MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS: LEARNER, TEACHER, CAREGIVER, AND COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAMMING AND IMPACT

FINDINGS FROM QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FEATURING AMAL ALLIANCE'S COLORS OF KINDNESS PROGRAMME IN GREECE

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THE MHPSS COLLABORATIVE
FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES IN ADVERSITY

AMAL ALLIANCE
EMPOWERING GLOBAL CITIZENS

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About the MHPSS Collaborative

The MHPSS Collaborative is a global platform for research, innovation, learning and advocacy in the field of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). We convene key stakeholders – from children and families with lived experience to service providers, researchers and policy makers – to work together for children's mental health and wellbeing. We develop and share knowledge on the latest innovations and research on MHPSS in fragile and humanitarian settings. We advocate to ensure donors and decision makers hear the voices of children and families and prioritize policy and funding for MHPSS. Visit www.mhpsscollaborative.org for more information.

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ACRONYMS

BLP	Better Learning Programme
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
Colors	Colors of Kindness
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DYEP	Reception School Facility for Refugee Education
ESTIA	Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation
EU	European Union
I/NGO	International / Non-Governmental Organization
IP	Implementing Partners
LMS	Learning Management System
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MoE	Ministry of Education, religious Affairs, and Sports
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RC	Research Coordinator
REC	Refugee Education Coordinators
RIC	Reception and Identification Centers
RQ	Research Question
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
WHO	World Health Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
ZEP	Education Priority Zones

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2022, 40% of the nearly 110 million persons forcibly displaced people globally were children under the age of 18.[1] Displaced children face acute and chronic adversities that significantly threaten their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.[2]The urgent needs of children in humanitarian crises underpin various policies and programmatic approaches that include increasing attention to both mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services broadly[3] and in education approaches specifically.[4] MHPSS in education in emergencies (EiE), including social-emotional learning (SEL), has been identified as an important pathway to address both children's mental health and psychosocial needs and to improve learning outcomes.[5]

There is increasing recognition that quality education is reflected not just in academic outcomes such as literacy and numeracy, but also in those indicating learner psychosocial wellbeing.[6] Learners are embedded within a context of specific relationships, environments, and systems that notably influence their daily lives, learning, and holistic wellbeing. These socio-ecological factors are complex and context-specific, and can have a significant impact on the efficacy of an intervention aimed at supporting children's growth and learning.[7]

Improved understanding of this social ecology around learners can lead to more relevant and impactful program design and implementation. The perspectives of children, caregivers, teachers, and relevant community and education system stakeholders are critical to understanding not just if an intervention is effective, but how, why, and for who.

This research set out to examine the enabling environments for MHPSS interventions delivered in education settings in humanitarian contexts, with specific focus on Amal Alliance's Colors of Kindness (Colors) program implemented in Greece.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	
1	To understand what contributes to an enabling environment for MHPSS interventions and approaches to improve holistic wellbeing, from the perspective of children, teachers, caregivers, and other education actors.
2	To understand the role of education systems, including schools (and formal and nonformal programmes), and educators in contributing to children's holistic wellbeing from the perspective of children, teachers, caregivers, and other education actors.
3	To describe similarities and differences of enabling environments for MHPSS interventions across diverse contexts, including both geographic location and type of emergency or adversity.
4	To understand how an MHPSS intervention may be useful and relevant in dynamic contexts, such as in the case of education interruptions, and what the role of schools is in supporting children's holistic wellbeing.

5	To understand the perceived impact of Amal Alliance's Colors of Kindness program in Greece, in order to contribute to organizational and programmatic learning and implementation.

Amal Alliance[i] is an independent humanitarian organization dedicated to empowering displaced and disenfranchised children through education and social development programmes around the globe in both refugee camps and formal school settings. Amal Alliance's Colors of Kindness[ii] programme focuses on social emotional learning in order to (a) foster social and emotional skills of children to bridge the learning gap, (b) enhance the wellbeing of caregivers and their children, and (c) increase access to and engagement with distance learning. Amal Alliance works through its implementing partners (IPs) on the ground, who deliver Colors in their education response programming in locations across Greece. Research with six of these IPs in 15 distinct locations, as well as with general education actors in three additional locations, was the focus of this study.

METHODS

To achieve the research objectives, the target population for participation in the research included children, teachers, caregivers, implementing organization staff, psychologists, refugee education coordinators, community-based education actors, and education officials (at local, regional, sub-national, and national level). The research team collected data from 62 total participants across Greece. This included data collection via five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 37 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) in 16 distinct locations.[iii] FGDs were conducted with learners (5 FGDs). KIIs were conducted with caregivers (n=5), teachers (n=16), social scientists or psychologists (n=2), education management or administrative staff (n=5), implementing partner non-teaching staff (n=5), and with Amal Alliance staff (n=2). The participating learners were aged 6-12 and included both refugee/asylum seeking and host community children.

