

Research Thesis 2023

Master track Ethics of Education

**Education of children in Refugee Camps:  
The case of Ritsona Refugee Camp, Greece**

**Dimitra Leontiadou (S5315050)**

*Number of words: 11,414*

Supervisor: Dr. C. Josje Van Der Linden

Second assessor: Dr. Loraine Visscher





## Preface

Growing up in Greece I have encountered a lot of difficulties and injustices regarding education, even though I was one of the lucky ones belonging in a middle class family who encouraged me to get educated and even gave me the opportunity to pursue my dream abroad, by doing my masters in the University of Groningen. One of the biggest wake up calls for me was in 2015 when more than one million refugees arrived in my country from Syria and Afghanistan. In my hometown, Diavata, a refugee camp was built, in which I had the opportunity to volunteer as a children facilitator. There I experienced and I viewed all the hardships and lack of opportunities the refugees living there went through, especially the children. Most of them have never been to school and they lacked of basic social skills. I was seeing how much happiness I was giving them these few hours we were spending together, playing and communicating mainly with the body language. I realized then how these children have the right and the need to be educated and the benefits that would have in their development. Many years later, in 2023, the situation in Greece's refugee camps still has not changed a lot, children are still not going to schools for a variety of reasons. Motivated by these thoughts and experiences I decided to choose this specific topic for my thesis, the education children living in refugee camps receive. Particularly, I chose the camp of Ritsona because my sister was working there for many years as a camp coordinator and was describing to me the preposterous educational situation.

Dr Josje van der Linden supervised my thesis, and I am incredibly grateful for the chance I had to collaborate with her. She actively engaged with my work and consistently offered valuable feedback, without which I could not have completed my research. I also want to convey my appreciation to all the teachers and educational coordinators of Ritsona who gave me the chance to listen to their stories. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for their unwavering financial and moral support during my entire academic journey.

*Dimitra Leontiadou*

*Groningen, September 28<sup>th</sup> 2023*

## **Abstract**

Due to conflicts, prosecutions and violent actions, millions of people have been forced to flee their homes and find shelter all over the world. Greece is one of the countries that received a large wave of these people from 2015 onwards. All the countries that have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, including Greece, have agreed among others to respect and protect the right of refugees to education. A majority of refugees and asylum seekers in Greece live in “temporary” accommodations named refugee camps. There, children have the right to attend local schools and also receive a type of non-formal education inside the camp facilities. This thesis analyzes the kind of education refugee children receive in one of Greece’s largest refugee camps “Ritsona refugee camp” with an ulterior purpose to give an answer to the question; what kind of education do children, living in Ritsona refugee camp need, in order to become active citizens. To investigate this question a study of relevant bibliography was conducted, six educational coordinators and educators of Ritsona were interviewed and a video with refugee children’s experiences was analyzed. All the parties described their experiences and the problems they are facing regarding education in Ritsona. The results revealed an accordance between the words of the coordinators and educators and a partial discrepancy with what the children said. All of the interviewees agreed that changes should be made in the way education works inside and outside the refugee camp. Following the analysis of data and the review of relevant literature, the researcher put forward several recommendations aimed at enhancing the educational opportunities provided to refugee children living in the Ritsona refugee camp.

## Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	6
<b>Theoretical Framework</b> .....	8
<i>The refugee crisis of recent years</i> .....	8
<i>The role of education</i> .....	9
<i>The importance of education for refugee children</i> .....	11
<i>Active citizenship</i> .....	13
<b>Methods</b> .....	14
<i>Sub Question I</i> .....	14
<i>Sub Question II</i> .....	15
<i>Sub Question III</i> .....	16
<i>Reflexivity of the researcher</i> .....	17
<b>Results</b> .....	18
<i>Problem solving by coordinators and educators</i> .....	24
<b>Discussion</b> .....	27
<i>Limitations</i> .....	30
<i>Recommendations</i> .....	30
<b>References</b> .....	32
<b>Appendices</b> .....	36

## Introduction

Conflict, persecution or natural disasters have led to an increase in the number of individuals who are forced to flee their homes resulting in an ongoing global refugee crisis. According to UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) 89.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced<sup>1</sup> at the end of 2021. Among them are nearly 27.1 million refugees<sup>2</sup>, around half of whom are under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2021).

In 2015, the number of forcibly displaced people in the world reached its highest level since the end of the Second World War (Education in emergencies, 2016). According to UNESCO (2016), refugee children and adolescents across the globe are five times more likely to be out of school than their non-refugee peers. At global level, UNHCR estimates that half of the 3.5 million refugee children of primary school age do not go to school.

Since early 2016, a refugee flow of over 860,000 migrants into Greece and Northern Europe has been recorded. As of August 2022, the total number of migrant residents in Greece amounts to 18,587, of which 16% (3,190 people) is the population of refugees and asylum seekers<sup>3</sup> on the islands, and 84% is made up of the population living on the mainland (InfoMigrants, 2022). Most of them came from Syria, Afghanistan and from Palestine (WorldData, 2022).

According to UNHCR (2019), most refugees worldwide live in private accommodations. However, refugee camps remain an important feature of the humanitarian landscape. In November 2022, approximately 6.6 million individuals, constituting roughly 22% of the global refugee population, were living within refugee camps, according to the UNHCR 2022 report (Global trends, 2022). As is also mentioned by Triandafyllidou & Bartolini (2017) refugee camps are considered to be a short-term solution where people live for a short period of time until they settle in the host country or they move to another country. They are created to receive refugees and people in refugee-like situations. The main purpose is to provide immediate assistance and protection to people who have been forced to flee their homes due to a life threatening situation (war, persecution).

Education is a vital component for people living in refugee camps, as it provides children and young adults with the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and abilities to rebuild their lives and integrate to their new environment. However, education in

---

<sup>1</sup> The UN (United Nations) has defined **forcibly displaced persons** as those who are “forced to move, within or across borders, due to armed conflict, persecution, terrorism, human rights violations and abuse, violence, the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters or a combination of these factors”

<sup>2</sup> **Refugees** are those who have been forced to flee their homes because of war, violence or persecution, often without warning, and who have rights to specific protections under international law once they obtain refugee status

<sup>3</sup> **Asylum-seekers** are those who are seeking international protection from dangers in their own country, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined (Winchester, 2021)

refugee camps presents unique challenges that must be addressed in order to provide effective learning opportunities for refugees living there. These challenges include a shortage of resources, a lack of trained teachers, limited access to educational technology and other issues that will be examined in the following research.

In this study the case of education for refugee children in Ritsona refugee camp will be examined. Ritsona Camp was created in March 16<sup>th</sup> 2016 and is located in the Attica Region, about 70 km from Athens, Greece. According to the Hellenic National Defense General Staff's weekly press release, as of November 5, 2021, there were 2,409 asylum seekers living at the Ritsona camp, making the facility the third most populous in Greece after the Mavrovouíni camp on Lesbos island (2,907) and the Malakása camp on the mainland (2,432). For 2023 we do not have the precise number of the facility's population. It is certain though that the number has been reduced significantly since 2021, when the last inventory was held. The camp is managed by the Greek government, with support from international organizations such as the UNHCR and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The camp has a capacity to host up to 3,000 refugees, although it has often exceeded this number.

Without access to public transportation, Ritsona is located between factories and a crematorium, far from schools, supermarkets and any form of urban life. Many of Ritsona's children have missed years of school, traversing long distances in terrible conditions, as they were fleeing death, persecution, violence and other threats.

This research thesis seeks to explore the experiences of refugee children living in Ritsona refugee camp and of their educators and educational coordinators working in the camp with regard to education. By gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of refugee children, educators and coordinators of education in the camp, this study aims to inform policy and practice in the field of refugee education living in refugee camps. Ritsona can serve as a case to discover what is the most appropriate education that refugee and asylum seeking children, living in refugee camps, should receive in order to become active citizens. By conducting this study I would like to contribute to efforts to support the education of refugees living in camps and promote their successful integration into their new communities.

