awareness seems to have the most ratings of relevance. Behavior comes second with a slight higher rating, third comes competence, i.e. knowledge. Other skills come last as the least relevant.

Although Greek school classes have faced multicultural issues the last 20 years, teacher responses' on being able to recognize indicators of cultural affinities or 'style' in students whose families of origin are from the same country, are mostly gathered in the middle of the scale. Despite the low skills of teachers on recognizing indicators of cultural affinities or style in students coming from the same countries, their interest on asking usually students about the history of their country is rated very positively from 3-5 on a rating scale of 1 never-5 very often.

Another contradiction comes up in the following combination of questions. Teachers expressed by majority their wish to visit others countries which means they are open minded persons and interested in meeting new cultures. Moving on to the second question, if they agree that their country accepts too many immigrants, the majority expressed an agreement. In this case, some factors must be explained so that we can interpret the situation. The statement does not include a sub-question asking them to explain why they think so. Suppositions can be linked mainly with the current situation in Greece especially with the refugee issue. The existent conditions of refugees in Greek camps are far from being good, especially the childrens' education. The difficulties are faced by most teachers with devotion and willingness but the state's formal activities are insufficient. So, we can suppose some teachers have by ideology disagreement on accepting so many immigrants, some others express their



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disagreement on the disproportion of refugees among EU countries and some other their deep concern on the impact of the insufficient and poor conditions in refugee lives.

An additional argument of the majority of teachers towards a multicultural school and society, is the positive rating on the existence of colleagues from other countries in schools. None of them chose the “not at all” option. The reconsideration of stereotypes after teaching foreign students in the class is very usual. Most important is the feedback on whether they had ever reappraised methods of teaching /their approach with the class, as a consequence of having students from different backgrounds and cultures. The responses are positive and can be considered as the basic intercultural skill of teachers to transform their approach according to their students’ needs, especially when students come from different countries and cultures. Most of them agree also with the statement that “schools must act as a tool of assimilation of the new culture for foreign students/migrants”.

### 3.2 STUDENTS

#### Implementation of human rights at school

According to the vast majority (71.5%) the word “right” means “we all should be equals”. For the rest (24.3%) means “my right, I can assert my reasons”. Both opinions reveal children’s ability to understand basic human values and rights’ importance for all. Only a small percentage of 4.1% consider “right” as an obligation they have to respect by law. Almost the same percentage is aware of the existence of CRC. Hopefully, school appears as the main source of information (52.7%). Second source is internet and only few heard about it on TV or at their home.

There is an obvious contradiction on students’ responses regarding school. The majority rates school as a place that most of them feel respected, allowed to say what they think, to be dressed as they like and be respected for who they are. Moreover, in class the majority (66.7%) feels among friends. The contradiction comes by rating school as the place where children are most vulnerable to abuse, threats and violence. School has the highest percentages in comparison with other contexts (religious places, home, circle of friends and police) on which possible incidents of abuse, violence and threats can happen often. Trust issues between teachers and students emerged by the fact that students who witnessed such episodes talked to their friends (84.9%), to their classmates (63.7%) to their parents (61.7%) and least to their teachers (50.7%). Students feel more understood by their friends than their teachers.

Students of a satisfying percentage talked about discrimination and racism last year. Only a few said they didn’t talk at all. They also participated in group work very often (44.1%) and often (29.2%). Field trips and visits participation reached also high ratings (25.7-37.2%). Most students responded negatively on participating in intercultural educational projects.

Examining students’ activities on internet, a mean they use often for their information or other type of activities, a hopefully negative frequency of surfing racist pages, catches the eye. The high percentage of 66.7% responded they never do it, while only 3.6% do it very often. Surfing anti-racist sites has also a negative rating, 33.5% never do it while only 11.2% do it often. It can be said that perhaps students prefer passing their time on different internet activities. That explains why most students claim they haven’t often read racist posts on internet or they have a simpler idea of what consist a racist post. Participation on discussions about racism on social media or forums is not a very often activity of the majority since only 17.7% do it.

Since the beginning of school year 67.9% have witnessed a brawl while 42.3% have been involved in a fight. Episodes of racism witnessed 42.7% but only 12.7% have been involved in episodes of racism. Witnesses of bullying have been 43.9% while 16.1% have been bullied. All these data lead us to the conclusion of working more intensively on placing children rights, racism and discrimination issues on their daily lives and in different ways. Children’s willingness on hearing what others have to say is rated positively and their reaction “immunity” on the incidents is a good basis on which we can work together. The majority 50.5% didn’t walk away in order not to see bullying or racist episodes and most of them never or rarely walked away without doing anything. What students seem to feel is a confusion on what is the best choice of reaction, trusting their classmates, their teachers or intervening immediately.