GREECE CONTEXT

Greece has long been a main gateway to Europe for refugees and asylum seekers from all over the world; As of February 2024, Greece hosted approximately 169,000 refugees, 18,000 asylum-seekers, and 17,800 stateless persons[8] with the majority from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. Refugees and asylum seekers in Greece live both in camps and integrated into host communities in both urban and rural settings.

Currently, both camp and non-camp families face notable challenges to assuring their basic needs are met while they either await asylum decisions or work to integrate into Greek society. Refugees often face significant mental health challenges due to the traumas they have experienced prior to arrival in Greece,

[i] For more information on Amal Alliance: https://www.amalalliance.org/

[ii] For more information on Colors of Kindness: https://colorsofkindness.org/

[iii] Research sites included Veria, Alexandria, Lagkadikia, Diavata, Agia Eleni, Katsikas, Fillipiada, Volos, Koutsochero, Schisto, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, N. Kavala, Drama, Serres, and Lesvos. Sites of implementation were in refugee camps and community centers.

including exposure to violent conflict, displacement, and extreme loss. Many refugees suffer from conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. These challenges are exacerbated by the uncertainty of their situations, lack of resources, and limited access to health and social services, often leaving affected populations underserved.

The need for MHPSS services for displaced families and children in Greece is notable, and support services delivered by I/NGOs, civil society, and education actors is insufficient. While Greek law extends certain rights and protections—including the right to access education and health services—to refugees and asylum seekers, there are few official policies that explicitly speak to MHPSS concerns of the population at large. Additionally, the translation of policy into practice to support displaced learners and their families is lacking.

MAIN FINDINGS

Understanding and responding to context of intervention

Understanding the dynamic context and ongoing challenges of displacement in Greece is essential in order to design and implement effective and appropriate MHPSS programming.

- Displaced families across Greece face significant challenges in their daily lives—including unmet basic needs, financial insecurity, and the precarity of awaiting asylum decisions—which have notable impacts on mental health and wellbeing.
- Refugee learners' varied educational experiences as well as exposure to risk in their countries of origin and while on the move impact their holistic needs and opportunities upon arrival in Greece.
- Integration into Greek society is an ongoing challenge for refugee learners and their families.

> *These kids live in a camp with a wall that is six meters high, and they need to check in and out every time they come and go from the camp… This leads to a sense of feeling trapped, of being in prison, of not being able to move freely, of feeling like a secondary citizen, and of not being treated like everyone else.* ***Implementing Staff***

- Refugee services providers face many barriers in providing sustainable, quality support, including inconsistent coordination and collaboration with government actors.
- Integration of refugee children into the formal school system is encumbered by persistent challenges at the policy, school, and classroom levels.
- Across all research sites in Greece, there was limited access to MHPSS resources and services for refugee children and their families.

> *In the refugee population here, we are talking about children who do not have...a stable environment in which they live and grows up. So it is very important to try to create safe conditions and a stable environment for these children in [education] spaces. And it is important to support them with skills they need, which will help them during the period they live in the camp... but the constant changes in conditions and policies, and the change to their refugee status… this does not create good conditions for the wellbeing of children.* ***Teacher, NFE***

Perceptions of holistic wellbeing and the role of education

This research underscores the significant role of education in contributing to learner wellbeing and highlights diverse perceptions of educational community members on the value and purpose of school.

- Research participants emphasize that a critical aspect of a safe learning environment is assuring the emotional and psychological safety of all children.
- Caregivers, teachers, implementing partners, and other education actors describe the value of school and/or education as strongly linked to children's wellbeing, especially as a place to develop character and values, and to learn social and emotional skills.
- Caregivers and teachers perceive school as playing an important role in fostering tolerance and exposing learners to diversity.
- Children perceive the greatest sense of safety and wellbeing from their immediate environments, especially their homes and schools, and from their close relationships, particularly with family and friends.

> *Education here should be about getting children to a level at which they can interact as equals with their [Greek] peers. So that there is not this sense of… ostracization, of racism, of discrimination. But I think that that is very often is lacking, that this is not accomplished in the schools here.* ***Implementing Staff***

- Teachers, caregivers, and other education actors believe that supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students is a critical part of a teacher's job.

> *The teacher is not just a profession alone, but is an important role in society. This involves shaping the character of the children, together with parents. And to give knowledge to the children and create the foundation for something better in the future, to give hope.* ***Parent***

- Teachers and education actors consider the involvement of caregivers as essential to children's education, but in the refugee context in Greece there are many systemic barriers to caregiver engagement.