In this thesis the researcher will try to answer the following questions regarding refugee education:

**Main Research question:**

- What kind of education do refugee children living in Ritsona Refugee Camp need in order to become active citizens?

**Sub questions:**

-How do coordinators of education of Ritsona camp view the education children receive inside and outside the facility?

-How do the teachers of the camp try to educate the children in an appropriate way and how they view the education children receive inside and outside of the facility?

-How do children perceive the educational situation inside and outside of the camp and which are their needs for improvement?

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *The refugee crisis of recent years*

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention the term “refugee” refers to people who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality and membership of a particular social group or political opinion. A refugee crisis could be defined as the displacement of significant populations across international borders for prolonged periods (Education in emergencies guidance, 2017).

Approximately 22 percent of the world’s refugee population lives in refugee camps- an estimated 6.6 million people (Refugee Camps: Definition, Facts and Statistics, 2021). Refugee camps are makeshift installations established to offer immediate shelter and support to individuals forced to leave their residences because of warfare, oppression or aggression. While camps are not established to provide permanent solutions, they are supposed to offer a safe space for refugees and meet their most basic needs such as food, water, shelter, medical treatment and other basic services during emergencies. In situations of long-term displacement, the services provided in camps are expanded to include educational and livelihood opportunities as well as materials to build more permanent homes to help people rebuild their lives (Refugee Camps: Definition, Facts and Statistics, 2021).

The incredibly high rates of refugee population have been fueled by a number of conflicts and emergency situations around the world with the ongoing Syrian civil war, and the more recent Ukraine war as striking examples. The recent refugee crisis has put many OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, one of them is also Greece, under considerable pressure to accommodate and integrate large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers (Cerna, 2019). Furthermore, it has led to political and social tensions in many countries, with some governments adopting harsh anti-immigrant policies and other struggling to provide adequate support to those seeking refuge (Weinar et al., 2019).

At the end of 2021, less than 10% of all the world’s refugees and only a fraction of internally displaced people were living in the EU (European Commission, 2022). However, being located in close proximity to major ongoing civil and international



conflicts various parts of Europe still act as magnets to people on the move (Weinar et al., p.7, 2019).

As the south-eastern boarder of European Union (EU), Greece has found itself standing at the gateway to a humanitarian disaster. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1.000.573 refugees and migrants arrived in Europe from the Middle East and North Africa during 2015 (Moris & Kousoulis, 2017). Of these, some 850.000 landed on the Greek islands (49% were Syrian, 21% Afghan and 8% Iraqi) (UNHCR, Greece Factsheet, 2018). The majority of these people are characterized as “asylum seekers”. “An asylum seeker is a person who has left its country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who has not yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum” (Who is a refugee, a migrant or an asylum seeker, 2023)

The refugee crisis of recent years has highlighted the urgent need for greater international cooperation and support for refugees and their host communities. It remains a complex and ongoing challenge, requiring sustained efforts from governments, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and other stakeholders to address the root causes of displacement and provide support for those affected. Education is a fundamental component of these efforts. It not only caters to immediate necessities but also significantly contributes to tackling the underlying reasons for displacement. Furthermore, it plays a vital role in shaping a better future for the affected individuals, as the forthcoming sections of the research will elaborate.

### ***The role of education***

In a world experiencing rapid changes, and where cultural, political, economic and social upheaval challenges traditional ways of life, education has a major role to play in promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence (United Nations, 2023). Education is at the heart of the global struggle to alleviate poverty and reduce inequality (Fredman et al., 2018).

Education has been recognized as a fundamental human right since 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared that everyone has the right to free and compulsory education. Education must be “directed to the full development of the human personality” and “promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26).

According to Article 28 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child “state parties should recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity” (United Nations, 1989). In

particular, the article states that primary education should be compulsory for all children regardless their status and those different forms of secondary and vocational education should be available to all children. Moreover, regarding Article 28 “state parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and literacy throughout the world”

When the CRC refers to education, this encompasses both formal and non-formal education. Formal education is structured, chronically graded instruction, given in an educational institution. Non-formal education is an organized educational activity outside the established formal classroom system (Formal, non-formal and informal learning, 2023). Adequate teaching facilities, efforts and quality of the teachers and the availability of teaching materials are few of the factors, determinant for a minimum quality of education, which should be attained and maintained in all countries regardless their economic situation (Verheyde, 2006).

Usually, international legal instruments, like the Convention of the Rights of the Child, use the term ‘education’ in a double sense: a) education as the provision of basic skills, and b) education as the development of the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional potential of the young person or in other words the broader development of his or her personality (Verheyde, 2006). The CRC Committee (Committee on the Rights of the Child) stresses that the notion ‘basic skills’ does not only include literacy and numeracy but also life skills such as the ability to make well balanced decisions; to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner; and to develop a healthy lifestyle, good social relationships and responsibility, critical thinking, creative talents, and other abilities which give children the tools needed to pursue their options in life’ (CRC Committee, 2001).

Education is one of the main capabilities which give people the right and the possibility to live a life of human dignity as Nussbaum refers in her social justice theory (2011). Nussbaum states that taking this away from children is a violation of their basic human rights and has as a consequence the deactivation of their citizenship. According to this author, education is not emphasized only as a mean to gain future income but also as a mean to create active citizens by developing skills and attitudes.

Biesta (2009) adds another aspect to the role of education. He suggests three different functions: qualification, socialization and subjectification. All these are connected and influence each other. According to Biesta “qualification” is the function which provides knowledge and skills to the students which allow them to do something, for instance work in a specific field in the future. Biesta also gives the example of cultural literacy, which is a part of the qualification function. As cultural literacy we could mention the knowledge and skills considered to be necessary to function in a society (Biesta, 2009). As “socialisation” Biesta defines the function which is responsible for making people, through education, members and parts of a particular social, cultural and political order. Finally, “subjectification” is the process of becoming a subject (Biesta, 2009). More

specifically, through education and the function of subjectification students learn how to become autonomous and independent individuals.

The three functions combined and integrated into the curriculum could lead to “good education” and equality of opportunities for every student (Biesta, 2009). This applies to all children including refugee ones.

### ***The importance of education for refugee children***

As it is stated in Article 28 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) “all children and young people have the right to education no matter who they are: regardless of race, gender or disability; if they are in detention or if they are a refugee”. Few years before 1989 in 1951 the Refugee convention supplemented by its 1967 protocol stated in Article 22 regarding public education that states should make sure that in times of war education should be provided to children in both rural and urban areas. Moreover, it was agreed that states should take effective measures to ensure that these children can be reintegrated in the education system, including the provision of non-formal education programs by prioritizing rehabilitation of school buildings and facilities.

Despite these statements and according to UNHCR’s report “Missing out: Refugee Education in crisis” (2016), refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than non-refugee children. Only 50% of them have access to primary education, compared with a global level of more than 90%. As they get older, the gap becomes even wider with 84% of non-refugee adolescents attending lower secondary school while only 22% of refugee adolescents have this opportunity. Furthermore, at the tertiary level, the proportion of refugees who are able to pursue higher education is markedly low, with only 1% of such individuals attending university in contrast to the global figure of 34% (UNHCR, 2016).

The needs of refugee children are complex. Many have traumatic experiences and disrupted education, and are then tasked with adapting to a new culture. Schools play a critical role in helping refugee children find some sense of safety and helping maximize their learning potential (Thomas, 2016). Justifiably, many young refugees believe their education might enable them to achieve physical and cognitive mobilities that would enable them to build a more secure future (Dryden-Peterson, 2017). As also discussed by Gross (2015) education is one of the main factors which could support the inclusion of refugees and immigrants in a society. It is a critical tool for promoting the long-term well-being and integration of refugees. By providing refugees with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities they need to rebuild their lives and pursue their goals, education can help to break the cycle of poverty and displacement, and promote greater social and economic inclusion (UNHCR, 2019). It is well established that in many cases low educational attainment reduces later chances of employment and predicted earnings (Oreopoulos, 2007). Also, Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2015) emphasizes the

importance of education in determining the futures of young refugees and its potential to transform lives of those who are able to access it.

