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# “Without Education They Lose Their Future”

Denial of Education to Child Asylum Seekers on the Greek Islands



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Denial of Education to Child Asylum Seekers on the  
Greek Islands

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## Denial of Education to Child Asylum Seekers on the Greek Islands

<b>Summary</b> .....	1
Lack of Formal Education.....	3
Inadequate Non-Formal Education.....	7
Mental Health Impact.....	8
A Worsening Situation.....	9
Path Forward.....	10
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	12
To the Government of Greece.....	12
To the Ministry of Migration Policy and the Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs .....	12
To the Ministry of Health .....	12
To the Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs, the International Organization for Migration, and the European Union .....	13
To the European Union and its Member States.....	13
<b>Methodology</b> .....	14
<b>I. Background</b> .....	15
Containment Policy .....	15
Asylum-Seeking Children Denied Formal Education for Extended Periods.....	19
<b>II. Lack of Access to Education</b> .....	21
Lack of Formal Education.....	21
DYEP Afternoon Classes: Unavailable to Most Children in Island Hotspots .....	22
ZEP Morning Integration Classes: Only for Children Outside Government Camps .....	28
Delays Opening ZEP Classes.....	31
Delays in Providing Formal Pre-Primary Education.....	32
Obstacles to Public School Enrollment .....	33
Lack of Adequate Non-Formal Education.....	35
<b>III. Mental Health Impact of Denial of Education</b> .....	43

IV. Right to Education .....	48
Acknowledgments .....	51

## Summary

“Leila,” 11, and her sister “Magdoulin,” 12, have never been inside a classroom. Growing up in war-torn Syria, the only education the sisters, originally from Aleppo, had before fleeing their country six years ago was a private tutor during the two years they were displaced to Idlib province. “I want to become a doctor,” Leila told Human Rights Watch. “Other children can go to school while we don’t and that makes me sad.”

The family fled the country in 2017, arriving in April—via Turkey—on Chios, one of the five Aegean islands that have been the main entry point for Syrian and other asylum seekers into the European Union. Four months later, in August, the family of nine were still in Souda camp—where there was no formal school, no possibility of enrolling in a public school outside the camp, and no chance for the family to leave the island. The girls’ father, Omar, said he felt “sick” when he thought about his daughters’ situation and that of their two younger school-age brothers. “The lack of education was a main reason [for us] to leave Syria,” he said.<sup>1</sup>

Under Greek law, formal education is compulsory for all 5- to 15-year-old children, and all children, including migrants and asylum seekers, have the right to enroll in public schools, even if they lack paperwork.<sup>2</sup> As of July 5, 2018, nearly 17,700 asylum seekers—at least 5,300 of them children under 18—were stuck on the islands, 14,500 of them in overcrowded, government-run camps with a capacity of just over 6,300, according to Greek government data.

By law, these child asylum seekers have access to public education “for so long as an expulsion measure against them or their parents is not actually enforced,”<sup>3</sup> and must be

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Leila, Magdoulin (all children’s names changed to pseudonyms), and Omar in Souda camp on Chios, August 13, 2017. Souda camp was closed in October 2017.

<sup>2</sup> This right is based on article 40 of Law 2910/2001 and various Presidential Decrees, including a European Council directive that Greece incorporated into its national law in 2007 Article 9(1), PD 220/2007, transposing Directive 2003/9/EC into Greek law. Cited in Asylum Information Database, “Country Report: Greece, 2016 Update,” European Council for Refugees and Exiles, 2017, p. 109, <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/reception-conditions/employment-and-education/access-education> (accessed September 9, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Council of the European Union, Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 Laying Down Minimum Standards for the Reception of Asylum Seekers in Member States, February 6, 2003, OJ L 31/18-31/25; 6.2.2003, 2003/9/EC, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ddcfda14.html> (accessed January 22, 2018).

registered in school within three months of applying for asylum, or within one year if special language training is provided in the meantime to aid their access to public school.<sup>4</sup>

But as this report documents, unmet government promises and harsh policies mean that the right to education for most child asylum seekers on the Aegean Islands is not being fulfilled.

For many children, lack of education on the Greek islands compounds education already severely compromised before arrival due to conflict in, and flight from, their home countries.<sup>5</sup> In 2017, a Greek ministerial expert committee found that “owing to wars and migration, a significant percentage of refugee children [in Greece] have been out of the school environment for at least two years, and many children have never attended school, although they are of school age.”<sup>6</sup> Globally, research shows the likelihood that a child will drop out of school permanently increases with each missed semester.

Human Rights Watch is not aware of any cases where children living in the government-run camps on the islands have been able to enroll in public primary or secondary schools, or where information about public school enrollment, transportation to the schools, or other support has been made available to them. The only formal education that has been made available to children in government-run camps is pre-school classes.

Of 107 school-age children (aged 5 to 17) in government-run camps on Lesbos, Samos, and Chios, whom Human Rights Watch interviewed in August and December 2017 and June

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<sup>4</sup> Art. 9(2), PD 220/2007, cited in Asylum Information Database, “Access to Education: Greece,” undated, p. 110.

<sup>5</sup> Eighteen of the asylum-seeking children Human Rights Watch interviewed on the islands said that their education had been interrupted because their schools had been used for military purposes or were attacked and destroyed in conflict. For example, “Tamim,” now 10, fled Kunduz, Afghanistan two years ago, and has been out of school ever since. Even in Kunduz he was able to attend school only “every second day” on average, Tamim’s father said, because the school was often closed due to fighting between government forces and Taliban militants in the area. An additional eight children from Syria and Iraq, whom Human Rights Watch interviewed in December on Lesbos, said they dropped out of education when their schools were taken over by the violent extremist group ISIS, which burned books, fired teachers or threatened them if they did not teach an ISIS-approved curriculum, and recruited children to fight, often beginning at around the fifth year of primary school. Human Rights Watch interviews in Vial camp on Chios, August 15, 2017 and Moria camp, Lesbos, December 3, 4, and 5, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Greek Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs, Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project. A. Assessment Report on the Integration project of Refugee Children in Education. B. Proposals for the Education of Refugee Children during the 2017-2018 School Year,” April 2017, p. 38, [https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/CENG\\_Epistimoniki\\_Epitropi\\_Prosfygon\\_YPPEH\\_Apotimisi\\_Protaseis\\_2016\\_2017\\_070\\_.pdf](https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/CENG_Epistimoniki_Epitropi_Prosfygon_YPPEH_Apotimisi_Protaseis_2016_2017_070_.pdf) (accessed September 4, 2017).

2018, none—including children who had spent more than 11 months in the camps—had received any formal education there.

Lack of access to formal education for the vast majority of children seeking asylum on the islands stems from a policy for which the Greek government and the European Union are both responsible—one that denies asylum seekers confined to the islands access to basic rights on the mistaken grounds they will only be there for brief periods before being sent back to Turkey or allowed to move to the mainland.

In reality, many children are stuck for three to six months or longer in overcrowded, government-run camps, but Greece has failed to invest in formal education inside, or provide access to public schools outside, the camps. Instead of allowing children and their families to leave the poor conditions in the island camps, the government has maintained an apparent belief that containing them on the islands should deter new migration to Greece and the EU.

As former Greek Minister for Migration Policy, Ioannis Mouzalas, told Germany's *Der Spiegel* newspaper in December 2017: "If we relieve the islands, that would play into the hands of the smugglers," and trigger a "mini-version of 2015"—a reference to mass migration that year that saw more than 800,000 asylum seekers and migrants who traveled via Turkey arrive on Greek islands close, and proceed to mainland Europe.

## Lack of Formal Education

Most asylum-seeking children on the Aegean Islands live in government-run camps, also known as "hotspots" or Reception and Identification Centers. A minority of children have been transferred out of the camps to other places, such as shelters for unaccompanied children or EU-subsidized hotels or apartments for children with families deemed too vulnerable to live in the government-run camps.

In theory, all asylum-seeking parents can enroll their children in regular public school classes even if they lack identification documents, so long as the child has been vaccinated. In practice, however, the only children whom Human Rights Watch identified who were able to attend public school were among the minority who had been transferred



out of the government-run camps, and were enrolled only with help from NGOs or Greek volunteers.

Greece has established two main programs at public schools to make formal education available to children seeking asylum: a) a pre-existing morning “integration” program (ZEP/Zones of Educational Priorities) expanded to help asylum-seeking children integrate in classes with Greek peers; and b) an afternoon “reception” program (DYEP) for children who do not read or write Greek and may have been out of school for long periods. Both are limited in scope.

In 2016, Greece expanded the integration (ZEP) program to migrant and asylum-seeking children on the islands. Children who were transferred from government-run camps to other locations may receive help from nongovernmental groups or volunteers to navigate school-enrollment procedures.<sup>7</sup> Public schools in which there are nine or more asylum-seeking children are eligible to receive ministerial support to run the special ZEP program, which provides additional teachers to help students learn the Greek language.

However, since only a small number of children on the islands have been able to enroll in public schools, relatively few benefit from ZEP classes. During the 2016-2017 school year, just 47 children out of several hundred who had been transferred out of the government-run camps went to public schools on the islands. In some cases, ZEP programs did not open until the spring of 2018; in other cases, some children faced enrollment delays because the Ministry of Health did not ensure they were vaccinated, a requirement.

By the end of the 2017-2018 school year, at most 400 asylum seeking children on the islands were enrolled in formal pre-primary, primary, and secondary education.<sup>8</sup> The Education Ministry notified Human Rights Watch that in total, 1,118 asylum-seeking

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<sup>7</sup> Asylum Information Database, “Country Report: Greece, 2016 Update: Types of Accommodation,” European Council for Refugees and Exiles, March 2017, <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation> (accessed January 21, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF officials put the figure at around 370. Human Rights Watch phone interview with UNICEF officials in Athens, July 9, 2018. The head of primary and secondary education for the northern Aegean islands estimated the figure at more than 300 children. Human Rights Watch interview with Aristedes Kalargalis, Lesbos, June 15, 2018. The number increased from around 280 children enrolled in December 2017. Greece Education Sector Working Group. “Access to formal education for refugee and migrant children, 31 December 2017,” <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63725> (accessed June 20, 2018).

children had enrolled in formal education on the islands during 2017-2018, but this cumulative figure includes all enrollments at any point during that time, when thousands of asylum seekers left the islands.<sup>9</sup> As of June 2018 there were at least 3,000 school-age children on the islands, most in government-run camps.<sup>10</sup>

On the Greek mainland, children living in government refugee camps can enroll in afternoon reception (DYEP) classes, which offer formal education. The Education Ministry had planned to extend the DYEP program to the islands in 2016-2017, but according to an April 2017 report on refugee education by an Education Ministry committee, it was blocked by the Ministry for Migration Policy. The report did not provide further information, and the Migration Policy Ministry did not respond to our questions.

In a positive move, the Education Ministry began to open DYEP pre-primary classes for children in government-run camps on Samos and Chios in the 2017-2018 school year. In May 2018, another 33 primary-school-age children in a camp run by a municipality on Lesbos enrolled in afternoon DYEP classes at two public primary schools. A law published in June 2018 in the Greek government gazette provides for DYEP classes and does not distinguish between the islands and the mainland.<sup>11</sup> The Education Ministry also plans to open 15 new DYEP classes and to provide pre-primary classes in all government-run camps on the islands in the 2018-2019 school year, which would be the first time that children in the Moria camp on Lesbos can access formal pre-school.<sup>12</sup> However, even if these plans are realized, it does not appear that they will provide adequate formal education for the majority of asylum-seeking children on the islands, unless the number of children

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<sup>9</sup> Letter to Human Rights Watch from the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, Independent Department for the Monitoring and Coordination of Refugee Education, July 9, 2018, and email of July 11, 2018. It is difficult to calculate the number of asylum-seeking children who traveled from the islands to the mainland during the school year, but Greek authorities transferred thousands of asylum-seekers to the mainland from November 2017 to February 2018 to relieve overcrowding on the islands. See Background, Section I, below.

<sup>10</sup> UN officials provided estimates that there were 2,281 children in government-run camps, 507 in accommodations, and 207 in shelters on the islands in late May and early June, 2018. These figures are for children ages 6-17, but compulsory education begins at age 5. Email to Human Rights Watch from UNICEF officials in Athens, July 11, 2018. As discussed below, other sources provided different figures.

<sup>11</sup> Gazette of the Government of the Hellenic Republic, June 12, 2018, Law 4547/2018, "Reorganization of support structures for primary and secondary education and other provisions," articles 72-83.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Human Rights Watch from the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, Independent Department for the Monitoring and Coordination of Refugee Education, dated July 9, 2018, and email of July 11, 2018.

decreases substantially. During the last two years, the Education Ministry was unable to carry out announced plans to expand access to education on the islands.