Perceptions of impact of Amal Alliance's Colors of Kindness programme

- Colors is viewed as a positive, relevant, and effective approach by the majority of research participants.
- The majority of Colors learners who participated in this research described positive impressions of Colors and could give specific examples of how they used it in their lives and how it made them feel.

- Colors teachers describe the usefulness of Colors activities in their classroom and for supporting and understanding their students.

Colors has helped me a lot as a teacher because I've learned so many new things about my students. What they really think and feel, what they like, and what is hard for them… All of a sudden a child would come to me and open his heart and tell me the things he was feeling. I felt so happy that this worked for him, but I also really gained something. ***Teacher, NFE***

- Teachers, implementers, and caregivers perceive a number of clear outcomes related to children's holistic wellbeing as a result of Colors. These include improvements in emotional recognition, emotional regulation and management, social and communication skills, self-esteem, and ability to express themselves.
- Colors implementers perceive a number of learning outcomes that relate to learning readiness and improved concentration and engagement.
- Colors implementers perceive that a whole-family approach to Colors could improve social and emotional skills and positively impact dynamics in the home.

Colors helped me to better control my emotions, like when I get angry or feel something too much. I think it's good for us to understand first of all what we feel and then be able to control it. For example, my brother and I used to fight a lot because we were angry or be frustrated. And we are siblings. But now before we fight I find a way to stop and calm down so that we don't have to be angry towards each other. I learned this from Colors because I can explain what bothered me and led me to feel the need to fight. It helped me explain to others what I feel, so that they understand that at that moment, for example, I am in a slightly more special psychological state. That I am angry and that it is better… if others are angry also… to talk and not fight. ***Colors Learner***

- There were a number of classroom-level challenges to successful implementation of Colors that were described by teachers and implementing staff. These included language, concepts and terms, age and development, duration of lessons, use of technology/tablets.
- There were a number of implementation-level challenges to successful implementation of Colors. These included high turnover rate of teachers and implementing staff; lack of access to camps, living spaces, and caregivers; ongoing mobility of learners; and space-related limitations.
- In all sites of implementation, Colors has been contextualized to meet the specific needs identified in each location.
- Implementers and teachers had suggestions for program improvements, and these often related to requests for further guidance, as well as simplification due to the challenges of the implementation context.
- Amal Alliance's sustainability strategy for Colors in Greece aims at institutionalization of Colors into the formal education system, with adoption by the Ministry of Education and eventual integration into the formal schools in Greece.

CALL TO ACTION

To effectively implement MHPSS programs such as Colors, **implementers should focus on creating standardized approaches with the flexibility to adapt to contextual and cultural nuances.** This calls for the development of contextualization tools to address unique local needs, including explicit support at the classroom level to teachers and facilitators who adapt lessons and activities in real time. Colors offers an example of openness and encouragement of such contextualization, which other implementers of MHPSS programming could learn from, while it is also noted that further support for how contextualization is carried out is needed.

Additionally, **advocating for the integration of MHPSS into national curricula, training, and policies is crucial to ensure continuity and sustainability.** Amal Alliance's work with the Greek Ministry of Education to scale and institutionalize Colors to the formal school system offers opportunity to learn about such processes, and should be further explored and learned from. Implementers are urged to document and share best practices, lessons learned, and case studies to build capacity and facilitate knowledge exchange both on a national and global scale. While mental health of children is often reflected in national education policies, refugee-specific policy for education, health, and mental health are still lacking. Additionally, the financial and political commitment required to assure that MHPSS policy translates to action at the school level should be encouraged for all children.

Recognizing the value of local knowledge is essential; programs should be led or co-led by local entities to ensure contextual relevance. This assures adherence with the localization agenda of many I/NGOs in humanitarian contexts. By integrating local partners and leaders early in implementation—including programs designed or co-designed by local or national actors—such knowledge and leadership can inform implementation across the program cycle and beyond. In many humanitarian contexts, such as Greece, this integration of both displaced populations and Greek actors is additionally essential to promote greater inclusion of refugee learners and communities.

Furthermore, a focus on sustainable models is vital, including the integration of MHPSS into teacher training and alignment with formal education systems and policy. **Interdisciplinary collaboration is key, as MHPSS intersects with education, health, and social work.**

Lastly, **a context-sensitive approach is crucial for effective implementation.** This involves understanding the specific challenges, needs, and capacities of each community and its learners. Ensuring safety, both emotional and physical, is foundational for MHPSS interventions. This includes creating safe environments in schools, including fostering trusting relationships amongst learners and with teachers and other adults. In Greece, there are specific classroom-level and implementation-level challenges to delivering effective MHPSS programming. In-depth understanding of these context challenges is absolutely essential.