Integrating into the host society does not necessarily mean that children should erase their past, their native language and their previous experiences. Characteristically, educational integration is understood as a “dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 12).

In addition, education could contribute to: overcoming the marginalisation of vulnerable groups; combating poverty and deprivation; integrating migrants; developing the full potential of pupils intellectually, socially and morally; empowering youngsters (Brown & Krasteva, 2013). It can also serve as a crucial avenue towards a more promising future for refugees and their host communities, ultimately averting potential crises.

Refugee children have learning, social and emotional needs (Cerna, 2019). These needs could be significantly covered through education and active involvement of trained educators (Proyer, 2023). Some of the needs are the learning of the language of the host country, catching-up on schooling they have lost due to displacement, the adjustment to the new educational system, sense of belonging and of course coping with the trauma they have experienced. It is crucial for refugee children to interact with their non-refugee peers. As Biesta (2009) pointed out, this interaction helps in nurturing the social aspect of education (socialization).

Not educating young people creates a high risk of continuing inequality and frustration. Specifically, Sidhu and Taylor (2012) highlight that extended stays in refugee camps can lead to severe negative impacts on the educational attainment of individuals. The denial of education to refugee children, inside or outside refugee camps, could have a major mental health impact. For many asylum-seeking children, lack of access to education robs them of crucial structure, especially given the daily insecurity and harsh conditions in camps. Many experienced violence in their home countries and on the host country and suffer from stress and trauma, which generally goes untreated (Esveld, 2020). Anderson et al. note that educational opportunities decrease the psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters by providing a sense of routine, stability, structure, and hope for the future (Anderson et al. 2010). Schools can play a vital role as a crucial and positive source of interaction for refugee children, particularly when they experience a sense of belonging. These educational institutions can act as places of learning and personal development, as well as offer social connections with peers and guidance in navigating into the new culture (Thomas, 2016). In particular, schools could play a vital role in fostering the three functions of education proposed by Biesta (2009).

The three aforementioned functions of education suggested by Biesta (2009) could be adopted also in refugee education. Through education refugee children should acquire valuable skills and expertise (qualification), thereby enhancing their capacity to become skilled professionals and contributing members of society. By doing so, they may be

empowered to eventually participate in the rebuilding of their home country, while also aiding in the protection of vulnerable individuals. Moreover, refugee students should become members of their host society, a process that could be achieved through the socialization function. Finally, displaced children should learn how to become autonomous and independent individuals as the subjectification function of education proposes. The main question now it would be which are the best ways of providing education to refugee children in order for the three functions (Biesta, 2009) to be achieved?

### *Active citizenship*

As Biesta supports in his socialization function, education should be responsible for making people members and parts of a particular social, cultural and political order (Biesta, 2009). In essence, socialization helps individuals become familiar with and integrate into societal norms and values while also it activates their citizenship. Since the main research question is “What kind of education do refugee children living in Ritsona refugee camp need in order to become active citizens?” it is relevant to define briefly who an active citizen is according the relevant bibliography.

Abowitz and Harnish mention that citizenship in a democracy a) gives membership status to individuals within a political unit, b) gives to the individuals a sense of identity, c) encompasses a set of principles, usually seen as a commitment to the common good of a particular political unit, d) necessitates a certain level of engagement in the political process and e) implies gaining and using knowledge and understanding of laws, documents and governing procedures (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). In essence, citizenship provides membership, identity, principles and the opportunity for active participation in a community.

If these definitions of citizenship are taken into account then understanding what an active citizen is, becomes more accessible. An active citizen can be described as an empowered individual who assumes responsibility for both its own life opportunities and the development of society as a whole (Onyx & Brown, 2011). This skill can be particularly challenging for any individual to cultivate, and it becomes even more formidable for those with a refugee background. In the present thesis, the researcher aims to investigate whether education can be employed as a means to promote active citizenship among all students, especially among refugee children and youth.

## **Methods**

The present study examined the research questions through qualitative research methods. The phenomenological approach of qualitative method was selected by the researcher since it allowed her to investigate and gain deeper insight in the coordinators, educators and children's experiences regarding education in Ritsona. More particularly, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with the above mentioned groups, asking questions that prompt discussion and allow exploring each interviewee's responses deeper.

To gain a thorough understanding of the factors affecting refugee education, researcher's primary emphasis was in investigating the conditions within the Ritsona Refugee Camp. I conducted a comprehensive analysis of this specific case, following the approach of a case study as outlined by Flyvbjerg (2011). In terms of Flyvbjerg a case study could be defined as the detailed examination of a single example, in this case the example of Ritsona, which focuses on developmental factors in relation to the environment. Meaning that through this specific case of education in Ritsona Camp, it is expected that more answers will be given regarding the education of children living in other refugee camps and even regarding the education of refugee children in general all over the world.

### ***Sub Question I***

The following will outline the methodology employed to answer the question: How do coordinators of education inside Ritsona camp view the education children receive inside and outside of the facility?

### ***Participants***

In order to understand how the coordinators of education in Ritsona view children's education I conducted semi-structured interviews. Currently in the facility there are two coordinators. Both of them were interviewed on their experiences and outlooks. The coordinators have similar roles inside the facility with one being responsible for the children who attend primary education and the other for the children who attend the secondary. Their duty in Ritsona is mainly to coordinate all matters related to formal education. The coordinators are the only link between formal education (school) and the facility. They have to detect the school age children of Ritsona, enroll them to the nearest public schools, arrange their daily transportation, contact their school teachers and headmasters, pass on anything that is needed to the children's parents and make sure that all of the children attend school.

### ***Procedure and Instruments***

Once the participants agreed on being interviewed, both written and oral informed consent was obtained before each interview (APPENDIX A). Based on the research question mentioned above and the theoretical framework an interview guide was created (APPENDIX B). The interviews were semi-structured (Flick, 2023) without the interview guide being always precisely followed. Both of the coordinators were asked the same questions with some variations depending on their role and their responses. The duration was approximately forty minutes each. The discussions were conducted online through Google Meets, since both of the coordinators are currently living and working in Greece. Moreover, the interviews were conducted in the Greek language since this is the native language of the interviewer and the interviewees.

### ***Sub Question II***

The following will outline the methodology employed to answer the question: How do teachers inside the camp try to educate the children in an appropriate way and how they view the education children receive inside and outside of the facility?

### ***Participants***

For the purpose of answering the second research question the researcher conducted interviews with four of the five educators who work inside the facility in non-formal education. The number of the educators who were interviewed depended on the information the researcher acquired throughout the process. Once she noticed that the information started getting saturated and repetitive, she stopped the interviewing procedure.

The role of educators inside Ritsona is to teach and assist school age children after the formal education. Most of the facilities' children attend school and afterwards the non-formal education which is offered in the camp. The researcher interviewed the senior teacher, whose role it is to coordinate the teachers' team and occasionally teaching the Greek language. The other two educators interviewed are Greek language teachers as well and the fourth is teacher of English language.

### ***Procedure and Instruments***

The process of interviewing educators was similar with the one of coordinators. Once the participants agreed on being interviewed, both written and oral informed consent was obtained before each interview (APPENDIX A). Based on the second research question and the theoretical framework an interview guide was created (APPENDIX C). The interviews were semi-structured (Flick, 2023) without the interview guide being always precisely followed. All of the participants were being asked the same questions with some variations depending on their role and their responses. The duration was approximately thirty minutes each. The discussions were conducted online through Google Meets, since all of the educators are currently living and working in Greece. Moreover, the interviews were conducted in the Greek language while this is the native language of the interviewer and the interviewees.

### ***Sub Question III***

The following will outline the methodology employed to answer the sub-question: “How do children perceive the educational situation inside and outside of the camp and which are their needs for improvement?”