Different sources provided varying figures, but all available information showed that only a minority of children on the islands have been able to enroll in formal education:

- On Lesbos in August 2017, there were 530 children ages 6 to 17 (including 77 unaccompanied children) registered with UNHCR.<sup>13</sup> By June 2018, the number of school-age children increased to 2,000.<sup>14</sup> Roughly 200 children were in formal education by the end of the 2017-2018 school year. About 150 asylum-seeking children were enrolled in formal primary and secondary education by the end of the 2017-2018, most of whom had been transferred from the government-run Moria camp to other accommodations, including 33 children in a camp run by a local municipality.<sup>15</sup> In addition, 55 asylum-seeking children had enrolled in formal pre-school classes on Lesbos.<sup>16</sup>
- On Samos in August 2017, there were 374 children ages 6 to 17 registered with UNHCR, of whom 52 lived outside Vial, the main refugee camp. Only 7 asylum-seeking children were enrolled in public school in 2016-2017.<sup>17</sup> By early November 2017, there were 494 school-age children in the Vial camp, and 64 in accommodations outside.<sup>18</sup> As of June 2018, the number of school-age children on Samos stood at 501.<sup>19</sup> Roughly 60 children were enrolled in formal education by the end of the 2017-2018 school year, including 30 children who

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<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with UNHCR officials on Lesbos, August 24, 2017; email from UNHCR official on Lesbos to Human Rights Watch, September 4, 2017. In July 2017, about 60 percent of all 1,419 children on Lesbos lived in camps. UNICEF, “Refugee and Migrant Children in Greece – by Region,” July 31, 2017, [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GRE\\_Map\\_RefugeeMigrantChildren\\_v3\\_Final\\_Julylow.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GRE_Map_RefugeeMigrantChildren_v3_Final_Julylow.pdf) (accessed October 6, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Email to Human Rights Watch from the head of the Education Sector Working Group on Lesbos, July 9, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with UNICEF officials in Athens, July 9, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> The head of the Education Sector Working Group on Lesbos reported a total of 255 children enrolled in formal education, but this total includes 18-year-olds. Message to Human Rights Watch, July 9, 2011. The figure may also include 45 children who were enrolled for the following 2018-2019 school year, based on Human Rights Watch notes of participants at Education sector working group meeting on Lesbos, June 14, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interviews with UNHCR official on Samos, August 11 and 24, 2017; UNHCR, “Greece-Samos: Refugee and Migrant Children,” August 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Email to Human Rights Watch from UNHCR officials on Chios, November 3, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Email to Human Rights Watch from UNHCR officials on Samos, June 5, 2018.

lived in accommodations outside the government-run camp, and another 30 children in the camp who were enrolled in a formal pre-primary program.<sup>20</sup>

- On Chios, no asylum-seeking child was enrolled in a public school in the 2016-2017 school year. In September 2017 there were 261 asylum-seeking children of school age on the island, of whom 43 lived outside camps.<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch did not obtain the number of school-age asylum seeking children on Chios as of June 2018, but a conservative estimate is 300.<sup>22</sup> In the 2017-2018 school year, enrollment increased to 64 children living in shelters outside the camp, and another 60 children enrolled in pre-primary classes.<sup>23</sup>
- On Leros and Kos, there were 314 school-age children in September 2017, of whom 52 lived outside camps. As of June 2018, the total number increased to 388, of whom 66 were living outside camps.<sup>24</sup> There were 20 children enrolled on Leros, and 10 enrolled on Kos, the majority of whom lived in apartments or outside camps.<sup>25</sup>

## Inadequate Non-Formal Education

The asylum-seeking children in the camps who do receive some education generally do so in informal “schools” operated by local and international NGOs that often vary in quality and are limited in scope.

On Samos, for example, there were 374 asylum-seeking children of school-age on the island as of August 31, 2017, but non-formal programs reached only about 100; as of June 5, 2018, the number of school-age children had increased to 501. In the government-run Moria camp on Lesbos, as of June 2018, the only school inside the camp for children living with their families was able to teach 1.5 hours of daily instruction to 90 children, as camp

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<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with UNICEF officials in Athens, July 9, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with UNHCR officials on Chios, August 14, 2017; email from UNHCR officials on Chios, September 5, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> There were more than 2,000 asylum seekers on Chios in June; UNHCR estimates that 31 percent of arrivals to the Islands are under 18.

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with UNICEF officials in Athens, July 9, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Emails to Human Rights Watch from UNHCR officials on Kos, October 27, 2017 and June 5, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with UNICEF officials in Athens, July 9, 2018.

authorities had allocated only one portable container for the classroom. Roughly 170 children attended two other non-formal schools outside the camp, which provided transportation, but some younger children were unable to attend because their parents said they could not leave the camps to accompany them on the bus.

Some children told Human Rights Watch they had dropped out of non-formal education in camps because of high teacher turnover (often volunteers or refugees), instruction in Greek or English without translation, and limited instruction.

“Munir,” 15, from Deir al-Zor in Syria, arrived unaccompanied at the Moria camp on September 1, 2017, and enrolled in the non-formal school in the unaccompanied children’s section of the camp. He dropped out after a week. “It was the same lesson every day, because new children would show up, and it would just be teaching us the letters,” he said. Camp officials told Munir there was “no chance” he could attend a regular school outside the camp and that “I had to wait until I left Moria” to go to school. Unaccompanied children may remain for months in government-run camps due to a lack of specialized accommodation outside the camps.<sup>26</sup>

The non-formal schools that Human Rights Watch visited provided between 4 and 18 hours per week of instruction, compared to the 30 hours that Greek public schools provide. Some teachers at non-formal schools said their classrooms had up to 50 children; the average class size in Greece is less than 18 students. Staff emphasized that their schools were not intended to, and could not, replace formal education.

## 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 journey to Greece and suffer from stress and trauma, which generally goes untreated.

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<sup>26</sup> Pending placement in a shelter, Greek authorities also detain unaccompanied children in police stations. Human Rights Watch, “Greece: Lone Migrant Children Left Unprotected,” July 19, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/19/greece-lone-migrant-children-left-unprotected>

In 2017, for example, members of an armed group stormed the family home of Amir, 6, in Iraq, triggering stress and trauma for the boy. His mother Heba told Human Rights Watch that Amir had “started to be more at peace” since arriving in Chios in April 2017, where he had been able to attend an informal school. However, a fight in the camp triggered his distress. “He now wakes up crying almost every night, and he re-enacts these things.” As of August 2017, he had been able to see a camp psychologist just once.

Parents and NGO staff told Human Rights Watch that the structured, secure routine of education programs helped children to overcome fear and anxiety. “Our main purpose is to get them out of the camps and into normality, through education, and not in a state of constant urgency,” a former education official said. “Education can let them feel like a child again, because they have had such bad, adult experiences.”

## **A Worsening Situation**

The so-called EU-Turkey deal signed in March 2016 aimed at reducing the number of arrivals in Greece, and the containment policy Greece has adopted to enforce the deal, has fueled the lack of education for children asylum seekers and trapped them in deplorable conditions, in overcrowded tents and containers, with little access to proper shelter, food, water, sanitation, health care, or protection.

On April 17, 2018, Greece’s highest court ruled that that Greece’s containment policy had no legal basis and that there were no imperative reasons under EU and Greek law justifying the restrictions to the freedom of movement of asylum seekers. But instead of implementing the ruling, the Greek government three days later issued an administrative decision reinstating the containment policy. Meanwhile, arrivals to the islands have increased, from 1,250 in February to 2,400 in March to 3,000 in April, according to UNHCR.

In addition, changes in funding have imperiled even the informal education previously available to refugee children. In July 2017, the European Commission’s humanitarian agency, ECHO, which until then had provided funds directly to NGOs on the islands,

including those providing non-formal education, changed its funding to Greece to focus on cash assistance and rental accommodations in order “to get refugees out of the camps.”<sup>27</sup>

The ECHO funding shift led several international NGOs that had education programs on the islands to end their operations in Greece.<sup>28</sup> For example, the Norwegian Refugee Council ended its education program for 300 children and youth on Chios in July 2017,<sup>29</sup> and Save the Children ended the daily classes in English, Greek, and mathematics it had provided to about 120 children on Lesbos and 200 children on Chios.<sup>30</sup> NGOs warned of other gaps in essential services they had provided on the islands, including the shuttering of shelters for unaccompanied and separated children.<sup>31</sup> As of June 2018, local NGOs continue to lack the capacity to fill large, pre-existing gaps in non-formal education.

## Path Forward

In the two years since the EU-Turkey Statement entered into force, Greece and the EU have repeatedly pledged to respect and protect the rights of all asylum seekers in the country, but have consistently failed to mitigate dreadful conditions on the islands, and to provide children in camps with access to education.

The EU and its member states, which under the EU-Turkey deal share responsibility for denying rights to asylum-seeking children contained on the Greek islands, should end the current containment policy and support the prompt transfer of children and their families

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<sup>27</sup> Jessica Abrahams, “EU announces new funds and strategy for refugee support in Greece,” Devex, August 1, 2017, <https://www.devex.com/news/eu-announces-new-funds-and-strategy-for-refugee-support-in-greece-90791> (accessed June 6, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> CARE, International Rescue Committee, Médecins Sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, Solidarity Now, “Lack of handover plans for the response in Greece puts asylum seekers at risk, NGOs warn,” July 11, 2017, <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/press/joint-ngo-greece-transition-statement-110717.pdf> (accessed January 20, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, “Leaving Greece,” March 27, 2018, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2018/march/leaving-greece/> (accessed June 6, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with local NGO and UNHCR officials on Chios, August 12 and 14, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> CARE, International Rescue Committee, Médecins Sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, Solidarity Now, “Lack of handover plans for the response in Greece puts asylum seekers at risk, NGOs warn,” July 11, 2017, <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/press/joint-ngo-greece-transition-statement-110717.pdf> (accessed January 20, 2018).

to the mainland, where authorities should ensure that school-age children can access education and adequate health and mental health services.

In the meantime, they should help Greece and civil society actors provide quality education and mental health services to all children on the islands who need them.



# Recommendations

## To the Government of Greece

- End the containment policy, cease holding asylum seekers in camps on the Aegean Islands, ensure that all children are able to enroll promptly in formal education, and that children with disabilities have access to inclusive education.
- In the interim, work with the EU and other ministries to implement the following recommendations by the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year:

## To the Ministry of Migration Policy and the Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs

- Open afternoon preparatory classes (DYEP) at public schools for all school-age children in government-run camps on the Aegean Islands.
- Make Zone of Educational Priorities (ZEP) classes on the Greek islands accessible for asylum-seeking children in camps.
- Expand the implementation of free, inclusive pre-primary education in camps around the country, including on the islands.
- Expand the DYEP program to cover children ages 16 and 17 to ensure that children older than 15 have access to integration programs at public schools.
- Provide asylum-seeking children who have missed extended periods of schooling with support to successfully integrate in school and show flexibility with regard to grade placement to accommodate educational needs.
- Cooperate with NGOs to organize additional support for asylum-seeking children, including with disabilities, to integrate in school.

## To the Ministry of Health

- Ensure that no child is barred from enrolling in school because they are unable to access or obtain the necessary vaccinations.
- Ensure that adequate mental health services are available for all children.

**To the Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs, the International Organization for Migration, and the European Union**

- Cooperate to provide transport and school supplies to all children who need it.

**To the European Union and its Member States**

- Provide the funding needed for non-formal education programs that reach all asylum-seeking children on the Greek islands who do not enjoy access to formal education.

## Methodology

In late August and December 2017, Human Rights Watch interviewed 67 asylum-seeking children aged 6 to 17 and one or both of their parents or guardians, and 8 children age 5, on the Greek islands of Lesbos, Samos, and Chios. Of these, 53 children arrived on the islands before the end of the school year in June 2017. In June 2018, we interviewed an additional 27 children aged 6 to 17 and their parents or guardians on Lesbos, and 7 children age 5. Most were from Syria and Afghanistan, with others from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kuwait, Mali, and Nigeria.

This report uses the expression “school-age children” to refer to children ages 5 to 17. In Greece, education is free and compulsory for children ages 5 to 15. Under international human rights standards, primary education must be free and secondary education must be accessible. Secondary education is free in Greece including for asylum seekers.

Human Rights Watch conducted all interviews with asylum-seekers in private places, including containers, tents, and NGO offices. Interviews in French or English were conducted by the researchers. Interviews in Arabic and Dari were conducted with the assistance of an interpreter. We informed all interviewees that their participation was voluntary and that they could end the interview at any point, and explained the nature of the research and the intention to publish the information gathered.

Human Rights Watch also sent email inquiries to, and conducted phone and in-person interviews with, 25 staff of relevant United Nations agencies, local and international non-governmental groups, the Greek Education Ministry and Ombudsman, and activists, and consulted public reports and official statements. We contacted but did not receive responses to questions from the Greek Ministry of Migration Policy.

Human Rights Watch has changed all children’s names to pseudonyms and withheld identification of individuals and agencies that requested anonymity or to protect interviewees.

# I. Background

## Containment Policy

The EU-Turkey Statement, which the heads of government of Turkey and the European Union's (EU) member states signed in March 2016, commits Turkey to limit the onward travel of asylum seekers to the Greek islands, and to accept the return of people who traveled through its territory and arrived on the Greek islands.<sup>32</sup>

A Greek ministerial expert committee on education for refugee children found that the overall refugee population on the Aegean islands “almost quadrupled between March and October 2016,” due to the “peculiar regime” involving the “mandatory stay/blockade of refugees” on the islands.<sup>33</sup> The government's policy of containing refugees on the islands continues to exacerbate the lack of access to education for the majority of children there.