The recommendations included in this report aim to optimize the impact and sustainability of MHPSS programs, emphasizing the need for standardized yet flexible approaches; policy integration; local knowledge utilization; and a context-sensitive, safety-focused implementation strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

At the end of 2022, 40% of the nearly 110 million persons forcibly displaced people globally were children under the age of 18, and 76% hosted in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).[9] A growing evidence base shows that displaced children face acute and chronic adversities that significantly threaten their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.[10] Research emphasizes that children exposed to war and displacement exhibit a range of distress and stress reactions, including specific fears, dependent behaviors, psychosomatic symptoms, and aggressive behaviors.[11] The urgent needs of children in humanitarian crises underpin various policies and programmatic approaches that include increasing attention to both mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services broadly[12] and in education approaches specifically.[13]

Education is a basic right and access to quality education for refugee children is underlined via strategic priorities and policy by major humanitarian actors and governments hosting significant refugee populations.[14] The provision of quality education has important overlaps with child protection priorities and includes efforts to address children's wellbeing in humanitarian contexts, such as promoting a sense of stability and normalcy, providing important relationships with peers, and opportunities for building life skills.[15] MHPSS in education in emergencies (EiE), including social-emotional learning (SEL), has been identified as an important pathway to address both children's mental health and psychosocial needs and to improve learning outcomes.[16] There is widespread interest from a range of actors in this type of programming, as well as increasing recognition that quality education is reflected not just in academic outcomes (such as literacy and numeracy) but also in those measuring learner psychosocial wellbeing.[17]

This clear interest in MHPSS programming across EiE is not currently matched by the evidence base. This includes a dearth of evidence to support effectiveness in terms of type of MHPSS in EiE intervention or implementation method; what groups/subgroups of children may most benefit; and how interventions can or should be adapted for specific contexts. Further, although research in high income and stable contexts shows influence of environmental and ecological factors on children's mental health and learning outcomes,[18] there is limited understanding of what aspects of classroom, school, household and community environments influence children's wellbeing and learning in humanitarian settings in LMICs.

Support for classroom-based MHPSS and SEL interventions is based on the proposition that such interventions can improve children's mental health and learning outcomes. The specific factors surrounding these interventions (in terms of delivery of the interventions, and the socio-ecological factors influencing children beyond the intervention itself) are complex and often poorly understood.[19] In addition, children, caregivers and teachers are more likely to actively participate in and benefit from classroom-based MHPSS interventions if the programs are relevant, acceptable and feasible.

This research is based on a social ecological framework that considers the complex interplay between the individual learner; their home and school environments; their community; the relationships built across these levels; the systems and institutions around them; and finally the policy and funding environment of humanitarian and education programming broadly.

Children learn in an environment that is situated within a larger "ecosystem." Their lives and wellbeing are notably influenced by their relationship with families or caregivers; with friends and peers; with teachers and school administrators; and with other community members such as religious leaders. Schools are a critical site of influence, and learners, teachers, and families see the role of education as contributing to holistic wellbeing, human development, and learning that includes both academic and life skills. Such education relies on actors and action in the education system largely, including education and health policies that reflect mental health and wellbeing of children as clearly articulated priorities.

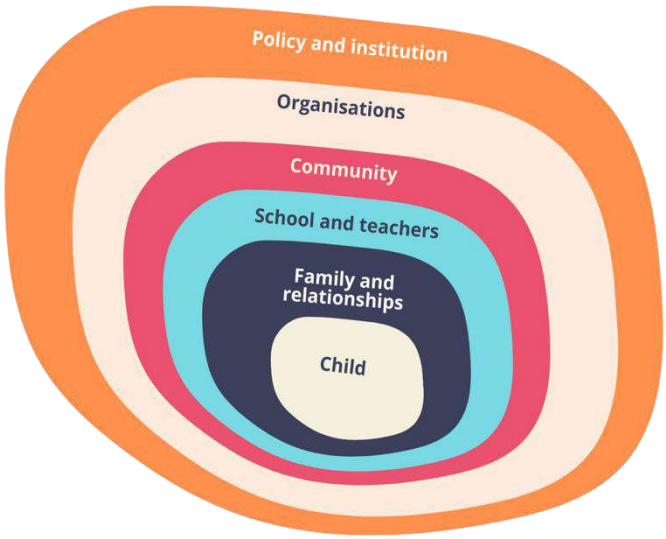


Figure 1: The social ecological framework for understanding children's psychosocial wellbeing in education contexts