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### **Multicultural issues at school**

As said before Greek schools have had multicultural classes almost twenty years ago. Students have now 77.1%, or have had in the past 18.9%, classmates coming from other countries. In the school context there is a continuing coexistence which 54.3% of the students claim it was characterized by very good relations. This relationship is extended in a social context except the school environment. Spending time with people/families from other countries is a very often activity 34.5% of students. Another percentage of 49.6% does it seldom and 8.8% have done it in the past. The context which is more usual for students spending time with people from other countries is circle of friends 81.1%, sports 14% and associations 4.5%. 45.8% of the students have neighbors from other countries, while 20.7% have had in the past. The percentage of not ever having neighbors from other countries is 33.6%. The relationship with the neighbors is rated by the majority from good to very good. However, a very small percentage does homework with classmates from another country which is not so much a consequence of limited relations outside school. Students in Greece attend after school private courses either in foreign languages or in school subjects. It can be supposed there is limited time or even different schedules in everyday life.

Students were asked what they think when they see in streets people wearing their traditional clothes. A crucial feedback based on the current situation in which students see more often refugees of another culture and clothing code. Only 3.2% of the respondents think "if they want to live here, they must dress like us" which reveals a more intolerant behavior towards different people. Two choices are selected by the equal number of students. In detail, 33% of the students think they should be more comfortable in western clothes but they can do as they wish and 33% believes clothes are not relevant or they don't have an opinion. The rest 30.7% think that after all it's nice to see people different from us. Considering three of four options given in the question are characterized by cultural tolerance and cultural free expression, students/children consider clothes as personal choice of every person and personal different choices can be nice or our opinion on them doesn't matter.

In addition, students' wish to meeting other cultures and countries is definitely a promising for the harmonic coexistence of different people or cultures. The vast majority (97.2%) when they hear about other countries wishes to visit them. Students seem to rate their agreement on the following statement "The presence of migrants requires stricter control by the Police" in a middle scale. The majority also agrees on the presence of foreign teachers in schools and they give equivalent ratings on teachers as an expression of cultural majority and minority also. For them teachers' nationality is irrelevant. Cultural and linguistic diversity is seen as an opportunity by students, an opportunity that can bridge cultural and linguistic exchanges.

## **4. CASE STUDIES AND BEST PRACTICE**

### **Methodologies**

Identifying case studies was a difficult procedure for several reasons. At the beginning, finding 10 good practices seemed a non achievable goal so we had to examine other ways of discovering teachers with good practices. There is no formal curriculum guideline for integration of foreign students in secondary education. Actually, all these years there was not any special treatment or major changes in Greek schools, even if students of foreign origin were a respectable percentage of the students' population. Greek educational system is also centralized on the school curriculum and little innovation is observed on strategies and mechanisms that promote social capabilities of children and their further awareness for a multicultural society. Teachers feel most of the time restricted because they have to abide by the curriculum.

Against all odds, we identified teachers, who didn't lose their creativity and their vision to be apart from teachers, mentors for their students in need. Mostly they are teachers engaged in the education of refugee children but also teachers from schools of multicultural background. After an open call was made with different ways (social media, e-mail, personal contacts), teachers accepted and filled our case study template. The rest case studies were searched on the internet, and are school activities combatting racism, discrimination and inequality. Several case studies of both primary and secondary schools are chosen as best practices.



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### **Lesson learnt**

The most important lesson to be learned is that good practices should be adopted as strategies by the ministry of education. Occasional happening and only in some schools, good practices don't offer a long term solution. At the moment, considering refugee children, schools must be prepared to deal with its multicultural nature and educate children on the issues of non-discrimination and racism. Teachers don't have the time to develop such activities, for this reason, most of them worked after school hours with their students to achieve the results they wanted. Moreover, intercultural courses aiming in educating teachers and schools' personnel are fundamental for an education which will integrate all children and will treat them equally.

Secondly, educational system must be based on the needs of students and focus on the real issues of the Greek society. For example, most teachers took action the moment they realised that there are issues of racism and discrimination in their class. The actions and the activities seem to have really change, at least in short term level, attitudes in the classroom. Teachers who conducted these activities "didn't do just their job". By having awareness skills they tried to define the problem, to find some ways of engaging students in the discussion and then show them through role playing the importance of treating each other equally.

Finally, "good teachers" can be mentors and guides for students, since they pass enough time with them. Unfortunately, this is not enough. School environment, buildings and material are also crucial. Discrimination attitudes happen usually in schools with bad conditions. Motives for regular attendance by students are missing. It's not a secret that vocational schools have the poorest attendance and development of students. Creative activities are not satisfying, thus leading students to delinquent behaviors. Creative activities and good practices have to be formally introduced in Greek schools.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

A country which faces not only economic but also social crisis also, functions on its limits with great impacts on children lives. School can't be only a place which offers basic knowledge but mostly a place of harmony and development, where children feel accepted and understood by their teachers. In the case studies, students' opinion and prejudices changed to a certain degree after the activities but there is not enough evidence of a deeper change of their behavior. Non formal educational tools and interesting activities can be more effective. The implementation of these activities requires the cooperation of different actors. In some cases teachers confessed that their colleagues didn't care to participate (they are just doing their job) or they also had prejudices and showed a discrimination behavior towards foreign students.



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