



Inclusive Higher Education

Access to Higher Education for Refugee and Migrant Youth in Greece

Policy Brief

Within the framework of the “Inclusive Higher Education” project, implemented in Greece by She Tells and in Kenya by Photofilm for Change, under the AU–EU Youth Cooperation Grant of the AU–EU Youth Lab programme, with the support of the African Union and the European Union.

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Executive Summary

Refugee and migrant youth in Greece continue to face significant structural barriers in accessing higher education despite existing national and European commitments to inclusive education and integration. According to UNHCR, approximately 9% of refugees

globally have access to higher education, compared to around 42% of the general population, highlighting persistent inequalities in educational access and opportunity.

This policy brief combines:

- desk research,
- structured and semi-structured questionnaires,
- participatory qualitative findings,
- and stakeholder consultations conducted within the framework of the “Inclusive Higher Education” project.

The research engaged refugee and migrant youth living in Greece, alongside consultations with NGOs, researchers, educators, universities, and inclusion practitioners working on migration and education-related issues.

The findings identify major barriers related to:

- language requirements and limited academic Greek pathways;
- fragmented information systems;
- financial insecurity and survival pressures;
- diploma recognition procedures;
- psychosocial stress and uncertainty;
- and limited institutional support.

Within the project consultations, language barriers and lack of accessible information emerged among the most frequently identified obstacles to higher education access.

The research additionally highlights that refugee and migrant youth are not a homogeneous group. Women, caregivers, LGBTQI+ persons, persons with disabilities, traumatised populations, and individuals facing socio-economic precarity experience different forms of exclusion and require tailored and intersectional support mechanisms.

While important initiatives and programmes already exist in Greece, support systems remain fragmented, project-based, geographically uneven, and insufficiently connected to coherent higher education pathways.

Inclusive higher education should be recognised not only as an integration issue, but as a long-term investment in:

- social cohesion;
- democratic participation;
- economic inclusion;
- and human dignity.

1. Introduction

While significant efforts have been made in Greece to improve access to compulsory education for refugee children, access to post-secondary and higher education remains considerably more fragmented and limited for refugee and migrant youth aged 18–30.

Research and stakeholder consultations indicate that barriers to higher education are rarely caused by lack of motivation or educational aspirations. Instead, exclusion emerges through cumulative structural barriers related to:

- language requirements;
- fragmented administrative systems;
- financial precarity;
- interrupted educational pathways;
- legal uncertainty;
- and limited institutional support.

A major transition gap additionally exists between compulsory education and higher education pathways for refugee and migrant youth, particularly after the age of 18.

Higher education access is closely connected to:

- social inclusion;
- labour market participation;
- psychosocial wellbeing;
- democratic participation;
- and long-term integration.

This policy brief adopts a participatory and youth-led approach, recognising refugee and migrant youth not only as beneficiaries, but as active contributors to policy dialogue and educational inclusion processes.

Existing evidence additionally challenges deficit-based narratives around refugees and migrants, highlighting significant educational potential that remains underutilised due to structural barriers. According to EMN and Eurostat data referenced during stakeholder consultations, 76% of third-country nationals in Greece are considered overqualified for the positions they occupy, highlighting significant underutilisation of existing qualifications and skills. The findings additionally point toward significant underutilisation of educational potential, qualifications, and professional skills among refugee and migrant populations in Greece, resulting not only in individual exclusion, but also in broader social and economic loss.

2. Methodology

This policy brief combines:

- desk research and policy review;
- structured and semi-structured questionnaires;
- participatory qualitative findings;
- and stakeholder consultations with migration, education, inclusion, and civil society actors.

The research engaged refugee and migrant youth living in Greece, primarily from Kenya, Georgia, and Ukraine, alongside practitioners, researchers, NGO representatives, educators, and inclusion professionals working in the fields of migration and education.

Consultations and questionnaires were conducted in May 2026 within the framework of the “Inclusive Higher Education” project implemented by She Tells and Photofilm for Change.

The research is exploratory and participatory in nature and aims to highlight recurring structural barriers, lived experiences, and policy gaps related to higher education access for refugee and migrant youth in Greece.

The findings do not aim to provide statistically representative national data, but rather to identify recurring patterns, structural challenges, and stakeholder perspectives emerging across consultations and participatory research activities.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Language Barriers and Academic Greek

Language barriers emerged as one of the most significant obstacles affecting access to higher education in Greece.

Within the questionnaires conducted in the framework of this project, 50% of participants identified language barriers as a primary challenge affecting educational continuation. Additionally, nearly all participants reported possessing only basic Greek language skills, while only one participant indicated advanced-level Greek proficiency.