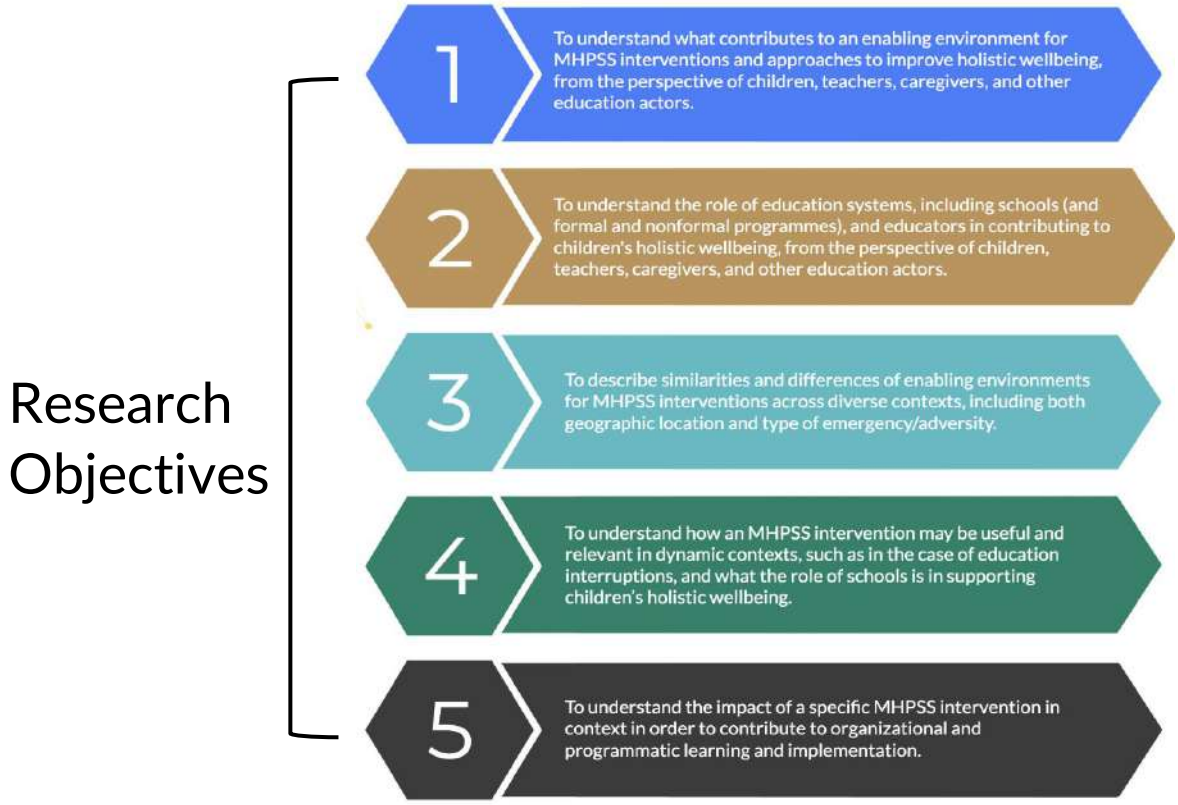
Improving understanding of this social ecology around learners can lead to more relevant and impactful program design and implementation, and provide the building blocks for future study of impact.

1.2 "MHPSS IN ACTION" RESEARCH INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

This research set out to examine the enabling environments for MHPSS interventions delivered in education settings in humanitarian contexts. The study consisted of two phases. The first phase included a significant desk review (culminating in the publication of a Realist Review[iv] of current evidence), an MHPSS global programme mapping exercise, and targeted expert interviews. Key learnings from Phase 1 directly informed the design of Phase 2, consisting of primary qualitative data collection in Colombia, Kenya, and Greece. The research focuses on key aspects of an enabling environments for MHPSS programme efficacy. Five primary research objectives underpin phase two of the project:

[iv] Lasater, M. E., Flemming, J., Bourey, C., et al. (2022). School-based MHPSS Interventions in Humanitarian Contexts: A Realist Review. BMJ Open, 12(1), e054856.

Figure 2: Research Objectives



The MHPSS Collaborative partnered with two implementing organizations to conduct the research. This included the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Kenya and Colombia to study their flagship PSS/SEL programme, the Better Learning Programme (BLP). In Greece, the team partnered with Amal Alliance to study their SEL programme, Colors of Kindness. For each country, specific Research Questions (RQs) were crafted based on the overarching research objectives. Additional RQs were developed in collaboration with the two implementing partner organizations via in-person workshop prior to the start of data collection. Country-specific sections of this report elaborate on the RQs per country.