### ***Procedure and Instruments***

Because of various challenges the researcher encountered in reaching out to children residing or having resided in Ritsona (most of the children could not speak either English or Greek and the camp did not have the ability to offer a translator, many of the parents would not let their children participate in the research, the situation in the camp is chaotic, children come and go and it was difficult for the coordinators and the educators to find children willing to participate) she sought to address the third sub-question by examining the content of the short documentary “Education Matters”. The video was filmed in 2021 by the documentarian Polina Aksenenko (Denied Education, 2021). In the video, the interviewer asks seven children, who were then living in Ritsona about their dreams and experiences regarding education both within and outside of the facility. Their answers give insight in their experiences, dreams and wishes, allowing the researcher to gain insight in their perspective.

### ***Data Analysis***

The interviews of the educational coordinators and the teachers were recorded and afterwards transcribed, initially in Greek and after that were translated into English with the help of the online translation platform DeepL, in order to be easier for the researcher to analyze them and share quotes in this thesis. Concerning the children and their voice, the researcher meticulously reviewed the video titled “Education Matters” multiple



times, conducting a thorough analysis while keeping both the research question and the queries posed to the other interviewees in mind. The data were approached mainly inductively, while the researcher began with specific observations and data and then worked toward more general theories and conclusions, which provided a foundation for searching and identifying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the beginning of the process the data were analyzed semantically, by identifying and summarizing the content and capturing the surface meaning of what the participants said. Afterwards, a more lenient coding occurred, trying to dive into the ideas, meanings, concepts and assumptions which were not explicitly stated to the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher tried to understand profoundly the subjective experiences and intentions of the participants by using coding (Flick, 2023). A thematic analysis was used following six steps as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The first phase started during the data collection where the researcher familiarized herself with the information. The process of transcribing and afterwards translating the data had a helpful impact on this. The procedure continued with the first attempt of generating codes. The researcher tried to create relevant codes connected to the data she collected, which helped her gain a deeper, initial understanding of the inputs. Then, the research was carried on with the active process of developing the primary themes, not fixed and flexible to change (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After this step it was time for the researcher to review the potential themes from the aforementioned phase and examine their quality always in accordance with the research question. With the completion of this phase many themes were altered or even eliminated. Next, a new, finalized list of themes was created and lastly a thorough report was produced.

### ***Reflexivity of the researcher***

Reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of a perpetual, internal dialogue and self-critical evaluation of researcher's positionality (Berger, 2015). To implement this, the researcher decided that the inclusion of a brief, relevant paragraph is vital based on the study's inherent characteristics.

The researcher is a Greek female on her mid-twenties who grew up in a middle class home and was raised by educated (tertiary education) parents. Throughout the entire process the researcher was trying to pay attention to her self-knowledge and sensitivity, to carefully monitor the influence of her biases, beliefs and personal experiences on her research and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal aspect. In particular, the researcher has worked voluntarily as a teacher in the past with young refugees. This experience made her identify in a deeper level with the educators of the camp rather than with the coordinators. Furthermore, some of the interviewees had friendly relations with one of the researcher's family members, fact that made them more comfortable and talkative during the interviews. Finally, the researcher was biased on the way Greek refugee camp work, since she has volunteered in the past as a

children's assistant in another refugee camp. However, the researcher had always in mind her lens with which she would conduct the present study. More particular, triangulation was employed by exploring the education of the children through different perspectives namely, from that of the educational coordinators, the educators and refugee children themselves. This increased validity, and minimized the influence of bias (Flick, 2018). Hearing these diverse voices allowed the researcher to recognize and correct many of her own preconceived notions on the subject.

## Results

The aim of the analysis was to respond to the main research question “What kind of education do refugee children living in Ritsona Refugee Camp need in order to become active citizens?” by analyzing the opinions and the personal experiences of the three interested parties: coordinators of education, teachers and children. Talking with and listening to the experiences of the people who work inside the facility in the educational part and watching the video “Education Matters” the researcher gained deeper knowledge on the situation and discovered shared issues and beliefs mentioned by all the interviewees but also sometimes conflicting views and experiences. Moreover, the researcher spotted various differences in the perspectives and opinions of the interviewees. She used triangulation to test the validity through the convergence of the information she received from all the different sources. Bellow the themes will be presented.

***The organization of education inside and outside the camp:*** When the researcher interviewed the education coordinators and the teachers of Ritsona refugee camp, she gained valuable insights about the camp's functioning and the educational opportunities available to children both within and outside the facility.

To understand how education works in Ritsona, it is useful to have insight in the role of the education coordinators as presented to the researcher. The education coordinators coordinate all matters related to formal education outside of the facility, the education in the public school which is based on a set curriculum. As one of the coordinators mentioned: “*The Education Coordinator coordinates all matters related to formal education*”. In particular, the coordinators identify the children of school age who live in the facility and they make the necessary arrangements to enroll them to the public school (vaccinate them, get them school materials). After the children are enrolled, coordinators are the basic link between the school and the facility: “*So, I enroll the children in the schools, and once they start their studies, we are the link between the school and the structure*”. They oversee the student's progress, they speak with the school teachers and the principals about any issue that arises and they report what is needed regarding education to the children's parents.

As the researcher was informed by the coordinators, currently (2023) there are 250 school age children at Ritsona from age six to seventeen, a number that used to be three times as high a few years ago. Almost all the children living at the camp at the moment attend public school even though the coordinators have faced a lot of difficulties to achieve that (see the following themes). In the schools, refugee children attend three hours per day a reception class, which is set up in schools where refugee children are enrolled. Teachers are recruited for this purpose, exclusively to teach Greek. The other three hours of the school, children attend classes with the Greek students. They follow the curriculum set up by the Greek Ministry of Education.

Regarding the education inside the camp, as the teachers explained, the provider of non-formal education within the facility is the NGO Solidarity Now, which is an offshoot of UNICEF. This organization provides education within the facility until the school starts during the summertime and until the reception classrooms will have the adequate staff to accept the refugee children. But they also provide, inside the facility, remedial teaching, which means that as soon as the children come back from school, they attend three extra hours of class as a supplement to the Greek curriculum, classes in Greek, English and Math. More specifically, 140 out of the 250 Ritsona's children attend this form of education. The school inside the facility is not obligatory and the students who want to attend should register. The small number of children who are not enrolled in the Greek public school go to the school inside the facility in the morning hours, while the ones who attend the local school have classes inside the facility after school from 2 until 5 in the afternoon. As one of the coordinators informed the researcher some children don't receive any form of education: *"But there are some, not many of course, who don't want to go to school. Or there are boys of that age who prefer to work. There is a need for their families to work"*.

In the lessons inside the facility, the teachers help the children with their school homework in Greek, English and Mathematics. As one of the educators stated in one of the interviews, the teachers of the camp have the freedom in terms of the material they can teach; in essence they do what they judge is necessary and useful for the children:

There are several manuals that we can select from. But usually, it's something we make ourselves. Based on the manual or combined. The textbooks help us, but there is some sort of lesson plan that we come up with ourselves, we tailor it specifically to the needs of specific kids (Educator).

With regard why these three specific subjects are being taught inside the camp one of the educators said that they have focused on the two core languages (Greek and English) and on the universal language of Mathematics, while they think these will be of vital importance to the children throughout their lives in Greece:

We have focused on the two core languages and the universal language of mathematics. Especially Greek, which children encounter every day at school and in the society in which they live, so it is essential that they master it. English

as an international language that will be useful to them anywhere and mathematics as a more recognizable international language (Educator).

***The obstacles that the local and national authorities put to refugee education:*** All the three parties mentioned in various ways that they have faced a lot of difficulties and lack of means and organization for the children's enrollment in the school. First of all, there was no transportation for many months that could carry the children from the facility to the city, which is 20 km away.

As one of the coordinators states: *"There were two and a half years of exclusion of children from school, because the government did not call for tenders, we did not have buses. When we do not have buses how do we send children to school"*. While one of the children in the video confirms that by saying: *"I have been to Greece for two years and I have only been to school for two months"*.