Under the flawed assumption that Turkey is a “safe third country” for asylum seekers, unless they can prove otherwise, the EU-Turkey deal calls for Greece to not consider the merits of asylum claims by refugees who have passed through Turkey.<sup>34</sup> In exchange, the EU has pledged to provide Turkey with up to €6 billion (US \$7.02 billion) in aid, visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, and revive negotiations for Turkish accession to the EU.<sup>35</sup>

To carry out the deal, the Greek government adopted a containment policy, keeping asylum seekers confined to the Aegean Islands during the procedure that decides whether or not to return them to Turkey. In practice, few forcible returns were carried out before Greek courts considered the merits of people's asylum claims.<sup>36</sup> Yet Greek migration authorities

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<sup>32</sup> European Council, “EU-Turkey statement, March 18, 2016,” <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/> (accessed January 22, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs, Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project,” April 2017, p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> Human Rights Watch, “EU Policies Put Refugees at Risk. An Agenda to Restore Protection,” November 23, 2016 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/23/eu-policies-put-refugees-risk>

<sup>35</sup> In June 2018 Turkey suspended a 2001 bilateral migration pact with Greece, after Greece refused to extradite soldiers whom Turkey accused of involvement in an attempted military coup in July 2016, but Turkish state-run media reported that the 2016 EU-Turkey deal would remain in force.

<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Greece: Highest Court Fails Asylum Seekers,” September 27, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/27/greece-highest-court-fails-asylum-seekers>

have persisted in the claim that it is impractical to enroll children in the island camps in schools because “the refugee population on the islands is on the move,” according to an international aid agency official in Athens.<sup>37</sup>

From March 20, 2016, to April 30, 2018, Greece returned 1,601 people to Turkey, of whom 5 percent were children.<sup>38</sup> Although the rate of arrivals from Turkey fell after March 2016, it increased in 2017. Beginning in mid-October 2017, Greece sped up transfers from the islands to the mainland to “ease conditions in overcrowded reception centres, and transfer the more vulnerable to safety” as winter set in, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported.<sup>39</sup> From June 2016 to January 2018, 23,090 people were transferred to the mainland.<sup>40</sup>

However, from July to December 2017, 19,800 people arrived on the Greek islands, 40 percent of whom were children.<sup>41</sup> UNHCR stated in December that “some 10,000 asylum seekers are still crammed into government-run facilities on the islands, double the design capacity. The situation continues to be critical [on Lesbos and Samos].”<sup>42</sup> The same month, former Greek Minister for Migration Policy Ioannis Mouzalas told *Der Spiegel* that Greece would not change the containment policy:

If the Greek government violates the EU-Turkey agreement, we will see a mini-version of 2015. If we relieve the islands, that would play into the hands of the smugglers—that's how new refugees would arrive.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with international aid agency education official, Athens, September 1, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> UNHCR, “Fact Sheet: Aegean Islands, 1-30 April 2018,” <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63716>; see also “Returns from Greece to Turkey,” March 31, 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/fr/documents/download/62989> (both accessed May 22, 2018).

<sup>39</sup> UNHCR, “Situation on Greek islands still grim despite speeded transfers,” December 22, 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/news/20439> (accessed January 21, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> UNHCR, “Fact Sheet - Greece, 1-31 January 2018,” <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/62216> (accessed March 20, 2018).

<sup>41</sup> UNHCR, “Situation on Greek islands still grim despite speeded transfers,” December 22, 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/news/20439> (accessed January 21, 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Der Spiegel, “Flüchtlinge in Griechenland: ‘Ich kann Todesopfer nicht ausschließen,’” December 7, 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/fluechtlinge-in-griechenland-ich-kann-todesopfer-nicht-ausschliessen-a-1181673.html> (accessed February 8, 2018).

Arrivals increased from 1,250 in February to 2,400 in March to 3,000 in April, mostly to Lesbos, with the majority being Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan families.<sup>44</sup>

On April 17, 2018, Greece's highest administrative court ruled that Greece's containment policy had no legal basis and that there were no imperative reasons under EU and Greek law justifying the restrictions to the freedom of movement of asylum seekers. Instead of implementing the ruling, the Greek government introduced a bill two days later that seeks to provide a legal basis for the containment policy by incorporating into domestic law EU Directive 2013/33, which sets standards for the reception of asylum seekers. The law was adopted on May 22. On April 20, the government issued an administrative decision reinstating the containment policy.<sup>45</sup> By July 5, there were 17,695 asylum seekers stuck on the islands, of whom more than 14,498 were in the hotspot camps.<sup>46</sup> UNHCR estimates that 31 percent of arrivals on the islands are under 18, which would mean there are 5,300 children asylum-seekers on the islands.<sup>47</sup>

Upon arriving on the islands, asylum seekers and migrants are restricted for roughly three days in the government-run Reception and Identification Centers, the so-called hotspots.<sup>48</sup> In October 2015, the first hotspot camps were established on the islands Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos, and an immigration detention facility that had opened on Lesbos in 2010 was expanded. These camps were initially open facilities that registered and screened migrants and asylum seekers who were then allowed to move to the Greek mainland.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> UNHCR, "Fact Sheet: Aegean Islands, 1-30 April 2018," <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63716> (accessed May 22, 2018).

<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Greece: Government Defies Court Order on Asylum Seekers," April 25, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/25/greece-government-defies-court-asylum-seekers>

<sup>46</sup> Hellenic Republic Interior Ministry, "National Situational Picture Regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea (5/07/2018)," <http://mindigital.gr/index.php/προσφυγικό-ζήτημα-refugee-crisis> (accessed July 8, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> UNHCR, "Greece Aegean Islands Weekly Snapshot, 11-17 June 2018," <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64098> (accessed June 21, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> Mary Malafeka, "Moria Refugee Camp: Restriction of Movement and Living Conditions," April 13, 2018, Border Criminologies blog, <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2018/04/moria-refugee> (accessed April 13, 2018); Human Rights Watch interviews with NGO staff in Lesbos, Samos, Chios, August and December 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Izabella Majcher, "The EU Hotspot Approach: Blurred Lines between Restriction on and Deprivation of Liberty (PART II)," April 5, 2018, Border Criminologies blog, <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2018/04/eu-hotspot-o> (accessed April 12, 2018).

More than 800,000 people passed through the islands in 2015.<sup>50</sup> The temporary “restriction of liberty” of asylum seekers in the camps was made possible by a law that passed in April 2016 to implement the EU-Turkey deal.<sup>51</sup>

Initial screening and registration is carried out by officials from the Hellenic Police, Frontex (the EU’s border agency), and the Greek Reception and Identification Service. Following the screening, unaccompanied children may be placed in a special section of the camp, which is fenced and guarded for protection in the camp on Lesbos but not in the Vathi camp on Samos at the time of Human Rights Watch visits. As of mid-June 2018, UNHCR reported that about 12 percent, or roughly 600 children on the islands were unaccompanied.<sup>52</sup>

Other children are released with their families into the general camp population, where they remain while their asylum applications are examined by the Greek Asylum Service, which conducts refugee-status-determination interviews, as well as by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), an EU agency, which has offices in the hotspot camps. Human Rights Watch met asylum-seeking families whose interviews were scheduled for 11 or more months after they had arrived in hotspot camps.

During this waiting period, refugees deemed “vulnerable”—such as single-parent families—may be eligible for transfer to hotels or apartments in towns, or to other island camps with better conditions; for example, on Lesbos, housing is significantly better in Kara Tepe camp, run by the Lesbos municipality, and in the Pikpa camp run by Greek and international volunteers, than in the government-run Moria camp a few kilometres away.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “EU/Greece: Share Responsibility for Asylum Seekers,” January 28, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/28/eu/greece-share-responsibility-asylum-seekers>

<sup>51</sup> Greece: Law No. 4375 of 2016 on the organization and operation of the Asylum Service, the Appeals Authority, the Reception and Identification Service, the establishment of the General Secretariat for Reception, the transposition into Greek legislation of the provisions of Directive 2013/32/EC [Greece], April 3, 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/573ad4cb4.html> (accessed April 13, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> UNHCR, “Greece Aegean Islands Weekly Snapshot, 11-17 June 2018.” According to this UNHCR document, 31 percent of all migrants and asylum seekers on the islands are children, and 12 percent are unaccompanied. UNHCR data also states that 38.3 percent of all arrivals in Greece as of January 2018 were children. See “Demographics,” UNHCR Operational Portal: Mediterranean Situation: Greece, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179> (accessed July 28, 2018). The Greek interior ministry reported that there were 17,350 migrants and asylum-seekers on the islands, which would mean there are roughly 5,380 to 6,640 are children, of whom 540 to 650 are unaccompanied. Interior Ministry, “National Situational Picture Regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea (10/06/2018).”

<sup>53</sup> Human Rights Watch observations, Lesbos, December 2017 and June 2018. In June 2018, municipal authorities on Lesbos announced plans to close Pikpa camp because it was allegedly a danger to public health and the environment. Lesbos

If the asylum application is examined and granted or the person is admitted to the regular asylum system, or if the applicant is officially recognized as vulnerable, under Greek law, they may move to the mainland. If their application is rejected, they may appeal, while remaining on the islands.<sup>54</sup>

### *Asylum-Seeking Children Denied Formal Education for Extended Periods*

Human Rights Watch interviewed many children who have been on the islands for extended periods because of the Greek government's containment policy and the length of the procedure that decides whether they will be allowed to move to the mainland or returned to Turkey.

On Samos, the average length of time that asylum seekers—including families with children—remained in government-run camps in 2017 was 93 days, according to a UNHCR official, even though the “transit period” at any camp was 25 days maximum under Greek law.<sup>55</sup> Municipal authorities on Chios estimated in 2017 that 30 percent of the 950 people in Souda camp – which closed in October 2017 – had been there longer than six months.<sup>56</sup> Human Rights Watch interviewed several families that had been living in camps on the islands for more than 11 months.<sup>57</sup>

A family with four school-age children, from Kunduz, Afghanistan, arrived in Moria camp on Lesbos in November 2017 and were still living there in June 2018. In early March, they were able to enroll their children in a non-formal afternoon education program outside Moria, and in early June, had also enrolled them in an additional UNICEF-sponsored non-formal

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Solidarity-Pikpa, “Reaction to Announcement to Close Pikpa Camp,” June 29, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/1650025878606170/posts/2113987248876695/> (accessed July 3, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews, lawyers specializing in supporting asylum cases, Lesbos, June 12, 15, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with UNHCR staff on Samos, August 11, and email on August 24, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Ylenia Gostoli, “Aegean Island Refugees Fear Government Aid Takeover,” IRIN, July 12, 2017, <https://www.irinnews.org/news/2017/07/12/aegean-island-refugees-fear-greek-government-aid-takeover> (accessed February 3, 2018). On the closure of Souda camp, see e.g., Observatory of the Refugee and Migration Crisis in the Aegean, “Souda camp in Chios closed today,” University of the Aegean, October 21, 2017, <https://refugeeobservatory.aegean.gr/en/souda-camp-chios-closed-today-video-and-some-words-goodbye-hero-center-chios> (accessed July 2, 2018); ANSA, “Greece: migrant arrivals continue as Chios camp closes,” August 23, 2017, <http://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/4724/greece-migrant-arrivals-continue-as-chios-camp-closes> (accessed July 2, 2018).

<sup>57</sup> See Section II, below.



morning program. However, the father, Karim, said that he worried about the toll that life in Moria was taking on his children, especially his 13-year-old son, Ali. Karim said:

We push them to study and learn but it's not a quiet place. We saw someone commit suicide in the camp a few months ago. I was with Ali, and we saw a man who had hung himself in a tree.<sup>58</sup>

Ali said, "I can't remember when exactly [the suicide was], because everyday something bad is happening here—big fights, smaller fights, horrible things."

Yusuf, from Kirkuk, Iraq, arrived on Samos with his wife and their 17-year-old son in December 2016, and their boy had not gone to school for more than nine months since then.<sup>59</sup> They were unable to leave the island because the Greek Asylum Service and an appeals committee had rejected their asylum application. Asylum-seekers can file a second appeal before an administrative appeals court.

Khadija, from Afghanistan, was stuck on Chios with her four school-age children for more than 10 months after arriving in November 2016. During that time, none of her children had been able to access formal education. Greece had granted asylum to her and her children, but because she had separated from her husband after arriving, she was unable to leave for the mainland until Greek authorities granted her full custody of the children.<sup>60</sup>

Ibrahim, an unaccompanied 17-year-old boy from the Gambia, lived in Moria camp on Lesbos for more than 11 months and had not attended public schools since arriving. "I was first registered as an adult and it took me months to be recognized as a minor. Now they tell me that I have to wait to get moved to a shelter on the mainland, but nothing happens," he said.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Karim and Ali (pseudonyms), Moria, June 13, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Yusuf (pseudonym), Vathi camp, Samos, August 18, 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Hadiza (pseudonym) in Chios Town on Chios, August 14, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Ibrahim (pseudonym), Mytilini, Lesbos, August 20, 2017. Human Rights Watch has previously documented the incorrect identification of unaccompanied children as adults on Lesbos. See: Human Rights Watch, "Greece: Lone Migrant Children Left Unprotected," July 19, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/19/greece-lone-migrant-children-left-unprotected> (accessed September 11, 2017).