1.2.1. AMAL ALLIANCE AND COLORS OF KINDNESS

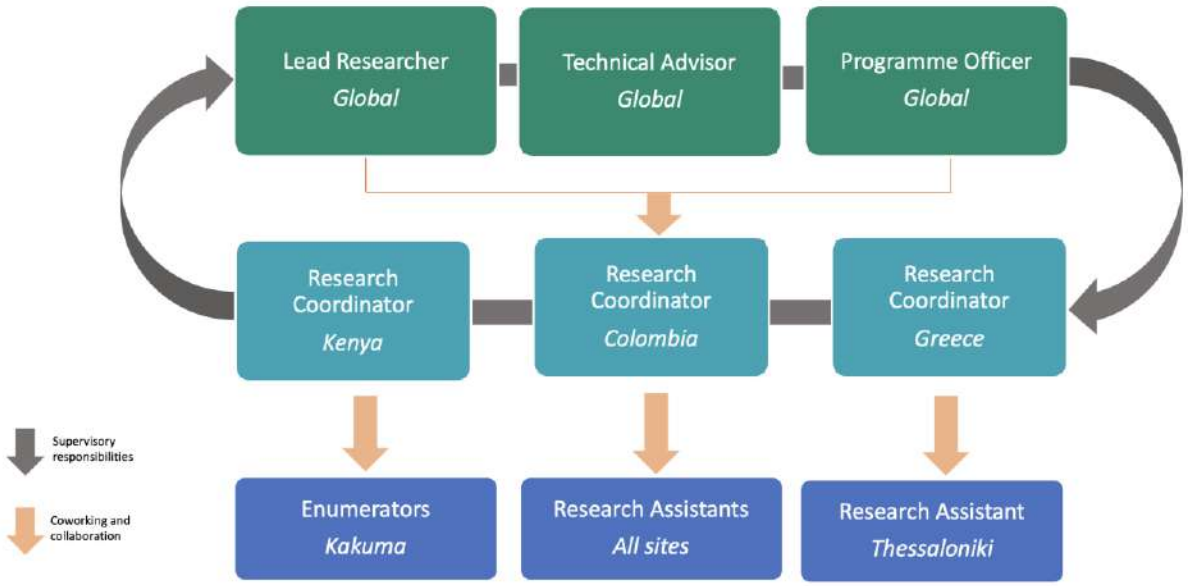
Amal Alliance is an independent humanitarian organization dedicated to empowering displaced and disenfranchised children through education and social development programmes around the globe in both refugee camps and formal school settings. Amal Alliance's Colors of Kindness (Colors) programme focuses on social emotional learning in order to (a) foster social and emotional skills of children to bridge the learning gap, (b) enhance the wellbeing of caregivers and their children, and (c) increase access to and engagement with distance learning. Amal Alliance works through its implementing partners (IPs) on the ground, who deliver Colors in their education response programming in locations across Greece.

1.3. APPROACH AND METHODS

1.3.1. RESEARCH TEAM

The research team was comprised of a six-person core team at the MHPSS Collaborative, plus enumerators or research assistants in each site. Figure 3, below, depicts the make-up of the research team. The team is comprised of both "global" and "country-specific" levels. While there is some indication of oversite amongst members in the table, the team was strategically structured to be a collaborative, non-hierarchal group of notable technical and contextual expertise. While Research Coordinators (RCs) in each location were, in first instance, responsible for their specific location, there was also strategic collaboration amongst the RCs as well as amongst the global and country-level teams.

Figure 3: Research Core Team Makeup



1.3.2. DATA COLLECTION

Across all sites, the target population for participation in the research included children, teachers, caregivers, implementing organization staff, school administration/boards, community-based education actors, university and research professionals, psychologists, and education officials (at local, regional, sub-national, national level). The sample sizes per location were based on most relevant principles of sample size for qualitative research (i.e. purposive sampling, maximum variation, and saturation). This allowed for disaggregation of the data by subgroups (e.g. gender, age) in each location as relevant for analysis.

The methodology used was a qualitative study of purposefully selected participants in Kakuma refugee camps, host communities, and the Kalobeyei settlement in Kenya; in five municipalities in Colombia; and

in sixteen locations/communities in Greece. In all locations, the sample included both learners that had and had not received the PSS/SEL intervention (Colors or BLP). The amount of exposure to the intervention differed by location, and is further described in the corresponding country section of this report.

Primary data collection was conducted by the RC, Research Assistants (RAs), and enumerators in all countries, supervised by the Lead Researcher.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

(1) ***Targeted document review:*** This included Colors / BLP programme documentation; additional Colors / BLP data, context and foundational documents; and policy and other programmatic documents as relevant;

(2) ***Qualitative data collection:*** This included Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and arts-based activities with children, teachers, and caregivers/parents. Researchers additionally collected data via Key Informant Interviews (KII) with principals, school management committees, school administrators, community members, implementing partners, Amal Alliance or NRC staff, other I/NGO staff, key regional and national education leaders, and other relevant stakeholders as identified in location.

(3) ***Introductory and Validation Workshops with implementers and other stakeholders:*** This included at least two workshops per country, facilitated by RCs in order to gain input into research design, research questions, preliminary findings, and analytical framing of findings.

The research team recorded all data collection activities and performed translation (when necessary) and transcription. Enumerators and RAs completed note-taking forms which were submitted upon completion of daily data collection activities. All data was input into the data analysis software MAXQDA.

