



# ***Progetto INTERPRES***

## **FOCUS GROUPS REPORT GREECE WP 2 Activities**



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## **1. FOCUS GROUP ON MIGRANTS AND THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN GREECE**



Focus group was held in IDEC. Participants were 2 primary education and 3 secondary education teachers and animator a consultant of IDEC SA.

## **Question 1**

### **Does the fact that nowadays there are 1st generation migrants coming to Greek schools affect their school performance?**

Greek society and Greek schools underwent a cultural shock in the 90ies, becoming from predominantly homogeneous (with the exception of a small minority of Roma children that were very difficult to recruit to school and a 2% Muslim minority in Western Thrace, the school education of which is governed by the Treaty of Lausanne).

Discussion, included several cases of migrant children with exceptional school performance that some times generated debate at a national level. In Greece there are parades of the schools during the National Days (25<sup>th</sup> of March and 28<sup>th</sup> of October). In these parades, there is a custom that the best pupil of the last grade will bear the Greek flag. There were cases that migrant pupils were in fact the best in their class and there was a big debate, following protesting of some parents of other pupils, if they should be the standard-bearers or not (the flag being not a prize but a national symbol)..

It was unanimously accepted, though, that there is not substantial correlation between the time of stay of a child in Greece and his/her school performance. It is also a fact that there is a higher drop out rate than the respective of Greeks, mainly between lower secondary education and higher secondary education.

Another observation is that even children, born in Greece seem to face difficulties especially as far as Greek language, essay, literature, ancient literature and history are concerned. On the other hand, there are numerous cases of migrants with very good school performance in physics, mathematics, chemistry etc.

Migrant children seem to be better or stronger motivated in school than Greek ones. This may be due to factors external to school, mainly social ones as the use of education as a means for social ascension.

## Question 2

### **Is it better to have mixed classes or to have migrants' minority schools?**

The general approach of the participants in the focus groups was for the co-schooling of Greeks and migrants in the same schools.

There was a reference about a research lead by the UNICEF in Athens and Thessaloniki in 2001 concerning "Discrimination, Racism and Xenophobia in the Greek Educational system". The research measured the opinions of pupils the parents (Greek and migrants), and the teachers (Greeks) about these subjects, including the acceptance or not of the mixed classes. Pupils, both Greeks and migrants prove to be more tolerant and opt more for the mixed schools. Parents like more the existence of minority schools, or different classes. Teachers, the majority of which had experience of teaching migrants have highlighted that they need further training to face the problems of a multicultural class.

Multiculturality has not to be considered as a fixed reality with given differences between different cultures. It concerns a continuous social process of exchanges and generation of new cultures and enrichment of the existing ones. Although most teachers say that language heterogeneity and the fact that many pupils are bilingual is a positive one and all of the class benefits from this fact they express some reservations as far as the effects of this bilingualism to the migrant pupils themselves. They say that they are not convinced that knowing well their mother tongue makes it easier to them to learn Greek or that bilingualism facilitates learning to learn.

Many migrants wishing to stay permanently in Greece do not teach their children their language, because they consider it useless to them. Instead, there are others that would like to have language maintenance or submersion courses for their language in Greek schools.



## **2. FOCUS GROUP ON MIGRANTS AND THE TRADE UNIONS IN GREECE**



Focus group was held in IDEC. Participants were 4 trade unionists of OBES (Federation of Greek Industrial Trade Unions) and animator a consultant of IDEC SA.

## **Question 1**

### **What is the situation of migrants concerning labor and labor movement?**

Greece was not ready to receive migrants. For example, when Greek migrants went to Germany or Belgium after the war, it was a well co-ordinated official initiative, so problems they faced were relatively small.

Foreign economic migrants in Greece have come more or less illegally and there was no formal way to legalise their stay in it. They have therefore been in many cases the victims of exploitation through:

- Working in the black market
- Being paid less than Greeks
- Not having social insurance rights
- Depending on the employer for staying in Greece

This had more implications. The Greek State could not control its frontiers and the identity of persons living within its borders. Furthermore, this caused increase of criminality on one hand and uneven conditions of competition with Greek workers. Both these implications favour racism, xenophobia and segregation of the labour movement.