## II. Lack of Access to Education

### Lack of Formal Education

A rough estimate indicates that fewer than 15 percent of the children asylum seekers on the Aegean islands are enrolled in formal education at any given time.

As of July 2018, there were at least 5,300 child asylum seekers on the islands, of whom at least 2,500 were of school age.<sup>62</sup> By the end of the 2017-2018 school year, at most 350 of these children were enrolled in formal education, including about 90 children in pre-primary education, according to UNICEF officials.<sup>63</sup> The majority were enrolled in schools that offer special integration classes for children whose mother tongue is not Greek.<sup>64</sup>

Throughout Greece there are 58,000 asylum seekers and refugees, most of whom are living in camps.<sup>65</sup> However, almost all of the asylum-seeking children enrolled in formal education— some 4,700 children throughout Greece, as of the middle of the last school year—are among the minority who were transferred out of camps and into subsidized apartments, shelters for unaccompanied children, or other forms of accommodation.<sup>66</sup> Even among this minority of children who have been transferred out of the camps, only

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<sup>62</sup> See notes 39 and 40, above.

<sup>63</sup> Human rights Watch telephone interview with UNICEF officials, Athens, July 9, 2018. Enrollment apparently increased by about 70 children from December 2017, when enrollment on the islands comprised about 6 percent of all asylum-seeking children enrolled in school in Greece, or 280 children out of 4,707. Greece Education Sector Working Group, “Access to formal education for refugee and migrant children, 31 December 2017.”

<sup>64</sup> The Education Ministry official in charge of primary and secondary education on the northern Aegean Islands told Human Rights Watch in June that 30 special integration classes were open for asylum seeking children at public schools on the islands, with roughly 10 students per class, which meant that more than 300 asylum-seeking children on the islands were enrolled in the integration classes. Human Rights Watch interview with Aristedes Kalargalis, Mytilini, Lesbos, June 15, 2018.

<sup>65</sup> An ECHO-funded program supported about 19,700 refugees and asylum seekers on the mainland to live in apartments and 1,400 people on the islands. Almost 30 percent of the people in these apartments are school-age children. ESTIA, “Accommodation Capacity Weekly Update - 26 June 2018,” <http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/estia-accommodation-capacity-weekly-update-26-june-2018/> (accessed June 27, 2018). UNHCR, “Greece Accommodation Update,” May 31, 2018, p. 1, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63900> (accessed June 27, 2018). UNHCR, “Fact Sheet: Greece,” 1-31 May 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64032> (accessed June 27, 2018).

<sup>66</sup> Greece Education Sector Working Group, “Access to formal education for refugee and migrant children, 31 December 2017.”

around 55 percent of these children throughout Greece were enrolled in public schools in the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>67</sup>

Compounding these poor overall statistics, children in camps on the islands face additional obstacles to education. Among unaccompanied children living in shelters, an April 2017 survey found an average enrollment rate of 44 percent for all of Greece, but only 28 percent on the Aegean islands.<sup>68</sup> And most children who are living in island camps have been unable to access the main formal education program, called DYEP classes, that is available to children in camps on the mainland.

### *DYEP Afternoon Classes: Unavailable to Most Children in Island Hotspots*

Afternoon classes—known by the Greek acronym DYEP, or as “Reception Facilities for Refugee Education” or “Refugee Reception and Education Facilities”—have provided schooling for roughly 1,600 children asylum seekers in primary or secondary classes and another 250 children in pre-primary classes in all of Greece during the 2017-2018 school year, as of early June.<sup>69</sup>

However, these classes have mostly been accessible only to children in camps on the mainland; of the children living in government-run camps on the islands, only about 30 children, all in pre-primary school, were able to enroll in DYEP classes, late in the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The latest available information is from December 31, 2017. Greece Education Sector Working Group, “Access to formal education for refugee and migrant children, 31 December 2017.” However, another survey of unaccompanied children outside camps in Athens and Thessaloniki, on the mainland, in March 2017 found that only 22 percent were enrolled in formal education. UNICEF and REACH, “Access to Education of Refugee and Migrant Children outside Accommodation (Open) Sites,” March 2017, p. 1, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/REACH\\_GRC\\_Access\\_to\\_Education%20final.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/REACH_GRC_Access_to_Education%20final.pdf) (accessed June 25, 2018).

<sup>68</sup> Children on the Move Network (comprising ARSIS, Metadrasi, Praksis, Save the Children, SOS Villages), “Access to formal education for unaccompanied children in shelters,” Greece, April 2017, pp. 4, 8, <http://www.o-18.gr/downloads/FINAL%20ENGLISH%20VERSION.PDF> (accessed June 25, 2018).

<sup>69</sup> Education sector working group, Greece, “Access to formal education for refugee and migrant children - 31 December 2017,” pp. 1-2.

<sup>70</sup> Greece Education Sector Working Group, “Meeting Minutes,” May 15, 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63724> (accessed May 22, 2018)

The DYEP plan is rooted in a promise made by Greece on September 20, 2016, “to establish an education plan that enables migrant and refugee children to access public education in the 2016-2017 school year.”<sup>71</sup>

During the year, Greece opened preparatory classes in public schools to integrate asylum-seeking children living in camps on the Greek mainland. Children ages 6 to 15 were eligible to attend DYEP classes in Greek, English, mathematics, sports, arts, and computer science from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.<sup>72</sup> Teachers were selected from the list of public school substitute teachers, appointed by the Education Ministry.<sup>73</sup>

Progress was made on the mainland: by March 2017, Greece had opened 107 DYEP classes at primary and junior high schools for 2,643 child asylum seekers on the mainland.

But there was less progress on the islands, where the Education Ministry intended to open the DYEP classes too during the 2016-2017 school year, and went so far as to send specially seconded teachers to refugee camps on the islands, as was done for refugee camps on the mainland.<sup>74</sup> These teachers, “Refugee Education Coordinators” (RECs), were supposed to coordinate between public schools, asylum-seeking parents, children, camp management, and NGOs, and to facilitate enrollment in afternoon preparatory classes.

However, although seven RECs were seconded to camps on the Aegean islands, their role was left undefined, because the DYEP program was never extended to cover the islands.<sup>75</sup> A former Greek education official involved in the initial plan to set up DYEP programs on the islands in 2016-2017 told Human Rights Watch that multiple problems thwarted the goal of providing education to children in the camps, including lack of long-term planning, and overlapping government jurisdictions:

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<sup>71</sup> “Summary Overview Document. Leaders’ Summit on Refugees,” November 10, 2016, [https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/public\\_summary\\_document\\_refugee\\_summit\\_final\\_11-11-2016.pdf](https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/public_summary_document_refugee_summit_final_11-11-2016.pdf) (accessed October 6, 2017).

<sup>72</sup> Asylum Information Database, “Access to Education. Greece,” 2017, <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/reception-conditions/employment-and-education/access-education> (accessed September 9, 2017).

<sup>73</sup> European Social Policy Network, “Integrating refugee and migrant children into the educational system in Greece,” ESPN Flash Report 2017/67, June 2017, available at (accessed January 23, 2017).

<sup>74</sup> Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs, Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project,” April 2017, p. 62.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 34-35; phone interview with UNICEF official working on education in Athens, August 29, 2017.

People got stuck [on the islands] because of the EU deal with Turkey, but at the same time there was no permanent presence, as many people were still being sent to the mainland or expecting to, so there were no schools. The Migration Ministry's policy was that all the children and women were to [be moved] out of the camp, and only the single men were supposed to be left. But they were engaged in short-term thinking.<sup>76</sup>

The result, the former official said, was “chaos in the camps,” exacerbated by a lack of clear lines of command between different government actors.

There were bureaucratic battles between the interior ministry, the army, the ministry of health, education, and so on—all of them had a stake in running the reception centers. If you wanted to set up a classroom in the camp you had to ask one ministry for a desk and another for a chair. Then, for instance, there was a huge fire in Moria in November 2016, so all the children were moved outside the camp. And the tables would move around from place to place. [The REC] would go to EuroRelief [an aid group present in Moria camp] and say, ‘Where is the classroom?’ And they’d say, ‘Oh my God, we had a fire, we had to move all the desks, now where are they?’<sup>77</sup>

An April 2017 report by a ministerial expert committee on refugee children found that “numerous children who are stranded in the Aegean islands with their parents did not gain access to formal education [under the DYEP program] owing to decisions made by the Ministry for Migration Policy.”<sup>78</sup> The committee's report did not elaborate on what those decisions were or the reason for them.

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<sup>76</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Greek official #2, December 5, 2017.

<sup>77</sup> The fire at Moria in November 2016 began when a cooking gas container exploded, killing a 65-year-old woman and 6-year-old boy and severely burning others, then spread throughout the camp and left 400 people without housing; 38 unaccompanied minors were evacuated to other shelters. UNHCR, “UNHCR saddened by tragic death of woman and child in Moria, Lesbos,” November 25, 2016, <https://www.unhcr.gr/print/nea/artikel/9d58bd36384313e2bcc2227696343e6d/unhcr-saddened-by-tragic-death-of-wo.html> (accessed January 23, 2018). Eva Cossé, “Lesbos Fatal Blast A Stark Reminder of Hardships Refugees Face,” Human Rights Watch, November 25, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/25/lesbos-fatal-blast-stark-reminder-hardships-refugees-face-greece>

<sup>78</sup> Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs, Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project,” p. 37. The committee also found that the Ministry for Migration Policy was the source of “great difficulties” that affected children's education on the mainland as well as the islands, “and it was not possible to set up a

Human Rights Watch attempted by email and phone to meet and clarify this point with Ministry for Migration Policy officials in November and December 2017. The officials said they were not available to meet and that Human Rights Watch should direct questions on this point to the Education Ministry.<sup>79</sup>

The Education Ministry official responsible for primary and secondary education on the northern Aegean Islands told Human Rights Watch in June 2018:

We hope that for the provision of better education and accommodation for refugees, a large number of refugee families and their children will be transferred to mainland Greece, as promised by the Ministry for Migration Policy.<sup>80</sup>

The Greek Ombudsman's office told Human Rights Watch that it had issued letters to the Ministry of Migration Policy in 2017 critiquing the lack of education for children in camps on the islands, but did not receive a response.<sup>81</sup> One Greek official with knowledge of the bureaucratic problems preventing the opening of DYEP classes on the islands in 2016-2017, who asked not to be identified, said:

The ministry said they were tied by the EU-Turkey statement not to create expectations on the islands, so they did not give the Education Ministry the green light to open things on the islands.<sup>82</sup>

Attempts to improve access to the DYEP program, including on the islands, during the 2017-2018 school year largely fell short.

In its April 2017 report, a ministerial expert committee recommended that Greece include

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functional joint taskforce. For instance [...], the design and operation of several RFREs [Reception Facilities for Refugee Education] was discontinued shortly before they were due to start operating because it emerged that the RACs had been abolished without any informal or formal briefing from the Ministry of Immigration Policy.

<sup>79</sup> Human Rights Watch letter to Elias Miltiadis Klapas, Secretary-General for Migration, Ministry for Migration Policy, November 28, 2017; phone call to the ministry, December 3, 2017.

<sup>80</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Aristedes Kalargalis, Mytilini, Lesbos, June 15, 2018.

<sup>81</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Giorgios Moschos, Deputy Ombudsman for the Rights of the Child, Athens, December 6, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Greek official, December 7, 2017.

asylum-seeking children on the islands in the DYEP program in the 2017-2018 school year, while urging that students then transition to regular public school classes with Greek children.<sup>83</sup> An inter-ministerial decree issued by the Greek Ministries of Finance and Education of August 23, 2017, provided for the afternoon DYEP classes for “all children of third-country nationals residing in centers or hosting facilities” in the 2017-2018 school year, without distinguishing between the islands and the mainland.<sup>84</sup>

The Education Ministry informed Human Rights Watch on September 13, 2017, that RECs would be deployed to “all islands” in the 2017-2018 school year by the end of September 2017 to facilitate enrollment of asylum-seeking children in planned integration classes for asylum-seeking children.<sup>85</sup>

However, no RECs were directly assigned to cover the largest government-run camp, the Moria hotspot on Lesbos, and the Education Ministry was only able to gather information about children in the camp indirectly from other humanitarian actors present in Moria, after “discussions” with the Migration Policy Ministry.<sup>86</sup> There were four RECs on the islands in 2017-2018.<sup>87</sup>

Greece did not open DYEP classes on the islands for most of the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>88</sup> On Samos, according to a letter dated January 18, 2018, to Human Rights Watch from the Education Ministry’s Directorate of Secondary Education on that island, integration classes were available for children living outside of camps in rented accommodations (provided by UNHCR), but “for the children who live at the Reception and Identification Center [i.e. the

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<sup>83</sup> Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs, Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project,” pp. 84, 83.