Another very serious issue that was pointed out strongly by all parties was the lack of teachers in the reception classrooms. Even though the school is typically starting on September, the government was hiring teachers on November and sometimes even on December. This had as a result children missing months of school. One of the children in the video mentions: *"Greek children start the school in September and we start two three months later"*, while another one says: *"We were never treated in the educational level as the local community"*. Finally, according to the coordinators, many times the local authorities of Chalkida (the nearest to the camp town) and some of the parents of the Greek children were creating problems to the children of Ritsona by stating that they do not want them in the regular classrooms. As one of the coordinators said:

There were problems created by local administrators, let's say mayors, municipal counselors, who sent letters to the Ministry of Education asking that children not attend the Greek public education system, so they were creating a negative climate for children's participation (coordinator).

***The Greek language:*** All three parties, especially the children and the educators, emphasize the significance of acquiring proficiency in the Greek language, as knowing adequate Greek will help the children integrate easier to the Greek society will enhance their comprehension of various school subjects and will bridge a communication bridge with their non-refugee peers. One of the educators refers to communication as the most important need children have:

I think also the needs that refugees have in our country are mainly communicative. So, we are working very much on the everyday part, the everyday vocabulary, so that they can communicate practically in the outside world, outside the structure.

Furthermore, one of the coordinators when she was asked how it is for the children to attend the Greek school and the Greek curriculum she answered: *"Of course, it is*

*difficult for children to attend classes when they have not mastered the Greek language to a large extent*”, one of the students validates this statement and he says that *“sometimes the level of the classroom is very high, they only speaking Greek and I don’t understand”*.

***More opportunities for educational activities outside of the camp:*** Multiple times throughout the interviews and the video the camp was described as a remote prison with high walls, 20 km away from the rural area of Chalkida. As one of the coordinators stated: *“Children want to get out of the prisons that the facilities are, the want to see their peers”* also adding that *“this imprisonment is not helping our children at all in terms of integration”*. Moreover, one of the educators supported that *“Children want socialization in different areas, and sports, and arts, and anything that can help them get out of the facility”*. Another one agreed by adding:

I think it's clear that when the kids go out of the camp and communicate with Greek kids, it's very good for them on so many levels. Not only linguistically. So ideally it would be nice to give them more opportunities to be outside the camp and do other things outside of school so that they can come into contact with other stimuli that would definitely help them develop even more.

One of the girls on the video says: *“the camp is far from the school and the town and we don’t have public transportation, it is always a struggle for us to get out of the camp”*, while another younger girl adds: *“I want to discover the world, not just stay in one place”*

The importance of learning the language of the host country is also corroborated by Cerna while according to him, refugee children have learning, social and emotional needs like acquiring adequately the language of the host country and communicating with their peers (Cerna, 2019). Moreover, by speaking Greek, children will adapt easier to the local culture.

***Strong wish of the children to attend school:*** This issue is inextricably linked to the previous one. In order for the children to get away from the facility and acquire a sense of normality they all have a really strong will to attend school daily. All of the children of the video express deeply their intensive will to go to school every day like the rest of the kids do: *“I would like a school like this, when you go to the school it should be organized, you study there and after you leave. There should be three-four hours per day, five days”*. Another girl says: *“There needs to be regularity. There isn’t any. We need to go to school regularly”*. The older girl stated with emphasis: *“We don’t want education inside the camp; we want to go to the Greek school, to integrate with the Greek children”*. One of the coordinators mentioned a very interesting comparison of how his children and general a majority of non-refugee children view school in comparison with the refugee ones:

Refugee children very much want to go to school. They don’t view the school like my own children let's say did. I have two daughters, who are women now.

When they went to school, I remember, both in elementary and middle school, and in high school sometimes, when they were in their bad times, they described school like a prison. They would leave home to go to a prison. The interesting thing now is that these particular kids (of the camp) they leave a prison (camp) to go and be free in the school.

The other coordinator mentions *“school gives them perhaps the only regularity in their lives. It's away from home, away from their homeland. Some don't have their family members. The only normal thing they do is that they go to school”*. Furthermore, she comments that when they did not have buses to transfer the children to the school: *“We had children coming every day crying, telling us to go to school, school, school, school, school”*

Many of the children's statements reveal their intense need of receiving education and go to school:

“Education makes you smart, when you are smart you are thinking and when you are thinking you are not doing something bad”, “I will study from now till I am 25, 26, until I got a diploma of some kind. Then I'll get a job I like”, “I want to become important, learn new things, learn languages, go to any place I can”, “I would like to go to the college and study physics, my favorite and after I would probably got a good job, because if you study surely you got a good job”.

Finally, a teacher of the camp says: “Obviously the non-formal education in the camp it is not enough, it works only supplementary, children need the school”.

***Lack of basic social and practical skills:*** Out of the four educators who were interviewed, three pointed out that the majority of the children they encountered were deficient in fundamental social and practical skills, skills that might be considered commonplace among other children.

They lack basic social skills. And we're talking about skills that can be normally covered in children three to four years old like holding a pair of scissors, holding a pencil. Being able to sit, being able to listen to someone. Most of them, especially the younger children I met, lack that (Educator).

While another one agrees with this statement by saying: *“Because there are refugee and migrant children who may never have attended another school, not even in their own country. We may have students who don't even know how to pick up a pencil to write”*.

***Lack of trained teachers:*** One of the coordinators pointed out another issue:

The teachers that are hired in the reception classes, they don't have a special training, is not required, they haven't done any relevant masters on intercultural

education nor seminars. They insist only on the alphabet, in the grammar, they don't insist at all on the communication part because they don't know how important it is. The role of the teacher in the reception class in the school, is very important because they are their basic link, if children feel intimate with them, they will show willingness to join the other classes too. So, the teachers should play a more active role in the integration and the inclusion of the children, which is not happening (Coordinator).

The other coordinator offers a clear view on the situation by saying that:

Teachers in reception classes are usually the last to choose a school<sup>4</sup> and they are the completely inexperienced ones. They are not the experienced teachers who have attended seminars, who have taught the language, who have a friction with kids in general. They are thrown into the ocean without ever being given a life jacket and they have to swim. They have no particular curriculum to follow, no particular book, they have to improvise. And that's what usually creates problems for the children, creates boredom and resignation.

***Need for adults to get educated as well:*** During the interviews it was underlined numerous times, by the coordinators and the educators, the importance of offering education also to the adult refugees of the camp, since they are the ones who will motivate their children. One of the educators when she was asked if there are children who do not want to attend school she said:

But there are also cases of children who are still negative even now, because they may have been bullied or not made friends at school and combined with parents who are in denial. Yeah, that certainly doesn't help at all (Educator).

While one of the coordinators informed me that there is no chance for adult refugees to get educated inside or outside the facility:

There is no other opportunity within the structure for people who want to learn Greek to do so. And this is a deficit. I keep saying it all the time. That is children, yes with many difficulties, we will say and in the process we manage and we enroll them in schools. But the adults who want to attend Greek language courses, it is not possible. There is no possibility within the structure. There should be institutions that teach adults the language, so that they can also help them. Although we have observed the phenomenon here that parents learn from their children. In other words, sometimes, we use them (children) as translators within the structure (coordinator).

---

<sup>4</sup> In the Greek system, after someone finish the university to be a teacher, they express to which schools and in which position they would like to work and they enter a big waiting list. The younger teachers, who have just finished the university are in the bottom of the list and are the ones who express last to which school and position they would like to go, having to choose from the few positions they have left

Another educator highlights the importance of education also for the adult refugees while she says:

We need to look at the adults a little bit. That is, the parents. We need to provide them with education and help them understand the importance of it. There needs to be education for them as well. They should learn some things that if they understand them they will pass them on to their children (Educator).

***Problem solving by coordinators and educators:*** The analysis revealed that another noteworthy theme is the ways in which teachers and coordinators in Ritsona try to solve the difficulties that arise regarding education.

Each of the individuals interviewed passionately discussed the challenges they have encountered and continue to confront, as well as their efforts to address these issues either individually or collaboratively:

### **Coordinators**

Regarding the issue of lack of public transportation, which took away from the children more than two years of schooling the coordinators, stated that they solved it by making the situation public, taking even to the European Parliament. In the end they managed to find private sponsors who donated buses and school materials (books, pencils, bags) to the children of Ritsona:

We raise awareness, we get our needs out there, we go around Chalkida and collect notebooks, bags, everything. And with sponsorships, then, we cover these needs in educational material, in school supplies. And that's how the problems are solved. So, we solved them with pressure. The way we have chosen is not to keep our mouths shut, let me tell you a little bit, we put it out there (Coordinator).