Participants highlighted that limited access to academic-level Greek affects:

- university admission preparation;
- understanding of administrative procedures;
- classroom participation;
- and long-term educational integration.

While Greek language programmes exist through municipalities, NGOs, and integration initiatives, a 2026 mapping conducted by the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee Issues (ACCMR) identified that advanced academic Greek pathways connected to higher education progression remain unevenly accessible across Greece.

Stakeholders additionally emphasised that language should be approached not solely as an admission requirement, but as an enabling right and inclusion mechanism supporting equal participation in higher education and social life.

3.2 Fragmented Information Systems

Lack of accessible and multilingual information emerged consistently as a major barrier throughout the research process.

Within the questionnaires conducted in the framework of this project, 57% of participants identified lack of information regarding admissions procedures, scholarships, and educational opportunities as one of the main barriers affecting access to higher education in Greece.

Participants reported difficulties navigating:

- admissions procedures;
- scholarships;
- diploma recognition;
- language requirements;
- and educational rights.

Although important initiatives and support mechanisms exist across ministries, universities, NGOs, and municipalities, information systems remain fragmented, decentralised, and difficult to navigate independently.

Stakeholders highlighted the need for centralised multilingual guidance, clearer educational pathways, and one-stop support mechanisms within universities.

3.3 Financial Insecurity, Trauma, and Survival Pressures

Financial precarity and survival pressures significantly affect educational participation and long-term planning.

Participants frequently prioritised:

- work;
- housing;
- and immediate survival needs over education.

Stakeholders additionally highlighted the impact of:

- trauma;

- prolonged uncertainty;
- legal limbo;
- and psychosocial stress.

These barriers do not operate independently. Language barriers, legal uncertainty, financial precarity, psychosocial stress, and recognition procedures frequently reinforce one another and progressively narrow educational opportunities.

3.4 Recognition of Qualifications

Recognition of diplomas and prior qualifications emerged as a major structural barrier.

Participants and stakeholders identified:

- complex DOATAP procedures;
- translation costs;
- lack of guidance;
- and incompatibilities between educational systems as major obstacles to educational continuation.

Stakeholders specifically noted that many qualifications are difficult to recognise due to differences in programme duration or curriculum structures between countries.

Although mechanisms such as DOATAP and the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) exist, practical accessibility and flexibility remain limited.

3.5 Intersectional and Holistic Support Needs

Stakeholder consultations strongly emphasised that refugee and migrant youth are not a homogeneous group.

Women, caregivers, LGBTQI+ persons, persons with disabilities, traumatised populations, and individuals facing socio-economic precarity experience different forms of exclusion and require intersectional and tailored approaches.

Gender-sensitive barriers emerged strongly in discussions around childcare responsibilities and flexible participation. Several stakeholders noted that migrant and refugee women often wish to continue into higher education but lack access to childcare support or flexible study pathways.

Stakeholders additionally highlighted the importance of:

- digital literacy;
- media literacy;

- academic orientation;
- soft skills;
- and psychosocial support.

The findings suggest that educational inclusion should be approached holistically, extending beyond language learning and admissions processes alone.

3.6 Limited Data and Monitoring Mechanisms

Reliable and disaggregated data regarding refugee and migrant participation in higher education in Greece remain limited.

Stakeholder consultations additionally highlighted the lack of consistent public monitoring regarding:

- university enrolment;
- scholarship participation;
- educational progression;
- diploma recognition outcomes;
- and dropout rates among refugee and migrant populations.

Limited availability of accessible and coordinated data restricts evidence-based policymaking, institutional accountability, and the development of targeted inclusion measures.

Strengthening national data collection, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms could support more coordinated, sustainable, and effective higher education inclusion policies and improve understanding of long-term educational outcomes for refugee and migrant youth.

4. Policy Gaps

The findings suggest that the central challenge is not the complete absence of support mechanisms, but rather the absence of coordinated, accessible, and sustainable pathways into higher education.

Key policy gaps include:

- fragmented higher education inclusion frameworks;
- limited free academic Greek preparation pathways linked to university access, with advanced-level programmes often remaining financially inaccessible
- fragmented multilingual information systems;
- difficult diploma recognition procedures;
- limited scholarship accessibility;

- uneven institutional support within universities;
- geographic inequalities;
- insufficient psychosocial and intersectional support mechanisms.
- limited flexible and hybrid higher education pathways for working adults and caregivers;
- legal and administrative delays affecting continuity of educational and professional pathways
- lack of coordinated educational guidance and mediation services within universities
- limited public monitoring and disaggregated data regarding refugee and migrant participation in higher education

While important programmes and initiatives already exist in Greece, many remain temporary, project-based, urban-centred, and insufficiently institutionalised.