<sup>84</sup> Κοινή Υπουργική Απόφαση 139654 /ΓΔ4/2017 - ΦΕΚ 2985/Β/30-8-2017, <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-ekpaideuse/koine-upourgike-apophase-139654-gd4-2017.html> (accessed September 11, 2017).

<sup>85</sup> Email to Human Rights Watch from Greek education ministry official, September 13, 2017.

<sup>86</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Aristedes Kalargalis, Mytilini, Lesbos, June 15, 2018.

<sup>87</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Aristedes Kalargalis, Mytilini, Lesbos, June 15, 2018.

<sup>88</sup> Even on the mainland, DYEP classes were delayed and did not begin with the start of the school year on September 11, 2017: as of October 20, the Ministry of Finance had still not signed the inter-ministerial decree as was required for the DYEP classes to begin. Greece National Education Sector Working Group, “Meeting Minutes,” October 30, 2017 (“Update by MOE, DYEP”), <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60571> (accessed January 21, 2018).

government-run camp on the island], the Education Ministry is examining the possibility of creating DYEP classes.”<sup>89</sup>

The Greek school year ends in June. On Chios, 30 children began attending pre-primary DYEP classes in late March and early April, but subsequent arrivals to the island could not enroll “because of the lack of vaccinations,” an education working group comprised of UN agencies, the Education Ministry, and NGOs reported.<sup>90</sup>

As of May, there were still no DYEP classes on Chios for children ages 6-15 because education partners were “waiting for relevant guidelines” from the government.<sup>91</sup> On Lesbos, the national-level education working group in Greece reported that DYEP classes opened in May.<sup>92</sup> All 33 children enrolled by the end of the month in two primary schools in Mytilini are living in the Kara Tepe camp, which is run by the Mytilini municipality, non-governmental groups providing education on Lesbos told Human Rights Watch.<sup>93</sup> No children from the government-run Moria “hotspot” camp were enrolled, and the Education Ministry did not plan to enroll children from Moria in DYEP classes in the 2018-2019 school year, according to the head education official for the northern Aegean islands.<sup>94</sup>

Education providers reported on May 29 that the Education Ministry intended to open DYEPs at public schools “in Chios, Samos and Leros for the coming school year,” but no plans had been issued to do so at time of writing.<sup>95</sup> In a letter dated July 9, the Education Ministry stated that it plans to open 15 new DYEP classes on Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros in 2018-2019.<sup>96</sup> Donors should support this positive move, but it still seems

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<sup>89</sup> Letter to Human Rights Watch from Dimitrios Tampanachiotis, Head of Secondary Education of Samos, January 18, 2018 (in Greek).

<sup>90</sup> Chios Education Sector sub-Working Group, “Meeting Minutes,” April 2, 2018 and May 9, 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63540> and <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63726> (accessed May 22, 2018).

<sup>91</sup> Chios Education Sector sub-Working Group, “Meeting Minutes,” May 9, 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63726> (accessed May 22, 2018).

<sup>92</sup> Greece National Education Sector Working Group, “Meeting Minutes,” May 15, 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63724> (accessed May 22, 2018).

<sup>93</sup> Education Sector Working Group meeting participants, Mytilini, Lesbos, June 14, 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Aristedes Kalargalis, Mytilini, Lesbos, June 15, 2018.

<sup>95</sup> Greece National Education Sector Working Group, “Meeting Minutes,” May 29, 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63889> (accessed June 7, 2018).

<sup>96</sup> Letter to Human Rights Watch from the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, Independent Department for the Coordination and Monitoring of Refugee Education, July 9, 2018.



inadequate to reach the majority of school-age asylum seeking children on the islands, unless that number declines.

### *ZEP Morning Integration Classes: Only for Children Outside Government Camps*

Since 2010, Greece has opened the Zones of Educational Priorities (ZEP) program to help child asylum seekers and migrant children with limited Greek integrate into public schools across the country. However, on the islands, the primary beneficiaries have been the small number of child asylum seekers who do not live in government-run camps.

The (ZEP) program allows public schools to set up an integration class if they have nine or more registered pupils who are not native speakers of Greek. Children in these classes receive special lessons in Greek, English, science, and mathematics to prepare them for full integration into Greek schools. They join their Greek peers in other classes, such as sports, information technology, and music.<sup>97</sup>

The first asylum-seeking children to enroll in public schools on the islands were staying at Pikpa, a camp outside Mytilini on Lesbos, established by Greek volunteers, with whose help 12 children were able to enroll in primary schools in late November 2016.<sup>98</sup>

All of the asylum-seeking children on the islands who were able to enroll in public schools in 2016-2017 were able to do so because existing spaces in ZEP classes were made available to them: 40 spaces on Lesbos and 7 spaces on Samos.<sup>99</sup> All 47 of these children lived in accommodations or shelters, not in the government-run camps.

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<sup>97</sup> Refugee.info, "How to Register Your Kids for Greece's New Refugee School Program," June 1, 2017, <http://blog.refugee.info/q-a-how-to-enroll-kids-ages-6-to-15-in-greek-public-morning-schools/> (accessed October 6, 2017).

<sup>98</sup> Anthi Pazianou, "Greek pupils on Lesbos island welcome refugee classmates," Xinhua, November 29, 2016. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-11/29/c\\_135864915.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-11/29/c_135864915.htm) (accessed June 20, 2018).

<sup>99</sup> Phone interviews with UNHCR officials on Lesbos, and with UNHCR official on Samos, August 24, 2017. Overall, there was a lack of reliable data on the provision of ZEP classes for asylum-seeking children in the 2016-2017 school year throughout the country. Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs, Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, "Refugee Education Project," p. 37.

For the 2017-2018 school year, the Education Ministry secured funding to open 700 ZEP classes to integrate asylum-seeking children across Greece, including on the islands.<sup>100</sup> In another positive move, the ZEP program was expanded to include classes for children ages 16 to 18, who can enroll in upper-secondary schools (lykeia),<sup>101</sup> an improvement over the 2016-2017 school year when ZEP classes were restricted to children ages 6 to 15, leaving older asylum-seeking children without educational support—a “basic omission,” according to a ministerial expert committee.<sup>102</sup>

The expert committee reported that across the country, many children of junior high school (gymnasio) age were unable to access school due to their lack of command of Greek and the absence of adequate support classes.<sup>103</sup> However, while ZEP programs were open for children in camps on the mainland during the 2017-2018 school year, on the islands they were once again open only for children in accommodations.<sup>104</sup>

The former Greek deputy Ombudsman for children’s rights visited the island of Leros in October 2017, where there were about 150 school-age asylum seekers, and told Human Rights Watch in December that his office encouraged local authorities to open 100 ZEP classroom spaces at public schools for them.<sup>105</sup> However, the plans were apparently delayed: as of February 2018, only 10 children were actually enrolled on Leros, according

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<sup>100</sup> Greece National Education Working Group, “Meeting Minutes,” August 21, 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/58898> (accessed October 7, 2017).

<sup>101</sup> Refugee.info, “Enroll now – Greek public school for refugees 15 – 18,” September 27, 2017, <http://blog.refugee.info/high-school-reception-classes/> (accessed January 21, 2018). The vast majority of unaccompanied children in Greece are over 15. UNICEF, “Situation Update: Unaccompanied Children in Greece,” September 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/60150> (accessed January 23, 2018).

<sup>102</sup> Greece National Education Working Group, “Meeting Minutes,” August 21, 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/58898> (accessed October 7, 2017); Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project,” pp. 77, 94.

<sup>103</sup> Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs, Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project,” pp. 36, 92.

<sup>104</sup> Refugee.info, “Enroll now – Greek public school for refugees 15 – 18,” September 27, 2017. On Samos, the opening of ZEP classes had been approved for secondary-school age children, but only “children who live in apartments and hosting structures” will be eligible to attend. Letter to Human Rights Watch from Dimitrios Tampanachiotis, head of secondary education of Samos, January 18, 2018 (in Greek).

<sup>105</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Giorgios Moschos, deputy Ombudsman for the rights of the child, Athens, December 6, 2017.

to information from local Greek government administrations cited by a Chios-based Greek NGO.<sup>106</sup>

On Lesbos, a group of civil-society, non-profit groups operate shelters in the capital, Mytilene, for children who are transferred from Moria camp with support from UN agencies and, in the case of unaccompanied children, approval from the Greek public prosecutor. One local non-profit, Together for Better Days, runs a non-formal school with space for 174 unaccompanied children, ages 8 to 18, in coordination with Iliaktida, a non-profit that runs a shelter for the children in Mytilene.<sup>107</sup> The non-formal school helps students enroll in public-school ZEP programs, and 70 children were enrolled as of December 4, 2017.

Staff at the non-profits said that the local public-school system was facing strains even with this limited number of asylum-seeking children. “The maximum is 34 [asylum-seeking] children per school [who need extra support], and we are up against that limit for secondary school students,” an Iliaktida staff member said in December. “There are 28 spaces [for asylum-seeking children] at the technical high school, but we’re still waiting for the Education Ministry to appoint a Greek teacher for them.”<sup>108</sup>

The ZEP program was opened for the first time on Chios in 2017-2018, where it provided the first-ever opportunity for any asylum-seeking child on the island to go to school, a UNHCR official told Human Rights Watch.<sup>109</sup> As of April 2018, 19 children whose housing was provided by UNHCR’s accommodation scheme outside of the camp enrolled in public elementary schools, 22 children ages 11-17 enrolled in secondary schools, and 25 in secondary-level vocational classes called EPAL.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Refugee Support Aegean, “Majority of refugee children in the Aegean Islands hotspots are excluded from education,” February 16, 2018, [http://rsaegean.org/majority\\_of\\_refugee\\_children\\_in\\_the\\_aegean\\_islands\\_hot\\_spots\\_are\\_excluded\\_from\\_education/](http://rsaegean.org/majority_of_refugee_children_in_the_aegean_islands_hot_spots_are_excluded_from_education/) (accessed May 22, 2018).

<sup>107</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews, Together for Better Days and Iliaktida staff, Lesbos, December 4, 2017. Better Days Greece is the implementing partner of Together for Better Days, an NGO registered in Switzerland in 2016.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with UNHCR official, Chios, August 14, 2017.

<sup>110</sup> Chios Education sub-Working Group, “Meeting Minutes,” April 2, 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63540> (accessed May 22, 2018).

Despite these positive steps, most children on the islands were excluded from the ZEP classes because they live in camps and lack access to public schools. The Education Ministry stated that it will continue to support ZEP classes on the islands, which had a cumulative total of 939 students throughout the 2017-2018 school year, in 2018-2019.<sup>111</sup>

### *Delays Opening ZEP Classes*

ZEP classes did not begin at the same time on all the islands, and none began at the start of the school year on September 11, 2017.<sup>112</sup> On September 13, an Education Ministry official told Human Rights Watch that the ministry expected both afternoon (DYEP) classes and ZEP classes for asylum-seeking children on the islands to open by mid-October.<sup>113</sup> Asylum-seeking children outside camps were to attend regular classes until the ZEP classes began.<sup>114</sup>

The Directorate of Secondary Education on Samos informed Human Rights Watch on January 18, 2018—nearly half-way through the school year—that “in terms of secondary education, three reception classes have been approved to operate, two of which will be held at the First and Second High School [gymnasio] of Vatheos, and the third at the evening EPAL [a technical, upper-level secondary school or lykeio].”<sup>115</sup>

Greek authorities should ensure children are promptly vaccinated so as to be able to enroll in formal education at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, due to the requirement in Greek law that children have certain vaccinations to allow them to enroll in school. In previous years, delays in vaccinating children led to delays in enrollment. On Lesbos, where ZEP classes were available in the 2017-2018, some children were not vaccinated until six weeks after the beginning of the school year.<sup>116</sup> According to a coordinator at

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<sup>111</sup> Letter to Human Rights Watch from the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, Independent Department for the Coordination and Monitoring of Refugee Education, July 9, 2018.

<sup>112</sup> Email to Human Rights Watch from human rights lawyer working in Athens, September 11, 2017.

<sup>113</sup> Email to Human Rights Watch from Greek education ministry official, September 13, 2017.

<sup>114</sup> Refugee.info, “Enroll Now: School Starts Soon in Greece,” August 29, 2017, <http://blog.refugee.info/enrolling-kids-in-school-in-greece/> (accessed October 7, 2017).

<sup>115</sup> Letter to Human Rights Watch from Dimitrios Tampanachiotis, head of Secondary Education of Samos, January 18, 2018 (in Greek).

<sup>116</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interviews with UNHCR official in Athens, September 1, 2017; with UNHCR officials on Lesbos, August 24, 2017; email from UNHCR official on Samos, September 11, 2017; email from UNHCR official on Chios, September 5, 2017.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which provides medical services to asylum seekers in Greece, the delays were caused by a lack of coordination between the ministries of health, education, and migration policy.<sup>117</sup> Several parents whom Human Rights Watch spoke to during the fall of 2017 said they had not been informed of the vaccination requirement.<sup>118</sup> The delay in vaccinations was also a main reason that some afternoon DYEP classes on the mainland could not open until March 2017, almost seven months into the 2016-2017 school year.<sup>119</sup> The Greek Ombudsman reported the same problems during the 2016-2017 school year on the mainland, namely “significant delays [in enrollment] until the completion of all the vaccinations” due to “lack of responsible medical information of those in charge.”<sup>120</sup>

## Delays in Providing Formal Pre-Primary Education

Although Greece’s stated goal is to make pre-primary education available to all children, many Greek children have been unable to enroll in public kindergartens due to a lack of space. Education is compulsory for all children in Greece as of age 5, including asylum-seeking children who are eligible to enroll in free public kindergartens.<sup>121</sup> Plans to open kindergartens in camps have been severely delayed.