As far as the issue of exclusion by the local authorities, who insisted not to send the refugee children to the regular classrooms with the rest of the children, one of the coordinators said:

We had to go through, how shall I put it, splintering, what shall I put it this way, to get to where we are today. I wouldn't say we're at a good level. We're just adhering to the letter of the law, where children are enrolled, where there's movement and they're going to school, So far. We don't talk about the substance. We're talking about the surface. Beyond that, the substance is another matter (Coordinator).

The coordinator intended to convey with this statement that, while they have successfully overcome numerous challenges to enroll the children in school, the quality of their education remains relatively shallow, and there isn't a deliberate effort to facilitate their integration.



## **Educators**

When they were asked which are the practical difficulties, they have to face each day inside the classroom and how they try to deal with them the educators said:

### *1. Problem*

A very big issue is the language. Especially in the first period, when the children didn't go to school, they didn't all go to school at least, because this year the language has improved a lot, both Greek and English. And the multiculturalism of the classroom, which is managing different ethnicities in a classroom, with whatever that might entail in a closed camp, with whatever rivalry they might have with each other (Educator 1).

### *Solution*

The teacher tries to address the problems of the language with:

A lot of pictures. Anything to do with vocabulary I always tried to put it in pictures and repetition a lot of times, the same word orally, so especially with younger children, focus on the spoken word and not so much on the written word (Educator 1).

While regarding the issue of multiculturalism in a classroom she mentioned that:

We try to promote cooperation and team-orientation. And sometimes we take advantage of global days. For example, world French language day. To let children express this part of their identity as well because it is part of their identity. On world language days we ask them to teach us their own language too (Educator 1).

### *2. Problem*

The other teacher mentioned that a significant difficulty is *“To have cooperation among the children. Teach them to share things with each other, getting them into a process of listening and paying attention to you”*.

### *Solution*

She tries to solve that: *‘with some games maybe at the beginning and at the end to calm them down a bit also with some body language movements’*.

### *3. Problem*

The third educator highlighted a more general problem that she is facing regarding children's parents:

There are a number of issues in terms of the mindset of these people about education and how important it is to them. That is something that makes it difficult for us because they are essentially responsible for their children. Especially for those children who are basically compulsory education, up to the age of 15. In practice, they should go. There are indeed many children who don't go because there is neglect from the family or because they don't consider education important enough (Educator 3).

#### *Solution*

As she mentioned they have tried to solve this issue with the following way:

We have tried and we are trying with many meetings with the parents, again with the help of our psychologist, with discussion, a lot of discussion. That is, we are constantly making efforts to investigate why they are not going. We are constantly communicating with the school principals and we get a list of absentees every week (Educator 3).

#### *4. Problem*

The last educator pointed out that a great difficulty for her is that: *“There are refugee and migrant children who may never have attended another school, not even in their own country. We may have students who don't even know how to pick up a pencil to write”*

#### *Solution*

The way she deals with it is: *“by adapting the material I use in the lesson, seeing each student individually as a unit, but also thinking about how I can integrate that unit into the classroom group”*.

Taking into account the viewpoints and insights of educational coordinators, teachers and refugee children, it appears that numerous practical challenges exist when it comes to providing education to children both within and outside the facility. Nevertheless, all parties are committed to making every effort to ensure the effective delivery of quality education.

## Discussion

The present study aimed to answer the question: “what kind of education do refugee children living in Ritsona Refugee camp need in order to become active citizens?”. The findings of this research shed light on various aspects and challenges associated with the education refugee children living in Ritsona refugee camp receive. This discussion section highlights and examines the key themes and the implications drawn from the data combined with the relevant literature research. After listening to the opinions and experiences of the educational coordinators, the teachers and the children of the camp the researcher identified some themes, on which she will reflect thoroughly in the present section of the discussion.

The video analysis and the interviews with the teachers and coordinators add to the literature and point out the necessity and the strong wish of refugee children to attend school daily. Multiple times the refugee children expressed intensively their need to get educated and integrated to the Greek society through education. For them school and education are the main road which will lead them to a normal, safe life. Their main wish is to be a part of the world and respected members of the society, exactly like the rest of the non-refugee children. As stated in the theoretical framework justifiably many young refugees believe their education might enable them to achieve physical and cognitive mobilities that would enable them to build a more secure future (Dryden, 2017). Furthermore, schools play a critical role in helping refugee children find some sense of safety and helping maximize their learning potential (Thomas, 2016).

As Nussbaum (2011) points out, education is not emphasized only as a mean to gain future income but also as a mean to create active citizens by developing their skills and attitudes. This development is even more necessary to refugee children, while many of them have traumatic experiences and disrupted education due to the constant displacement (Thomas, 2016). As it was mentioned multiple times by the educators of the camp the majority of the children lack basic social and practical skills due to their difficult past. Many of Ritsona’s children have never been to school before, they have never learned how to read or write in any language and they don’t even know how to hold a pencil. Moreover, they do not know how to follow instructions and how to work in a classroom environment with their teachers and peers. All of the educators said that this should be a main concern of education right now, to help children acquire and empower these lost skills. By providing refugees with the skills and opportunities they need to rebuild their lives and rebuild their goals, education can help to break the cycle of poverty and displacement (UNHCR, 2019). The words and beliefs of the educators are in line with the literature, in which it was mentioned that education could be characterized also as the provision of basic skills, which does not only include literacy and numeracy but also life skills such as collaborating with fellow classmates or following simple orders (CRC Committee, 2001).

In order for the above to be achieved and as the research also revealed it is of great importance for the children to learn the Greek language adequately. The knowledge of the language offers a way of expression to the children gives them a voice and as Cerna mentioned learning the language of the host country is of vital significance while refugee children have learning, social and emotional needs like acquiring adequately the language of the host country and communicating with their peers (Cerna, 2019). Moreover, by speaking Greek children will adapt easier to the local culture and they will find a common code of communication with those around them. Surprisingly though, children who have resided in Greece for over five years still struggle with Greek language proficiency, while some of them do not know it at all. This issue leads to various complications in their education as they face difficulties in keeping up with lessons in Greek schools. Even though they have lessons of the Greek language inside the camp and in the reception classrooms in the school, they have not managed to master it. This means that maybe some changes should be made in the way Greek is being taught to refugee children as will be mentioned in the recommendations section.

It is clear that enhancing the quality of education provided to refugee children residing in refugee camps requires the collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders, among them the Greek state. As it was stated in the interviews many times, the Greek government was putting obstacles in the education of the children by not providing a mean to transport them to school or by hiring teachers in the reception classrooms months after the beginning of the school year. There is a need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to ensure that resources are used efficiently and the education sector for refugees receives the necessary support. The lack of transportation and the extensive delay of the school year for the refugee children could be considered a violation of a basic human right and comes in contrast with the Article 28 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) which stated that “all children and young people have the right to education no matter who they are”. Furthermore, the reports of all these difficulties refugee children face regarding their education enrich the data of the UNESCO’S report that refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than non-refugee children (UNHCR, 2016).

One of the most common themes between the interviews and the video is the consistent description by all the parties, of Ritsona Camp as an isolated prison. This serious feeling of the interviewees reflects on the experiences they have the last years living or working in Ritsona. Refugee camps are typically regarded as temporary solutions for short-term stays. However, this does not apply to Ritsona Camp, which has been operational for the past seven years without any plans yet for closure. Of course, its remote position, 20 km away from any civilization, it is not a facilitating factor for children’s integration. Additionally, high walls have been constructed around the camp, empowering the feeling of imprisonment and isolation. Children expressed multiple times their need to go out of the facility more and meet with their peers and classmates also outside of the school environment. The engagement with other activities, like music or sports, is equally important for the activation of their citizenship. This comes in accordance with

Biesta's idea of the socialisation function of education which is responsible for making people members and parts of a particular social, cultural and political order while they engage and communicate with other people (Biesta, 2009).