Following legislative and administrative efforts in the first years of 2000s (the law concerning the “Entrance, Staying and social inclusion of citizens of third countries in the Greek territory” is 3386 voted only in 2005), the situation of most migrants now has been normalised. Their economic status has improved a lot.

Even so, migrants constitute a large part of the labour force in our country and their big majority declares they are salaried or wage-workers. There is an estimation that at least 100.000-150.000 minors under 18 years old work, many of them have dropped out of school or never studied (Roma, migrants and refugees) or work in the afternoon, at weekends and holidays in parallel with school.

A very serious problem that the labour movement has to pay attention to, now that first difficulties have been more or less regularised, is that migrants are able to find jobs equivalent to their qualifications. During the first years of mass migration of economic migrants from ex Soviet Union and other Central and Eastern European countries graduates of Universities came to Greece only to find jobs in the construction, agriculture or home care.



Another subject one has to notice is the low representation of migrants in the trade unions. This of course is not their sole responsibility. It depends as well on the Greek trade unions to come closer to them.



## **Question 2**

### **What is the thesis of the trade union movement concerning migrants?**

Trade unions, representing the world of paid labour, support and enhance the equal practice of working and social insurance rights for migrants as well as their access to a series of social goods.

The labour movement through its trade union representation has to create an integrated organised support network for assisting migrants in their working life and fight against discriminations at the workplace. In this perspective GSEE (The Greek General Workers Confederation) has to go on with the efforts it has done till now.

Trade unions have also to co-operate closely with the ethnic associations of migrants in order to face the common problems they encounter.



### **3. FOCUS GROUP ON MIGRANTS AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN GREECE**



Focus group was held in IDEC. Participants were 2 sociologists of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality and a mediator of the National Centre for Social Solidarity.

## Question 1

### **What services do you provide and what is the demand for social services by migrants?**

Migrants are very good “customers” of public social services in Greece. This is partially due to the fact that they face more practical problems, related to poverty and exclusion which generate social problems, partly because of the structure of Greek public services.

For example, the Greek National Health System provides that if you go to the public hospital, you are entitled for free services, but you cannot choose your doctor. Most Greek women prefer to give birth to their children in private hospitals having their own doctor. This means that public maternity clinics, which are very well equipped, are mainly used by migrant women.

The National Centre for Social Solidarity is another example which provides services as far as:

- Urgent social interventions
- Provisional housing, food and clothing
- Information, counselling at personal, group and local level
- Programmes of social solidarity and co-ordination of volunteers in emergency cases
- Psychological support to persons facing social exclusion

are concerned.

To this end there is a help line which can answer in many languages.

The General Secretariat for Gender Equality has Centres providing counselling to women facing problems of violence at home, sexual harassment, discrimination or being victims of trafficking in human beings.

Training of teachers how to face these problems and to better educate children is another activity.

## Question 2

### What are the tendencies for multicultural mediators?

The multicultural mediator has to meet the migrant's needs. He/she has to help the migrant to have equal access to goods and services provided to Greek nationals and to guide him/her how to face discrimination. If we want to express it positively the aim of the cultural mediator is to assist the migrants in order to be active citizens, knowing and demanding their personal, social and cultural rights.

Actually there are two tendencies for cultural mediators:

- The first one supports that a migrant is not only a member of a national minority having cultural specificities, but he/she belongs to a religion, has needs depending of his/her sex, social class, political beliefs etc. The opposite aspect is that the cultural mediator has to know the cultural background that influence the migrant's ideas, values and beliefs and hence his/attitude, daily needs in order to be effective in serving the migrant's needs.
- The second one supports that the migrant has to be considered as a member of a race and a nation. Based on that many mediators come from the country of origin. The objection to this tendency says that in this way there are racial stereotypes favoured and in any way one can never have enough mediators for all races present in a country.

What is important is that the mediator, regardless of which nationality he/she is, is to gain the confidence of the migrant, in order to be able to assist him/her effectively. To be able to do that, the mediator has to have an empathy and uncover the value system, the way the migrant understands the surrounding world and the way he/she reacts to stimuli.