In 2016, an official Greek “frequently asked questions” document with information for asylum seekers stated that “if you are staying in a Refugee Accommodation Center, there will be Kindergarten classes inside the Accommodation Center.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with MSF coordinator on September 4, 2017.

<sup>118</sup> For example, Khadija, who fled Afghanistan with four school-age children to Chios in November 2016, told Human Rights Watch that she wanted to enroll them in ZEP classes, but was unaware of the vaccination requirement when asked about it some 10 months later. Human Rights Watch interview with Khadija (pseudonym), Chios town, August 14, 2017.

<sup>119</sup> Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs, Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project,” p. 77.

<sup>120</sup> Greek Ombudsman, Migration Flows and Refugee Protection: Administrative Challenges and Human Rights Issues, April 2017, p. 65.

<sup>121</sup> Greek Presidential Decree 79/2017 requires each school to accept all applications for preschoolers, or if they lack adequate infrastructure, to allocate the surplus preschoolers to other pre-primary schools on the basis of their place of residence. See European Commission, “Greece: Early childhood education and care,” [no date], [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-33\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-33_en) (accessed July 3, 2018).

<sup>122</sup> General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning, “The Educational system in Greece – Frequently Asked Questions,” 2016, p. 2, [https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2016/education\\_guide\\_in\\_%CE%95%CE%9D.pdf](https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2016/education_guide_in_%CE%95%CE%9D.pdf) (accessed February 7, 2018).

A ministerial expert committee noted that specific plans for establishing kindergartens inside refugee camps had been prepared in September 2016, but that it took six months before the government issued tenders.<sup>123</sup>

The Education Ministry planned to open 30 kindergartens across the country by late November 2017 but was delayed: no pre-primary classes opened in any of the refugee camps on the mainland or on the islands until early 2018.<sup>124</sup> “There is no excuse for that,” a former education official told Human Rights Watch. “Yes, in some camps you have a mess, but in other camps you could open a kindergarten in a few days.”<sup>125</sup>

In a positive move, in 2018 the Education Ministry opened pre-primary classes in government-run camps for 30 children on Samos and 60 children on Chios.<sup>126</sup> A formal pre-primary class also opened in 2018 in the municipal Kara Tepe camp on Lesbos.<sup>127</sup> There was still no formal pre-primary education available to children in Moria camp, the largest government-run camp on the Aegean islands. However, in a positive move, the Education Ministry informed Human Rights Watch that in the 2018-2019 school year, it will open preschools for children in government-run camps on Leros, Kos, Samos, Chios and Lesbos, which would be the first time children in Moria have access to formal preschool.<sup>128</sup>

### *Obstacles to Public School Enrollment*

Even children who have been transferred from government-run camps to other locations where it is possible to enroll in public school face difficulties doing so. The manager of a shelter for vulnerable asylum-seeking families on Samos told Human Rights Watch that the

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<sup>123</sup> Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs, Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project,” pp. 67-9. In early 2017, the committee went so far as to examine mainland camps where empty buildings could be safely repurposed as kindergartens at minimal expense, including “former slaughterhouses.”

<sup>124</sup> Refugee.info, “Public kindergartens open for refugees in Greece,” October 17, 2017, <http://blog.refugee.info/public-kindergarten-greece/> (accessed January 23, 2018).

<sup>125</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Greek official #2, December 5, 2017.

<sup>126</sup> Human Rights Watch telephone interview with UNICEF officials, Athens, July 9, 2018; Human Rights Watch interview with Aristedes Kalargalis, head of education for the northern Aegean islands, Lesbos, June 15, 2018; Chios Education Sector sub-Working Group, “Meeting Minutes,” April 2, 2018, and May 9, 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63540> and <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63726> (accessed May 22, 2018).

<sup>127</sup> Education sector working group meeting participants, Lesbos, June 14, 2018.

<sup>128</sup> Letter to Human Rights Watch from the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, Independent Department for the Monitoring and Coordination of Refugee Education, July 9, 2018.

main obstacle to school enrollment is lack of information and support.<sup>129</sup> Some school officials had discouraged students from enrolling and parents' associations had protested the enrollment of asylum-seeking children at some schools.<sup>130</sup>

A ministerial expert committee on education for refugee children reported “that there were some schools, individual school principals and teachers who tried to discourage refugees from enrolling” in the 2016-2017 school year.<sup>131</sup> Some school principals refused to accept asylum seekers as students in 2018 on Lesbos without apparent justification, according to NGOs providing non-formal education on the island.<sup>132</sup>

A child protection specialist working with asylum-seeking children on Lesbos told Human Rights Watch that it could be “daunting and difficult” for an asylum-seeking child to join a Greek school without adequate integration, and especially language support, which could lead some parents to decide not to enroll their children under such circumstances.<sup>133</sup>

All of the asylum-seeking children who had enrolled in Greek schools on the islands in the past school year, whose cases Human Rights Watch identified, had received NGO help to guide them through the registration process. NGOs closely supported seven children that had enrolled in public schools on Samos in 2016-2017. The NGOs managed the shelters where four of the children lived, and the other three children were from a Christian family and received help from the Greek congregation they had joined.<sup>134</sup>

On Lesbos, UNHCR had coordinated school enrollment with schools and NGOs that manage apartments and shelters and provide non-formal education for asylum seekers to help children enroll. The majority of asylum-seeking children from these

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with manager of shelter for refugee families on Samos, August 17, 2017. This was confirmed by an UNHCR official working on refugee education in Greece. Phone interview with UNHCR official in Athens, September 1, 2017.

<sup>130</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with manager of shelter for refugee families on Samos, August 17, 2017.

<sup>131</sup> Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs, Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project,” p. 82.

<sup>132</sup> Education sector working group meeting participants, Lesbos, June 14, 2018.

<sup>133</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with child protection specialist on Lesbos, August 30, 2017; This was confirmed by an UNHCR official working on refugee education in Greece. Phone interview with UNHCR official in Athens, September 1, 2017.

<sup>134</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with UNHCR official on Samos, August 24, 2017; Human Rights Watch interview with manager of shelter for refugee families on Samos, August 17, 2017.

accommodations attended public schools in the past school year.<sup>135</sup> Greek volunteers who operate an accommodation site for refugees near Mytilini on Lesbos, called Pikpa, worked to enroll all school-age children in public schools who were present throughout the 2017-2018 school year.

## Lack of Adequate Non-Formal Education

Different NGOs provide non-formal education programs to asylum-seeking children on Lesbos, Chios, and Samos. “Non-formal education and homework support are crucial to help asylum-seeking children integrate in public schools and to prevent drop-outs,” a UNHCR official working on education for refugee children in Greece said.<sup>136</sup>

Children and parents emphasized the importance of these programs. “Majida,” 13, from Nasiriya in Iraq, said that she enjoys the classes provided by the NGO, Be Aware and Share, on Chios, which she attends three times a week. “The classes start at one in the afternoon, but I prepare my bag and am ready to go from the early morning. Later, I want to become a teacher,” she said.<sup>137</sup>

However, provision of non-formal education was not sufficient to reach all school-age children and provided significantly less classroom time—as little as 4 hours per week in some cases—than the 30 hours per week that a child would receive in the formal education system. Many children and parents told Human Rights Watch that they would prefer education at public schools to non-formal education. “Parents and children have been telling us that they want a program which is as close as possible to a real school,” an educator at Be Aware and Share said.<sup>138</sup>

A common concern is that the education provided by NGOs would not be officially recognized by schools in Greece or other European countries. “Jamal,” an unaccompanied 16-year-old boy from Najaf in Iraq who lives in the Vathi hotspot camp on Samos, said:

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<sup>135</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with UNHCR official on Lesbos, August 24, 2017.

<sup>136</sup> Phone interview with UNHCR official in Athens, August 30, 2017.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Majida (pseudonym), Vial camp, Chios, August 15, 2017.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with educator at Be Aware and Share, Chios town on Chios, August 14, 2017.



I only go to the non-formal education program because the classroom is air-conditioned and the containers at the camp are not. If you do not get a certificate which will be recognized, it is pointless to go.<sup>139</sup>

At a meeting in June 2018 for parents of school-age children in the Kara Tepe camp, operated by the Mytilini municipality on Lesbos, “most of the questions we got were about enrollment in formal education,” according to a group that provides non-formal education for children ages 7 to 18 in the camp.<sup>140</sup>

Non-formal education providers emphasized that non-formal education was not a replacement for formal schooling. “The quality of non-formal education can vary widely. Duplicating a school is quite different from providing a few hours of literacy training per week,” an NGO education expert said.<sup>141</sup>

On Lesbos, the only education available to the hundreds of children who live in the government-run Moria camp is non-formal, provided mainly by non-governmental groups. Two non-formal schools that are located outside Moria provide transportation for children from the camp. One, the Tapuat program, was teaching about 100 children ages 6 to 17 in three-hour daily lessons, as of June 2018.<sup>142</sup> Another community center for refugees, “One Happy Family,” supported by private donations, also provides services including non-formal education. The “School of Peace” in the community center teaches between 140 to 180 children ages 6 to 16 for three hours, five days per week; children stay for an additional half-hour during which the school provides them with a meal.<sup>143</sup> The school teaches children from the government-run Moria camp, as well as from the municipal Kara Tepe camp.

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<sup>139</sup> Interview with Jamal (pseudonym), Samos, August 18, 2017.

<sup>140</sup> Education working group meeting participants, Mytilini, Lesbos, June 14, 2018.

<sup>141</sup> Phone interview with education expert in Athens, August 10, 2017.

<sup>142</sup> The program is run by two local NGOs, Better Days and Iliaktida, and supported by UNICEF. Education working group meeting participants, Mytilini, Lesbos, June 14, 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with children and adult asylum seekers, Peace School, Lesbos, December 4, 2017 and June 13, 2018.

Some parents in the Moria camp on Lesbos said that non-formal schools were full when they tried to register their children.<sup>144</sup> Others said that they were afraid to send their children to locations outside the camp alone, but that they could not escort them either.<sup>145</sup> Manar, 28, had been living in an olive grove outside Moria camp for three months with her three school-age children when staff from a non-formal school contacted her, she said:

They told me my kids could go, but that I'd have to come along with them. But I can't do that, I have to take care of everything here. If you want to get out of the olive grove [tent site], you have to wait for the authorities to give you a better place, and if they call you over the megaphone and you don't run [to the interview], then you miss your chance. We need to do everything to get to a safer area.<sup>146</sup>

Because the children's parents or guardians must approve their transportation and schooling, no unaccompanied children from Moria were attending the "School of Peace" at time of research.

A volunteer teacher at the school, Mimi, who is seeking asylum, teaches English to 45 children, ages 6 to 9, and to another 25 children ages 10 to 16, whose native language is Arabic.<sup>147</sup> The school teaches two classes for Afghan children. "It can be exhausting," Mimi said.

You can't really teach 45 children in a classroom, they each need attention. All the time they are crying, 'Teacher I need this, teacher I need that.' But it is much better for them than nothing. And [volunteers] are building us a new classroom.

Unaccompanied children on Moria live in a section of the camp that is fenced off for their security; inside that section, they can access non-formal classes operated by a non-

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<sup>144</sup> Human Rights Watch interview, Nada (pseudonym), Moria, Lesbos, June 11, 2018.

<sup>145</sup> Human Rights Watch interview, Barat (pseudonym, from Afghanistan, with 2 school-age children and a school-age younger sister), Moria, Lesbos, June 13, 2018.

<sup>146</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Manar (pseudonym), Moria, June 11, 2018.

<sup>147</sup> Human Rights Watch interview, Mimi (pseudonym), Peace School, Lesbos, December 4, 2017.

governmental organization jointly with a teacher seconded by the Education Ministry. About 25 to 30 students attended each day during Human Rights Watch visits to Lesbos in August 2017 and June 2018, out of about 75 to 90 who were staying in the unaccompanied children's section.<sup>148</sup> In December 2017, the school was "too full," and the classes were hard to follow, according to "Taim," a 14-year-old Afghan boy who had attended some of the classes:

I tried to join the school but I couldn't understand anything. One of the teachers is Greek, but he teaches everything in English, and there are Afghans and Africans and Syrians. I only went four times. It was too hard and too full of people.<sup>149</sup>

Taim said that another refugee, who volunteered as a teacher in a non-formal school in Mytilene, had helped him to register there, but that he had been waiting for more than a month to receive approval to attend from the camp staff who acted as guardians for unaccompanied children.