1.3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, via team collaboration amongst the lead researcher and all RCs. The framework for analyzing data was both inductive and deductive in nature. All research objectives and questions informed the creation of initial codes; the team additionally partook in two facilitated preliminary analysis activities, in which RCs brainstormed new and emerging themes based on initial data review and the rest of the team fed back with additional probing questions. Based on this iterative process, a finalized coding scheme was crafted. Validation activities with the Amal Alliance or NRC team members provided additional inputs into points of interest, potential missing codes/themes, and areas to unpack or examine further.

All coding was conducted by the RC for their respective country. The lead researcher additionally reviewed all data and completed two reliability exercises with the coding scheme. Findings were triangulated across the data sources whenever possible.

1.4. LIMITATIONS, ETHICS, AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This research project demanded careful attention to ethics, with particular attention paid to the participation of children as well as others currently living in displacement contexts. In order to assure that ethical protocols were observed, all research team members involved in data collection participated in a specific training module on research ethics.

All three study sites were approved by Save the Children USA's internal ethical review board process. Additionally, in Kenya ethical approval was received through the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation and United States International University of Africa. All protocols were approved through these processes, and further reviewed/refined by implementing staff in location. All research team members adhered to Save the Children International Child Safeguarding Policy.

There were limitations in carrying out this research at both the global (across all three countries) and individual country level. Country specific limitations are included in the subsequent section of this report; notable shared limitations across all locations include the following:

- In all locations, a notable amount of flexibility was critical due to the dynamic nature of the contexts. While initial targeting and sampling strategy was created, it was necessary in all countries to adapt these plans once in the field. For any significant adaptation, additional IRB approval was sought. Often, however, this meant that the research team needed to be flexible and adapt protocols on the spot. This included, for example, the number of participants in an FGD; the number of learners or caregivers participating in total; the sites that could safely be visited; and the exact actors with whom interviews could be conducted.

- The number of participants is not equal across all sites (within country) of data collection; thus the research in each country is not intended to be representative of all locations equally. For this reason, the data analysis did not include "counts" of any kind that would represent an attempt to quantify responses.

- The implementation of BLP and Colors is intended for learners ages 6-16 (BLP) and 5-12 (Colors) and so the initial research plans mirrored this; however, on the ground, teams found that often there was a larger age range of children receiving the intervention. Thus, the sample reflects a larger age range overall (5-18) and age disaggregation is again not representative across all locations.

- There were some limitations in recording interviews, based on safety concerns, surrounding noise, or poor recording quality. In all countries, at least one data collection activity relied on the notes of the RAs or enumerators. In anticipation of this, multiple ways of recording data was planned for all events. However it does mean that not all events prompted high quality transcripts for coding. In these cases, the team coded their in depth notes to be analyzed. This creates some limitations, again, with regard to representation across sites.

- Translation was necessary for a majority of data. Translation was completed by RAs or the RC in each country. Back translating and check was conducted for a sample of the data in each country and reviewed in order to mitigate translation subjectivity, but it is noted that such subjectivity cannot be completely controlled for.

2. MHPSS IN ACTION IN GREECE: STUDYING AMAL ALLIANCE'S COLOURS OF KINDNESS PROGRAMME

2.1. GREECE COUNTRY CONTEXT AND ASYLUM POLICY

Greece is one of the main gateways to Europe for refugees and asylum-seekers from all over the world. For many decades the country has been a crossroads for people fleeing war, violence, conflict, fear of persecution and environmental disasters in search of safety. Today it remains one of the main entry points to the European Union (EU).

In 2015 Greece witnessed an influx of more than one million forcibly displaced people, from countries in the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia. This triggered the provision of emergency humanitarian response on a mass scale for the first time inside the EU. While the vast majority of displaced people subsequently navigated their way towards northern and western European countries, borders along the Balkan routes began to close which marked a turning point in population movements. With the landmark EU-Turkey deal[20] in March 2016, such onward trajectories were effectively restricted, and displaced people found themselves confined in Greek territory. Greece was no longer a transit country but a hosting country. Arrivals continued at a slower rate in subsequent years until the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. With this new nearby conflict, there was a renewed uptick in people seeking safety in Greece; by mid-2023 there were over 70,000 Ukrainian refugees in Greece.[21] As of February 2024, Greece hosted approximately 169,000 refugees, 18,000 asylum-seekers, and 17,800 stateless persons with the majority from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.[22]

Photo: Jenn Flemming

A note on terminology: *In European and international law, there are distinct legal terms used to group forcibly displaced peoples. These have a bearing on what rights a person is afforded and the below table provides the UNHCR descriptions for each term. In this report, unless otherwise specified, we use the term refugee to mean both refugees and asylum seekers for two reasons: first to use language that many forcibly-displaced people in Greece use to self-describe; and second, both children with refugee status and those awaiting an asylum decision have the same right to education.*