The study found that the teachers and the coordinators play a crucial role in bridging the gaps in refugee education, actively seeking immediate solutions to every problem it occurs. Many of the coordinators go daily above and beyond their duties in order to ensure a place in school for every child. They were confronted with the local authorities and they managed to find transportation to carry the children from the camp to the school. In order to reassure regular attendance, they were in touch every day with the teachers and the principals of the schools refugee children were attending. The educators of the facility also try to enhance children's education and adaptation to the local schools, using the inadequate tools they have. As they have mentioned, there is not a specific curriculum for them to follow neither a specific educational material. They are the ones who have to understand which are the educational needs of the children, outside of the school, and cover them. Despite their efforts though, the children of the video expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the education they receive inside the facility, describing it as unorganized and monotonous. However, the video was filmed a few years ago and the educational situation slightly improved since then.

Another factor that could improve the education refugee children receive, as the study revealed, is the training of the teachers on refugee and intercultural education. Both teachers of the camp and of the reception classroom in schools they did not have previous experience related to education for refugees. However, as the camp's teachers mentioned, the majority of them have received relevant training, through seminars or even related master's degrees. The teachers of the reception classrooms in Greek school are the ones who usually have not received any specific training. This has as a result that they are not able to create a teaching plan, which will captivate the students and will win their interest. While as it is mentioned in the theoretical framework refugee children have different needs from the non-refugee ones regarding education, like learning the language of the host country, adjusting to the new educational system, feeling accepted and manage to slowly overcome the traumatic experiences they went through (Cerna, 2019), teachers in reception classroom should receive also a different and an additional kind of training in order to meet these needs.

All in all, the researcher came to the conclusion that even though in theory the education that refugee children living in Ritsona receive is phenomenally sufficient, in fact it is not enough to meet their educational needs. There are reception classrooms, but there are not trained teachers. Moreover, these reception classrooms start months after they are supposed to. There is a form of education inside the facility, but much unorganized without the necessary tools. The educators there work independently without any guideline to follow. Even though it is illegal not to send children in school for years there was no transportation to transfer them. In order for refugee children living in refugee camps to become active citizens and integrate to the host society, an organized educational plan it is required with educational material, trained educators and an

education that not only equips them with academic knowledge but also empowers them with the skills, values, and resources to become active and engaged citizens. Only then we could properly implement what Biesta has said about the three main factions of education- qualification, socialization and subjectification.

### ***Limitations***

Due to its small scale and short duration the thesis has some limitations. First of all, the researcher had the chance to speak only with four educators and two coordinators of Ritsona. In addition, as it was mentioned above, due to various issues the researcher did not manage to speak herself with children who live in the camp. Instead, she used the video “Education Matters” to listen the voices of the children. It is important to note that the video was filmed in 2021, when the situation on the camp was much different with 850 school age children instead of 250. Moreover, on the video only the voices of seven children are being heard. Considering that Ritsona is a place with more than 250 school age children, the number of participants could be viewed as inadequate to present the full educational picture of the camp. Furthermore, the children selected for the interviews are the ones who are really motivated to get educated and build a new life in Greece, which is not always the case among refugees.

Another crucial matter is that the population of Ritsona camp changes constantly and there is no documentation which states the exact number of people who live there. Because of that the researcher could not have a precise image of the camp’s population. Her only source on that was the words of the coordinators, who stated the approximate number of the children, without being precise. Furthermore, the researcher faced difficulties in succinctly explaining the functioning and unique aspects of the Greek educational system within the constraints of a brief paper. Finally, the present paper represented the researcher’s first venture into qualitative research.

### ***Recommendations***

The research revealed that in order to address the educational needs of refugees effectively, several key initiatives should be pursued:

- There should be a significant increase in investment in education, both within and outside of refugee camps. This investment should target crucial areas such as infrastructure improvement, the recruitment and training of qualified teachers, and the provision of essential learning material.
- Comprehensive language support programs should be implemented to both children and adult refugees to help them overcome linguistic challenges and smoothly transition into their new educational environments.

- The Greek government should ensure that teachers are hired promptly in schools, ensuring a stable and consistent learning environment for all students, including refugee ones.
- Fostering greater interaction between refugee children and their local peers, while also encouraging activities that facilitate this interaction.
- Consider relocating refugee camps closer to urban areas. This proximity can provide easier access to educational resources, employment opportunities, and services, ultimately improving the overall well-being of refugee children.
- Documentation of the camp's population in order to ensure effective resource allocation and support for the refugee children.
- Lastly, it is important to emphasize that humanitarian aid should not be the responsibility of the host country alone. The involvement of global humanitarian organizations is crucial to provide comprehensive support to refugees and refugee education.

## References

- Abowitz, K. K., & Harnish, J. (2006). Contemporary Discourses of Citizenship. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(4), 653–690. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543076004653>
- Anderson, A., Hoffman, J., & Hyll-Larsen, P. (2010). *The right to education in emergencies, journal of education for children in emergencies*. *Legal Studies*, 2(1), 84–126.
- Ansa. (2022, September 26). *Greece migrant populations down by half year on year*. InfoMigrants. <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/43580/greece-migrant-populations-down-by-half-year-on-year>
- Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>
- Biesta, G. (2009). *Good education in an age of measurement: On the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education*. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21(1), 33–46. doi: 10.1007/s11092-008-9064-9
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) *Using thematic analysis in psychology*, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101.
- Cerna, L. (2019, May 17). *Refugee education*. OECD iLibrary. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/refugee-education\\_a3251a00-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/refugee-education_a3251a00-en)
- Denied Education - Welcome. (2021). <https://denied.education/>
- Dryden-Peterson, S. (2017). *Refugee education: Education for an unknowable future*. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 47(1), 14–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2016.1255935>
- Editorial note: Jeie Volume 3. (2017). *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 3(1), 5. <https://doi.org/10.33682/17bg-mj36>
- Education in emergencies guidance note. (2017). [https://www.dai.com/uploads/EiE\\_Guidance\\_Note-8fc7f4.pdf](https://www.dai.com/uploads/EiE_Guidance_Note-8fc7f4.pdf)
- Education in emergencies*. Global Campaign For Education United States Chapter. (2016). <http://campaignforeducationusa.org/topic/detail/education-in-emergencies>
- Esveld, B. V. (2020, June 23). *"Without education they lose their future"*. *Human Rights Watch*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/18/without-education-they-lose-their-future/denial-education-child-asylum-seekers>
- Figures at a glance*. UNHCR. (2021). <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance>



- Flick, U. (2023). *An introduction to qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.
- Formal, non-formal and informal learning - Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM)*. (2023). <https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/formal-non-formal-and-informal-learning>
- Fredman, S., Campbell, M., & Taylor, H. (2018). *Human rights and equality in education: Comparative perspectives on the right to education for minorities and disadvantaged groups*. Policy Press.
- Global trends report 2021*. UNHCR. (2021). <https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-trends-report-2021>
- Gross, Z., & Davies, L. (2015). *The contested role of education in conflict and fragility*. Sense Publishers.
- Human Rights Education and training | OHCHR. (2001). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training>
- Human Rights Watch. (2015). Turkey: 400,000 Syrian children not in school.
- Lerner, A. B. (2012). *The educational resettlement of refugee children: examining several theoretical approaches*. *Multicultural Education*, 20(1), 9–14.
- Missing out: Refugee education in crisis*. UNHCR France. (2016). <https://www.unhcr.org/fr-fr/en/media/missing-out-refugee-education-crisis>
- Moris, D., & Kousoulis, A. (2017). Refugee crisis in Greece: Healthcare and integration as current challenges. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 137(6), 309–310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757913917726019>
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2011). *Creating capabilities. The human development approach*. Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Onyx, J., Kenny, S., & Brown, K. (2011). Active citizenship: An empirical investigation. *Social Policy and Society*, 11(1), 55–66. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1474746411000406>
- Oreopoulos, P. (2007). *Do dropouts drop out too soon? Wealth, health and happiness from compulsory schooling*. *Journal of Public Economics*, 91, 2213–2229.
- Proyer, M., Krause, S., & Kremsner, G. (2023). *The making of teachers in the age of migration: Critical perspectives on the politics of education for refugees, immigrants and minorities*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Refugee camps: Definition, Facts and Statistics*. How to Help Refugees - Aid, Relief and Donations. (2021). Retrieved April 14, 2023, from <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/refugee-camps-explained/>

- Refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than others.* UNESCO. (2016). <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/refugee-children-are-five-times-more-likely-be-out-school-others>
- Refugees in Greece: Figures and development.* Worlddata.info. (2022). <https://www.worlddata.info/europe/greece/asylum.php>
- Statistics on migration to Europe.* European Commission. (2022). [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en)
- Taylor, S., & Sidhu, R. K. (2012). Supporting refugee students in schools: What constitutes inclusive education? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(1), 39–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110903560085>
- Thomas, R. L. (2016). *The right to quality education for refugee children through social inclusion.* *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 1(4), 193–201.
- Triandafyllidou, A., Bartolini, L. (2017). *Irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers: Conceptual and Policy Challenges in Europe.* University of Oxford, European University Institute.
- UNHCR *Greece Factsheet* September 2018.
- UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency | UNHCR. (2019). <https://www.unhcr.org/be/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2020/07/Global-Trends-Report-2019.pdf>
- UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency | UNHCR. (2022). <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/global-trends-report-2022.pdf>
- United Nations (1951). *Convention relating to the status of refugees.* Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137.
- United Nations (1989), “*Convention of the Rights of the Child*”. Treaty Series.
- United Nations. (2023). *UNESCO and IGCN join forces for the future of Education in Indonesia in Indonesia.* United Nations. <https://indonesia.un.org/en/221712-unesco-and-igcn-join-forces-future-education-indonesia>
- Verheyde, M. (2006). *A commentary on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28: the right to education* (Vol. 28; A. Alen, J. Vande Lanotte, E. Verhellen, F. Ang, E. Berghmans, & M. Verheyde, Eds.). <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004147294.i-70>
- Weinar, A., Bonjour, S., & Zhyznomirska, L. (2019). *Introduction: The Case for a Regional Approach to Study Politics of Migration.* In A. Weinar, S. Bonjour, & L. Zhyznomirska (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Migration in Europe* (pp. 1-11). (Routledge international handbooks). Routledge.

*Who is a refugee, a migrant or an asylum seeker?*. Amnesty International. (2023).  
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>

Winchester, N., (2021). *Forcibly displaced people*, UK parliament,  
<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/forcibly-displaced-people/>

## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Informed Consent for the interviewees



university of  
 groningen

faculty of behavioural  
 and social sciences

---

#### **“Education of Children in Refugee Camps: The case of Ritsona Refugee Camp, Greece”**

- I have read the information about the research. I have had enough opportunities to ask questions about it.
- I understand what the research is about, what is being asked of me, which consequences participation may have, how my data will be handled and what my rights as a participant are.
- I understand that the participation in the research is voluntary and anonymous. I myself chose to participate. I can stop participating any moment.

Below I indicate to what I am consenting to:

#### **Consent to participate in the research:**

Yes, I consent to participate; this consent is valid until 01-09-2023

No, I do not consent to participate

#### **Consent to make audio / video recordings during the research:**

Yes, I consent to make audio recordings of me as a participant in the research.

Yes, I consent to make audio and video recordings of me as a participant in the research.

No, I do not consent to make audio and video recordings of me.

#### **Consent to processing my personal data:**

Yes, I consent to the processing of my personal data as mentioned in the research information. I know that until 23-01-2023 I can ask to have my data withdrawn and erased. I can also ask for this if I decide to stop participating in the research.

No, I do not consent to the processing of my personal data.

**Participant's full name:**                      **Participant's signature:**      **Date:**  
.....

**Full name of researcher present:**      **Researcher's signature:**      **Date:**  
.....

For further information or questions, please contact the researcher:

- [d.leontiadou@student.rug.nl](mailto:d.leontiadou@student.rug.nl)

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Interview Guide for Sub Question 1:**

-How do coordinators of education inside the camp view the education children receive inside and outside of the facility?

#### **Questions for coordinators:**

Hello, thank you for meeting me etc. I remind you that our conversation is being recorded. Also, you could stop participating in any part of the process. It is a semi-structured interview in the form of a conversation not an interrogation. You can ask me whatever you want anytime.

You have already filled out the consent form. Let's start:

#### **Personal data**

1. For how long are you working as a coordinator of education in Ritsona camp?
2. Which is the role of a coordinator of primary education in a refugee camp?
3. Which is your experience with refugee education? Have you worked in other refugee camps?

### **General questions**

4. How many people live currently in the camp and how many of them are school age children?
5. What type of education is offered in the facility?
6. Which subjects are being taught inside the camp?
7. In which language are the subjects being taught?
8. Do all of the children of the camp attend the regular local schools, following the Greek curriculum?
9. Which practical difficulties have you faced until now regarding the education of the children?
10. How did you try to solve these difficulties?

### **Children's educational needs regarding their experiences**

11. According to your experience so far, which are the educational needs of the children living in the camp?
12. How do you, personally, try to cope with the children's educational needs?
13. Throughout the years working in Ritsona, you have seen many students come and go. Did any of them achieve to reach higher education (high school or even tertiary education)?
14. In which ways the lack of education have affected the children living in the camp?
15. Do you have any examples of children who used to live in the facility and now they have managed to integrate into Greek society? If yes, which was their educational level?

### **Ideas for improvement**

16. What needs to be done, according to your opinion, so more refugee children of Ritsona will have the ability to follow higher education in Greece, if they of course want it?
17. Which would be, in your opinion, the best way of educating the children of the camp?
18. Is the integration to the host society something that can be achieved through education?

### **Conclusion**

19. Would you like to add anything else?
20. Would it be possible to reach you again if it's needed?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Interview Guide for Sub Question 2:**

-How do teachers inside the camp try to educate the children in an appropriate way?

#### **Questions for teachers of non-formal education inside the facility:**

Hello, thank you for meeting me etc. I remind you that our conversation is being recorded. Also, you could stop participating in any part of the process. It is a semi-structured interview in the form of a conversation not an interrogation. You can ask me whatever you want anytime.

You have already filled out the consent form. Let's start:

#### **Personal data**

1. For how long are you working as a teacher in Ritsona?
2. Which is your experience with refugee education?
3. Did you receive any specific training before you start working as a teacher in Ritsona?

#### **General questions**

4. What type of education it is offered inside the facility and which is your role on that?
5. How old are the children you teach?
6. How many children attend this type of non formal education?
7. How many teachers are working currently in Ritsona?
8. Which subjects are you teaching?
9. Which practical difficulties you have faced until now working as a teacher in the facility?
10. How did you try to solve them?
11. According your experience and your relation with the children, do they have the need to be educated? Do they seek it?

#### **Children's educational needs regarding their experiences**

12. According to your experience so far, which are the educational needs of the children living in the camp?
13. How do you, personally, try to cope with the children's educational needs?
14. Is the combination of attend the local school and the non formal classroom of Ritsona enough to cover for children's educational needs?

#### **Ideas for improvement**

15. What needs to be done so more children of Ritsona will be able to integrate to the Greek society, if they want to of course?

16. Which would be, in your opinion, the best way of educating the children of the camp?
17. Is the integration to the host society something that can be achieved through education?
18. Inside the camp is the interculturalism promoted? The children keep their language and their costumes?
19. If yes with which way?

**Conclusion**

20. Could you send me maybe the information of more teachers who work in Ritsona?
21. Could you bring me in contact me with some students? Maybe with your help or the help of other coworkers I would like to approach them, to interview them.
22. Would you like to add anything else?
23. Could I contact you again if some follow up question come up?