School-age children living with their families in Moria camp cannot access the school in the unaccompanied children's section. The only school accessible to them inside the camp was the non-formal "Amal" ("Hope") school run by a non-profit group, "Boat Refugee Foundation." Because of limited space and staff, the Hope school was initially able to provide around 2.5 hours of instruction in English, math and either Arabic or Farsi, twice per week, reaching around 30 children, ages 6 to 10.<sup>150</sup>

By June 2018, the school had shifted its schedule and was teaching about 90 children with 1.5 hours of instruction every day, but still suffered from lack of adequate space. "We were moved from the old container [used as a classroom], because ten people are living there now, and the new one is even smaller," a school volunteer said.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Email to Human Rights Watch from a non-governmental aid worker on Lesbos, September 13, 2017. According to UNHCR, the number of accompanied asylum-seeking children aged 5 to 17 on the island stood at 452 as of August 29, 2017 and there were about 77 unaccompanied children. Phone interview with UNHCR officials on Lesbos, August 24, 2017; email from UNHCR official on Lesbos, September 4, 2017.

<sup>149</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Taim (pseudonym), Moria, Lesbos, December 3, 2017.

<sup>150</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hope School staff, Moria, Lesbos, December 4, 2017.

<sup>151</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hope School staff, Lesbos, June 12, 2018.

The school's location inside the camp was a trade-off, parents and teachers said. "Parents feel comfortable to send their children to school here because it is close to them, not outside the camp, but on the other hand it's a small space inside the camp so the children don't get a break from Moria, the bad conditions, the fights," a teacher said.<sup>152</sup>

Since teachers are asylum seekers hoping to move to the mainland, the turnover of staff disrupted continuity for students. "This turnover affects the relationship between teachers and students," a second teacher said. "I see the huge need for education here, but if my case is approved, I will say yes. I can't accept for my wife and my son to remain in Moria."

Even where non-formal schools are otherwise available, some families in government-run camps said they were afraid to enroll their children due to insecurity. In May 2018, fights between Syrian Arab and Kurdish asylum seekers in Moria camp led hundreds of Kurdish families to flee the camp and seek shelter elsewhere on Lesbos, including about 350 people who went to the volunteer-run Pikpa camp near Mytilini.<sup>153</sup> A group of local hotel owners subsequently launched a lawsuit seeking to close the Pikpa camp, and the municipality announced it would close the camp as a danger to public health after a health inspection found alleged minor violations in the community-run kitchen.<sup>154</sup>

Mahsoub, 40, arrived in Moria on March 25 and left on May 25 with his family including two school-age girls. "We moved here because of the fighting," he said. "The girls were crying and were hysterical, there were knives and rocks. Here they can play, there was no way they could play in Moria."<sup>155</sup> Before the family left Moria, Mahsoub said:

I knew there was a school inside Moria but it was not safe for them to go to that section [of the camp], they have to pass by [Syrian Arabs] after the fights. And there was [the School of Peace, outside Moria] but I also felt that sending them away on a bus to that school was unsafe. I just didn't want them out of my sight.

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<sup>152</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hope School staff, Lesbos, June 14, 2018.

<sup>153</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with three Kurdish families in Pikpa camp, and Pikpa staff, June 13 and 15, 2018.

<sup>154</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Pikpa staff, June 15, 2018; see also Lesvos Solidarity – Pikpa, "Reaction to Announcement to Close Pikpa Camp," June 29, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/1650025878606170/posts/2113987248876695/> (accessed July 3, 2018).

<sup>155</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mahsoub and his family, Lesbos, June 11, 2018.

“Aram,” who left Kobane in Syria in 2014, had been living with his four school-age children in the Kara Tepe camp on Lesbos for more than a year as of August 2017. He feared his children might be unable to succeed in school if they were able to re-enroll, after having missed three years of schooling, including one year on Lesbos. “They will need special programs to re-integrate in school because of the teaching they have missed,” he said.<sup>156</sup> His children attended non-formal classes at the camp, for about 15 hours per week—half the hours of instruction in Greek public schools. The non-formal classes were not accredited, and Aram was afraid that the lack of school certificates would harm their chances to receive a formal education. “Without education they lose their future, but they have not done anything wrong.”

In June 2018, SOS Children’s Villages began operating summer classes for children over 6 years old in Kara Tepe; the classes, held in an “Isobox” container, teach English, Greek and numeracy to about 35 to 40 children per day.<sup>157</sup>

Several NGOs that run shelters for unaccompanied children on Lesbos provide classes for children at the shelters, including Gekko Kids, a non-formal school that teaches 120 of the roughly 160 children at a shelter run by Iliaktida and Better Days in the town of Mytilini. Staff at the school and shelter were able to help 40 of these children enroll in public schools in 2017-2018.

Another non-formal school in Mytilini is run by staff at Mosaic, which teaches about 30 children ages 6 to 14 from the government-run Moria camp and from a volunteer-run camp, Pikpa, and has been able to enroll the latter in public schools.<sup>158</sup> Other NGOs provided information technology and language classes not specifically aimed at children, and one, Natan, provided evening language courses for children.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Interview with Aram (pseudonym) outside Karatepe camp on Lesbos, August 20, 2017.

<sup>157</sup> Education working group meeting participants, Mytilini, Lesbos, June 14, 2018.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with staff of non-governmental group on Lesbos, August 21, 2017; Phone interview with UNHCR officials on Lesbos, August 24, 2017.

On Samos “there is a huge gap in education provision,” a UNHCR official on the island told Human Rights Watch.<sup>160</sup> Two NGOs, Samos Volunteers and Boat Refugee Foundation, were providing lessons for an average of 14 children, ages 13 to 14, out of 61 children in that age group on the island as of August 31, 2017. Boat Refugee Foundation was also providing classes for about 15 children ages 15 to 17, while there were 119 children in that age group on the island.<sup>161</sup>

On Chios, the NGO Be Aware and Share was providing six hours of classes, three days a week for about 150 school-age children. In early September 2017, there were 261 asylum-seeking children of school age on the island.<sup>162</sup> By June 2018, a conservative estimate that half of all children on Chios were of school-age suggests there were around 300 children.<sup>163</sup>

Until July 2017, the European Commission’s humanitarian arm, ECHO, had provided €192 million (US \$226 million) in emergency funding to Greece, part of which had directly supported NGOs for purposes including informal education.<sup>164</sup> On July 26, 2017 the Commission announced €151 million (US \$178 million) in new “emergency” funding for rental accommodations and cash assistance for refugees, in partnership with UNHCR and local municipalities.<sup>165</sup> A Greek news website reported that because of the funding

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<sup>160</sup> Phone interview with UNHCR official on Samos, August 24, 2017.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with coordinator of Samos Volunteers, August 18, 2017; UNHCR, “Greece-Samos: Refugee and Migrant Children,” July 2017.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with UNHCR officials on Chios, August 14, 2017; email to Human Rights Watch from UNHCR official working on Chios, September 5, 2017.

<sup>163</sup> Greek government statistics show a daily total of about 2,000 asylum-seekers on Chios in June 2018; UNHCR estimates that 31 percent of arrivals on the islands were under 18, indicating 620 children. See “National Situational Picture Regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea,”

<http://mindigital.gr/index.php/%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%86%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C-%CE%B6%CE%AE%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B1-refugee-crisis/> (accessed July 11, 2018).

<sup>164</sup> European Commission, “Greece: Response to the Refugee Crisis, ECHO Factsheet,” July 2017, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/greece\\_en\\_o.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/greece_en_o.pdf); and European Commission, “Managing the Refugee Crisis: EU Financial Support to Greece,” July 26, 2017, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170726\\_factsheet\\_managing\\_refugee\\_crisis\\_eu\\_financial\\_support\\_greece\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170726_factsheet_managing_refugee_crisis_eu_financial_support_greece_en.pdf) (both accessed February 4, 2018).

<sup>165</sup> Municipalities on the islands are not among the municipalities participating in the program, but ECHO funds were also supporting housing there. As of February 2018, these funds paid for apartments for more than 1,300 refugees outside the camps, in addition to temporary hotel rooms for 376 others during the winter months. ESTIA (UNHCR), “ESTIA Program: Information Guide for the Local Authorities,” March 6, 2018, <http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/estia-programme-information-guide-for-the-local-authorities/> (accessed June 6, 2018). ESTIA (UNHCR), “Interview with UNHCR Representative in Greece on

changes, “dozens of NGOs are pulling out,” and that the European Commission’s humanitarian agency, ECHO, “will only continue to fund programs on the mainland.”<sup>166</sup> In July 2018, the EU announced an additional €20 million (US \$23.35 million) in funding to UNHCR to “improve reception conditions” on Lesbos, including support for non-formal education.<sup>167</sup>

Before the funding cuts led Save the Children to close its operations in late-2017, for example, the group was providing three hours of daily classes in English, Greek, and mathematics to about 120 children at the “One Happy Family” school on Lesbos.<sup>168</sup> On Chios, Save the Children was providing Greek, English and math classes to approximately 200 school-age at a safe space adjacent to the Vial camp before closing its operations in Greece.<sup>169</sup> And on Samos, the group was providing non-formal classes for up to 60 children ages 6 to 12 in August 2017, when there were 194 children in that age group on the island. By June 2018, the number of school-age children on Samos had increased to 501.<sup>170</sup>

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housing program for asylum seekers,” February 19, 2018, <http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/interview-with-unhcr-representative-in-greece-on-housing-programme-for-asylum-seekers/> (accessed June 6, 2018).

<sup>166</sup> Lina Giannarou, “The day after for refugee NGOs on Greece’s islands,” *Ekathimerini*, July 20, 2017, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/220208/article/ekathimerini/community/the-day-after-for-refugee-ngos-on-greeces-islands> (accessed February 6, 2018).

<sup>167</sup> European Commission, “Migration: Commission steps up assistance to Spain and Greece,” July 2, 2018, available at [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-18-4342\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-4342_en.htm) (accessed July 8, 2018).

<sup>168</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews, non-formal teachers, Lesbos, August 22, 2017.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with coordinator of Be Aware and Share, August 12, 2017; interview with UNHCR officials on Chios, August 14, 2017.

<sup>170</sup> Email from UNHCR office on Samos to Human Rights Watch, June 5, 2018.

### III. Mental Health Impact of Denial of Education

Children in camps on the islands face a vicious circle. Going to school could provide them with a sense of security and a daily routine that could help children suffering from trauma to recover, but most cannot enroll in education. Even if children should be able to access education, they may experience mental health problems that prevent them from trying to enroll or being able to concentrate if they do go to classes. Serious gaps in mental health support for children on the islands can leave children virtually trapped in trauma.<sup>171</sup>

“Abbas,” a 17-year-old unaccompanied Palestinian from Damascus, said that he had been out of school since 2015, when his secondary school was hit by a rocket.<sup>172</sup> In early 2017, Syrian security forces arrested him and several friends, for reasons he said he did not know; took him to jail, applied electric shocks; beat him with sticks; and suspended him from the ceiling upside down. “I asked them to kill me,” he said. Instead, they released him after three days and told him they would “kill me if they saw me again.” He fled Syria in May 2017 and arrived on Samos in early August. He was one of nine boys living in a single container in the unaccompanied children’s section of the government-run Vathi camp on Samos. “I am trying to forget what happened, but there was suffering on the journey, and this place does not help me to forget, the fights and drugs in the camp make my situation worse. Images from the prison come back.”

A Greek ministerial expert committee reported in April 2017 that “many” refugee children in Greece are “burdened by psychological traumas: terror, death experience, bereavement.”<sup>173</sup> In May and June 2017, Human Rights Watch documented the deteriorating mental health situation of asylum seekers on the Greek islands.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Save the Children, *A Tide of Self-Harm and Depression: The EU-Turkey’s devastating impact on child refugees and migrants*, 2017, pp. 11-15, <https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/trautolesionismo-e-depressione-limpatto-devastante-dellaccordo-ue-turchia-sui-bambini-migranti-e.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2018).

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Abbas (pseudonym), Vathi camp on Samos, August 18, 2017.

<sup>173</sup> Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, “Refugee Education Project,” p. 86.

<sup>174</sup> Human Rights Watch, “EU/Greece: Asylum-Seekers’ Silent Mental Health Crisis,” July 12, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/12/eu/greece-asylum-seekers-silent-mental-health-crisis>



Asylum seekers on the islands told Human Rights Watch that children faced psychological difficulties due to traumatic experiences in their home countries and during journeys to Greece, and that their mental health was harmed by harsh and dangerous camp conditions, and inadequate access to counseling or other support.

Mariam, 30, from Raqqa, Syria, had been living with her husband and their five children, three of whom are school age, in a large tent in Moria camp for a month-and-a-half as of mid-June 2018, but said her children’s “mental conditions are getting worse” because of the conditions, including fleas at night, fights between men from different national backgrounds, and lack of medical treatment.