5. Policy Recommendations

Ministry of Education

- **Develop** a national inclusive higher education framework for refugee and migrant youth;
 - **Expand** free academic Greek pathways connected to university preparation;
 - **Develop** bridging and preparatory programmes combining language learning, academic orientation, digital literacy, and soft skills;
 - **Create** a centralised multilingual information platform on admissions, scholarships, diploma recognition, and educational opportunities;
 - **Expand** scholarship and financial support mechanisms for vulnerable populations;
 - **Strengthen** accessibility and flexibility within qualification recognition procedures;
 - **Establish** dedicated budget lines supporting inclusive higher education pathways.
 - **Strengthen** national monitoring and data collection mechanisms regarding refugee and migrant participation, educational progression, scholarship access, and higher education inclusion outcomes.
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Universities and Higher Education Institutions

- **Establish** university inclusion focal points providing multilingual guidance, registration support, educational mediation, and scholarship navigation;
- **Expand** flexible and hybrid learning opportunities;
- **Develop** trauma-informed academic and psychosocial support services;

- **Strengthen** peer mentoring, student participation, and inclusive campus environments;
 - **Develop** gender-sensitive educational pathways including childcare support and flexible participation models.
 - **Develop** pilot multilingual learning support mechanisms, including translated educational materials, interpretation support, and digital learning tools.
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Ministry of Migration and Asylum

- **Strengthen** coordination between migration, integration, and education policies;
 - **Support** educational inclusion pathways within integration strategies;
 - **Expand** interpretation and translation support mechanisms;
 - **Strengthen** collaboration with universities, municipalities, and civil society actors.
 - **Develop** accessible guidance and mediation services supporting diploma recognition and educational continuation procedures, including legal, translation, administrative, and financial support mechanisms.
 - **Address** administrative and legal delays affecting educational continuity, diploma recognition, and access to higher education pathways for individuals undergoing international protection and migration procedures
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Municipalities and Local Authorities

- **Strengthen** outreach and multilingual information dissemination through Migrant Integration Centres and local services;
 - **Support** community-based educational inclusion programmes in urban and rural areas;
 - **Expand** local language learning and digital literacy initiatives;
 - **Facilitate** partnerships between local communities, universities, and civil society organisations.
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IKY, Erasmus+, AMIF, and EU Stakeholders

- **Expand** dedicated inclusion scholarships and preparatory programmes;
- **Support** long-term and sustainable educational inclusion initiatives;
- **Strengthen** funding for refugee-led and youth-led educational inclusion initiatives;
- **Encourage** partnerships between ministries, universities, municipalities, and civil society organisations;
- **Support** inclusive and intersectional approaches within educational funding frameworks.

- **Establish** regranting and continuation funding mechanisms for projects identified as educational inclusion good practices.
 - **Move** beyond fragmented and temporary project-based approaches by supporting sustainable, institutionalised, and long-term higher education inclusion pathways.
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6. Conclusion

Refugee and migrant youth in Greece possess educational aspirations, qualifications, and significant potential, yet continue to face substantial structural barriers in accessing higher education.

The findings of this policy brief demonstrate that existing initiatives, while important, remain fragmented and insufficiently connected to coherent higher education pathways.

Inclusive higher education should be recognised not merely as a humanitarian response, but as a long-term investment in:

- social cohesion;
- democratic participation;
- economic inclusion;
- and human dignity.

Strengthening access to higher education requires coordinated and sustainable action between ministries, universities, municipalities, EU stakeholders, and civil society actors.

The voices, experiences, and participation of refugee and migrant youth themselves must remain central to these processes.

About the Project

“Inclusive Higher Education” is a youth-led initiative implemented by She Tells and Photofilm for Change within the framework of the AU–EU Youth Cooperation Grant of the AU–EU Youth Lab programme, with the support of the African Union and the European Union.

The project additionally engages with the broader AU–EU Youth Lab consortium ecosystem, including organisations such as the European Youth Forum, Oxfam, and Restless Development.

The project aims to strengthen dialogue, inclusion, awareness, and policy engagement around access to higher education for refugee and migrant youth in Greece through participatory research, advocacy, and stakeholder consultation.

Infographics



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Disclaimer


The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official views of the African Union, the European Union, or the AU–EU Youth Lab programme.

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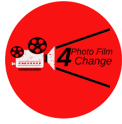
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