

# Inclusive Education in Cyprus for Migrant and Refugee Children

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## Access to Education

Education in the Republic of Cyprus is free and accessible to all children from 5 years old, regardless of their parents' legal residence status.

Currently, an estimated 18,1% of the population in the Republic of Cyprus are non-Cypriot residents. The number of children with migrant background attending public schools is very similar: During the academic year of 2020/2021, 18,92% of primary school children have a migrant background (with a total of 15,9% of primary school children having a mother tongue other than Greek), while 18,64% of junior high school children ('gymnasio') and 13,76% of children attending senior high school ('lykeio') have a migrant background. The five most prominent countries these children or their parents originate from are Syria, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and Georgia.



“SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”

## Challenges related to the Covid-19 Pandemic

While Cyprus grants every child the right to attend school – regardless of their parents' residence status, children of asylum seekers living in one of the two reception camps Pournara or Kofinou have not had this right met due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The overcrowded Pournara camp has been effectively sealed off, with residents not allowed to exit, thus not giving an opportunity to children to attend schools.

At times where schools have been – or continue to be – closed and learning has shifted to distance-learning (or effectively online learning), many children have faced challenges to access their classes. Internet connection is very weak in both Pournara and Kofinou camps, making it hard for children to follow online learning. Additionally, asylum seeker/ refugee children have been affected through lack of resources and lack of adequate technological equipment or learning spaces in which learning can take place. While support schemes have improved access to laptops for children, challenges remain.

Especially young children whose parents do not speak Greek face additional challenges during distance learning.



<sup>1</sup>Latest data available is from 2019: [https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/6C25304C1E70C304C2257833003432B3/\\$file/Demographic\\_Statistics\\_Results-2019-EN-301120.pdf?OpenElement](https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/6C25304C1E70C304C2257833003432B3/$file/Demographic_Statistics_Results-2019-EN-301120.pdf?OpenElement)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.moec.gov.cy/dde/diapolitismiki/statistika\\_dimotiki.html](http://www.moec.gov.cy/dde/diapolitismiki/statistika_dimotiki.html)



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## Language/ Integration Support for Migrant/ Refugee Children

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth offers language support classes for children with migrant background who do not speak Greek. Classes are offered both in primary as well as in secondary education and take place during school hours. During the academic year of 2020/2021, around 3700 children in primary education are benefitting from Greek language support classes. The programme (ΔΠΑ.Σ.Ε.) has been expanded to include 90 school units (previously 52). With regards to children in secondary education, there are transitional intensive language-support classes offered to 413 students, less intensive language support classes to 54 students and additional classes for 76 unaccompanied minors/ asylum seeking children. Language classes also include elements of history and culture. Generally, transitional intensive classes are offered at secondary schools with a high percentage of children with migrant backgrounds to facilitate their smooth integration into the regular school system. At secondary schools with a lower percentage of children with migrant backgrounds, children join the regular classes and receive additional language support classes – or if necessary additional help to catch up in the subjects relevant for exams under the Cypriot curriculum, such as in mathematics, physics and biology.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that truly all children have access to quality education – including those residing in temporary refugee camps by granting them the right to exit the camp to physically attend school.
- Ensure that all children have access to the technology needed to follow distant learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic (or other similar circumstances in the future);
- Keep and – where necessary – expand the existing programme for language and curriculum support for students with migrant background, both in primary and secondary education. • Include Global Citizenship Education in all classes (through Education for Sustainable Development or other classes) to address specifically topics such as racism, diversity, migration
- Supply schools with additional resources (in terms of teachers, classroom materials, games/ outdoor toys) to facilitate integration of children from various backgrounds.
- Provide ample opportunities to facilitate interactive and non-formal learning opportunities as part of the school day in addition to the core subject teaching.
- Integrate Global Citizenship Education into the teaching and into the ethos of the school units, so as to help children connect with one another and facilitate the challenging of stereotypes and prevent exclusion.
- In collaboration with civil society organisations offer intercultural learning opportunities for teachers, school staff, students as well as parents.
- Introduce specific focus on sports and/or arts especially in secondary schools with high percentages of children with migrant backgrounds/ need for language supports, as these have the potential to transcend the divides created by (lack of) language and (lack of specific curriculum-based) knowledge.