I heard about some schools here, but I can’t send my children. My son [age 10] has problems because he saw his older brother die in front of him when the Americans [the US-led coalition] were bombing [ISIS]. He used to be the top of his class in his third year [of primary school]. Not now. The children won’t even go outside after that attack. I went to ask for a child psychologist but we’re still waiting.<sup>175</sup>

NGO staff supporting asylum seekers on Lesbos, Chios, and Samos reported serious gaps in mental health services for asylum-seeking children on each of these islands.<sup>176</sup> In July 2017, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that 80 percent of new arrivals on Lesbos were assessed to need care for anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder, but the need for mental health services on Lesbos far exceeded available services.<sup>177</sup> MSF reported that in May 2017, Greek authorities instituted a change in procedures, whereby “vulnerable people would stay on the islands until their first asylum interview – rather than immediately be transferred to the mainland, as had previously been the case.”

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<sup>175</sup> Human Rights Watch interview, Mariam, Moria, Lesbos, June 13, 2018.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with educator at be Aware and Share, Chios Town on Chios, August 14, 2017; Interview with coordinator of Samos Volunteers, Vathi on Samos, August 18, 2017; Phone interview with child protection specialist working on Lesbos, August 30, 2017.

<sup>177</sup> MSF, “A Dramatic Deterioration for Asylum-Seekers on Lesbos,” July 24, 2017, p. 5, [http://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/msf\\_lesbos\\_vulnerability\\_report1.pdf](http://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/msf_lesbos_vulnerability_report1.pdf) (accessed September 10, 2017).

A Greek ministerial expert committee found that asylum-seeking children often struggled to adapt to classroom environments and “to follow rules,” as a “consequence of both the traumatic experiences they have sustained and their current living conditions.”<sup>178</sup>

A teacher with an NGO that provides non-formal education for asylum-seeking children on Chios described to Human Rights Watch in mid-August 2017 the severity of mental health symptoms amongst recently arrived children. She said:

We have been seeing instances of self-harm amongst children as young as nine, as well as a lot of aggressive behavior and, especially amongst older children, depression.<sup>179</sup>

“Mamadou,” 17, who fled from Guinea in January 2017, had dropped out of school in the 10th grade to look for work, after his father, a political activist, was killed in 2015.<sup>180</sup> He now he lives in the unaccompanied children’s section of the government-run Vathi camp on Samos:

Many here cut themselves, want to kill themselves. Conditions here are horrible, you are traumatized. I wake up because of hunger, the food is so bad. I go to the Save the Children school from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. But my head is not quiet, you cannot focus on studying. If you get counselling only after two weeks that does not help. I want to be an activist for human rights or a lawyer to fight against injustice. But when I see this [the situation in the camp], I don’t think it will be realized.

The unaccompanied children’s section of the Vathi camp is openly accessible, including at night, and “drunk men enter the section and threaten the children,” said “Antoine,” 17, an orphan who fled Cote d’Ivoire in 2016, and was raped by adult men in prison in Morocco before eventually arriving in Greece.<sup>181</sup> In Vathi, Antoine lived in a container without heating or air conditioning, and said he received one 1.5 liter bottle of drinking water per day, and there was often no water for showers, toilets, and other

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<sup>181</sup> Interview with Antoine (pseudonym), Vathi camp on Samos, August 18, 2017.

facilities at the camp. Antoine said he had spoken to a psychologist three times and was registered as a student at an NGO-run non-formal school, but “conditions [in the camp] make me remember what I went through. I had hoped to be safe, but here I suffer just the same way as before.”<sup>182</sup>

Parents and NGO staff told Human Rights Watch that structured education programs helped children to overcome fear and anxiety. Mohamad, from Deir al-Zor in Syria, told Human Rights Watch that his seven-year-old daughter and five-year-old son were anxious and afraid when they arrived on Lesbos one month ago. “They are a lot more relaxed since they started to attend classes offered by Save the Children two weeks ago,” he said.<sup>183</sup>

“The structured routine of going to class has such an amazing impact on many children,” said an NGO educator on Chios. “Over time, you see them relax.”<sup>184</sup> A psychologist who works in child protection for a non-governmental group on Lesbos told Human Rights Watch that from a mental health perspective, it would be very beneficial for asylum-seeking children to attend school in combination with psycho-social support.<sup>185</sup>

But conditions in camps on the islands undermine the progress children achieve in non-formal schools. Heba and Ziyad, from Iraq, told Human Rights Watch their son “Amir,” 6, had displayed aggressive behavior and wet his pants after members of an armed group stormed the family’s home in March 2017. Amir “had started to be more at peace” once the family arrived on Chios in April, where they were placed in Souda camp.<sup>186</sup> Heba said:

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<sup>179</sup> Interview with educator at Be Aware and Share, Chios Town on Chios, August 14, 2017.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Mamadou (pseudonym), Vathi camp on Samos, August 18, 2017.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Antoine (pseudonym), Vathi camp on Samos, August 18, 2017.

<sup>182</sup> Another boy who lives in the same container with Antoine said on September 10, 2017 that conditions had not improved. WhatsApp communication with Yagou (pseudonym), September 10, 2017.

<sup>183</sup> Interview with Mohammed (pseudonym) outside Kara Tepe camp on Lesbos, August 19, 2017.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with educator at Be Aware and Share, Chios town on Chios, August 14, 2017.

<sup>185</sup> Phone interview with child protection specialist working on Lesbos, August 30, 2017.

<sup>186</sup> Souda camp closed in October 2017. See e.g., Observatory of the Refugee and Migration Crisis in the Aegean, “Souda camp in Chios closed today,” University of the Aegean, October 21, 2017, <https://refugeeobservatory.aegean.gr/en/souda-camp-chios-closed-today-video-and-some-words-goodbye-hero-center-chios> (accessed July 2, 2018); ANSA, “Greece: migrant arrivals continue as Chios camp closes,” August 23, 2017, <http://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/4724/greece-migrant-arrivals-continue-as-chios-camp-closes> (accessed July 2, 2018).

But then there was a fight at the camp and some of the fighting men entered our tent at night.... This scared him very much, and now he wakes up crying almost every night, and he re-enacts these things.<sup>187</sup>

An NGO educator working on Chios told Human Rights Watch that she and her colleagues frequently had to send Amir home from class because he attacked teachers or other children.<sup>188</sup> Heba and Ziyad said they had consulted a psychologist working at Souda camp about Amir's condition in early August, but were not referred to any further services, which would only be available if the family's asylum application was approved and it moved to the mainland. At the island's public hospital, they were told that no psychologist was available to see their son. An NGO that provides counseling had taken information about Amir's case, but had not yet been in touch with the family at time of writing.

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<sup>187</sup> Interview with Heba and Ziyad, parents of Amir (pseudonym), Souda camp on Chios, August 13, 2017.

<sup>188</sup> Interview with educator at be Aware and Share, Chios town on Chios, August 14, 2017.

## IV. Right to Education

Under the Greek Constitution, “[t]he number of years of compulsory education shall be no less than nine.”<sup>189</sup> According to Greek Presidential Decree 220/2007, asylum-seeking children

[H]ave access to the education system under similar conditions as Greek nationals for so long as there is no pending enforceable removal measure against them or their parents. ... Access to the education system shall not be postponed for more than three months from the date of reception of the application by the minor or the minor's parents. This period may be extended to one year where specific language education is provided in order to facilitate access to the education system. Where access to the education system is not possible due to the specific situation of the minor, appropriate measures, according to existing legislation, may be taken.<sup>190</sup>

The decree incorporates an EU directive that obliges EU member states to provide “preparatory classes, including language classes” to children “where it is necessary to facilitate their access to and participation in the education system.”<sup>191</sup>

All asylum-seeking children in Greece are also entitled to the rights guaranteed under European and international treaties applicable in the country. The European Charter of Fundamental Rights provides that “everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training ... which includes the possibility to receive free compulsory education.”<sup>192</sup> The First Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights states, “[n]o person shall be denied the right to education.”<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Constitution of Greece, art. 16.

<sup>190</sup> Presidential Decree No. 220 of 2007 on the transposition into the Greek legislation of Council Directive 2003/9/EC from January 27, 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, November 6, 2007, art.9.

<sup>191</sup> Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast), 29 June 2013, OJ L. 180/96 -105/32; 29.6.2013, 2013/33/EU

<sup>192</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 26 October 2012, 2012/C 326/02, art. 14.

<sup>193</sup> Protocol 1 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, ETS 9, adopted March 20, 1952, ratified by Greece on November 28, 1974, art. 2.

The 1951 Refugee Convention, which Greece participated in drafting and ratified in 1960, provides that governments hosting refugees must accord them the same treatment accorded to nationals with respect to primary education.<sup>194</sup> The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), oblige states parties to make primary education “compulsory and available free to all,” and provide that secondary education, including technical and vocational training, “shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.”<sup>195</sup>

For children who have not completed primary education, “[f]undamental education shall be encouraged or intensified.”<sup>196</sup> According to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the international expert body that monitors implementation of the ICESCR, a government that fails to provide a significant number of individuals “the most basic forms of education is, prima facie, failing to discharge its obligations” under the right to education.<sup>197</sup> The committee that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination called on Greece in 2016 to “Facilitate access to education for all migrant children and, to that end, increase the necessary human, technical, and financial resources and provide training to teachers and other personnel involved.”<sup>198</sup>

International law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, gender, sex, religion, ethnicity, social origin, or other status. According to the Committee on Economic, Social

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<sup>194</sup> Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 189 U.N.T.S. 150, entered into force April 22, 1954, art. 22. Greece acceded to the Convention’s 1967 Protocol in 1968.

<sup>195</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force January 3, 1976, ratified by Greece on May 16, 1985, art. 13; Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), entered into force September 2, 1990, ratified by Lebanon on May 11, 1993, art. 28.

<sup>196</sup> ICESCR, art 13.

<sup>197</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, “General comment No. 3, The nature of States parties obligations,” U.N. Doc. E/1991/23 (1991), <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4538838e10.html> (accessed October 10, 2016), para. 10.

<sup>198</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, “Concluding Observations on the twentieth to twenty-second periodic reports of Greece,” October 3, 2016, U.N. Doc. CERD/C/GRC/CO/20-22 para. 23(e), <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhshHeRjjq81EP%2b%2blb%2fejjifjh9PY409q26ynMbExljkMfzovcSZVcL%2fEgGtpIBg1kPsg3trvptYYFRml4j7LAIgFEcRO2USp%2b%2b4Cn1YRi6jfv9otr1dp3EQjONbU7R5A%3d%3d> (accessed June 7, 2018).

and Cultural Rights, the prohibition against discrimination “is subject to neither progressive realization nor the availability of resources; it applies fully and immediately to all aspects of education.” Furthermore, it extends to “all persons of school age residing in the territory of a State Party, including non-nationals, and irrespective of their legal status.”<sup>199</sup>

The CRC requires that States Parties:

Take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee [...] shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are parties.<sup>200</sup>

Greece is also a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which guarantees the right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, requiring governments to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels. This includes education services that are available to refugee and asylum-seeking children.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, “General Comment No. 13, The Right to Education,” U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/10 (1999), [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/dGeneralCommentNo13Therighttoeducation\(article13\)\(1999\).aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/dGeneralCommentNo13Therighttoeducation(article13)(1999).aspx) (accessed October 9, 2017), paras. 31, 34.

<sup>200</sup> CRC, art. 22.

<sup>201</sup> Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 2515, acceded to by Greece on May 31, 2012 See CRPD, art.24 and also General Comment No. 4 on the right to inclusive education by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/4&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/4&Lang=en)

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## “Without Education They Lose Their Future”

### Denial of Education to Child Asylum Seekers on the Greek Islands

At the end of the 2017-2018 school year there were more than 3,000 school-age asylum seekers on the Greek Aegean islands, of whom fewer than 400 were able to access formal education. NGOs and volunteers helped provide non-formal education to hundreds more, but many children could not access non-formal schools either.

“Without Education They Lose Their Future” finds that Greece, despite steps by the education ministry to include asylum-seeking children in public education, has failed to provide access to formal education for most children on the islands. Non-formal schools play a vital role but offer fewer hours of instruction than public schools and are not intended to replace formal education.

Based on interviews with more than 100 asylum-seeking children and their families on the islands, Greek and UN officials, and NGO staff and volunteers, the report traces the lack of access to education on the islands to the March 2016 EU-Turkey deal to reduce migration to Europe. Greece has enforced the deal by containing asylum seekers on the islands until their asylum claims are adjudicated. The authorities have not provided formal education to most children in the government-run camps on the islands, claiming that children there are on the move. But some children have been stuck in government-run camps for up to 11 months.

The vast majority of children who were able to enroll in public schools on the islands were living in apartments, shelters, or other accommodations run by local authorities, NGOs, or volunteers. But for children ages 6 and older living in government-run camps on the islands, formal education was inaccessible.

Human Rights Watch calls on the Greek government and the European Union to end the containment policy, so that children can access the greater education resources on the mainland.

*(above) Asylum seekers sit in a makeshift tent camp near the overcrowded hotspot on the Greek island of Samos on October 13, 2017. As of July 2018, more than 3,500 people on Samos were living in government-run camps designed to hold only 650, according to Greek government data.*

*(front cover) Children seeking asylum attend an art class at the volunteer-run Refugee Education Chios center on the Greek island of Chios on September 29, 2016. By June 2018, only a few hundred child asylum seekers were enrolled in public schools on the Aegean islands.*  
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