Table 1. Terminology

Refugee	*A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to seek safety. They cannot return to their*

	country without risking their life or freedoms. It is a legal term that carries with it certain protections that refugees are entitled to.
Asylum seeker	*An asylum-seeker is someone who intends to seek or is awaiting a decision on their request for international protection. In some countries, it is used as a legal term for a person who has applied for refugee status and has not yet received a final decision on their claim.*
Stateless person	*Article 1 (1) of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons defines a stateless person as 'a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law'.* *In the case of stateless refugees, it is important that both their refugee and statelessness status are explicitly recognized. However, refugee protection should be prioritized as the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention) entitles individuals to more rights than the 1954 Convention to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954 Convention). Most importantly, this includes protection against refoulement.*[23]

Greece is signatory to both the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol meaning it must abide by the principle of *non-refoulement*[v] which applies to both refugees and asylum seekers, and provide certain protection, rights, and assistance to those who satisfy the convention definition of 'refugee'.

As a Member State of the EU and the Schengen area, Greece also must adhere to the directives and regulations of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and the Schengen Borders Code, which requires that external borders be secured. Greece is also obliged to respect the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which recognizes the right to asylum.[2]

Policy versus practice

Despite Greece being bound by international and regional legal instruments which provide protection to displaced peoples, there are many gaps between policy and practice, as well as explicit violations of existing policies. These violations range from illegal refoulement of people at the borders (such as pushbacks), people who have applied for asylum, and people who have received international protection status[24]; to non-fulfilment of rights and protections for asylum-seekers and refugees.

Of particular note to this study are the failures in fulfilling the Reception Conditions Directive which ensures that asylum applicants have access to housing, food, clothing, health care, education for minors and access to employment.[25] As of 2022, reception accommodation is now confined to camps which are often in isolated areas, and there are many reports of inadequate to very poor conditions in camps

[v] The principle of non-refoulement obliges States not to expel or return (refoule) in any manner whatsoever a person to territories where his/her life or freedom would be threatened, i.e. where there is a risk of persecution or any other form of serious harm. This obligation is set out under the 1951 Convention, regional refugee law instruments, international or regional human rights law instruments and is binding under customary international law. https://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/legal-framework/access-territory-and-non-refoulement

including electricity and water shortages, poor hygiene and sanitary conditions, and lack of access to services due to remote location and poor transportation links. [26]


Photo: Jenn Flemming

These shortcomings and violations of policy compound exposure to potential psychological and emotional stress which refugees have likely already experienced as a result of their displacement. Refugees face stressors at various stages of the migration process, all of which, according to WHO, can increase the risk of developing mental health conditions.[27] A 2022 UNHCR study, which examines a number of the challenges and opportunities encountered by refugees and asylum seekers in Greece with regard to integration, reveals very high levels of psychological distress in these populations owing to violence and exploitation, legal status, and unemployment among other stressors.[28] Overall, this suggests that there is a pressing need for policy interventions which provide both psychosocial support and address the root causes of psychological distress among displaced populations.

2.1.1. EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE & ASYLUM-SEEKER LEARNERS

A child's right to education is a universal human right and the EU Reception Conditions Directive stipulates that asylum-seeking children and unaccompanied children should have access to the education system. Moreover, within Greek national law education is compulsory for all children, including refugees, aged 5-15, and authorities are obliged to provide the necessary and adequate means to support and facilitate access.[29]

In 2019 Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports (MoE) established compulsory pre-school education for children aged 4-6 years old, and caregivers can request a place for their child at child centers which are either run by the municipality or are privately funded.[30] Refugee children who are turning six can be enrolled directly in primary schools, and children older than six may present the relevant certification or declare the number of years they have attended school.[31]

Greece has a number of policies and programmes which are intended to support the integration of refugee children into the Greek education system. In 2016-2017, the MoE established the Reception School Facility for Refugee Education (DYEP). DYEPs are set up in response to the level of need in a

particular area and take into consideration the mobility, time of arrival, duration of stay, and size of the refugee population. The DYEP programme provides preparatory classes specifically for refugee children and these can take place either within camps or in public schools after mainstream classes have ended for the day.[32] The DYEP covers some of the subjects of the formal school curriculum including Greek, English, Math, Physical Education, Computer Science, and Arts.

Another programme which provides support to refugees is the Educational Priority Zones (ZEP). ZEP provide reception classes for any primary or secondary education students who do not hold the required level of attainment in Greek to join mainstream classes. This includes but is not limited to refugee students. Students with very little or no competence in Greek are entitled to fifteen hours per week of intensive Greek language lessons for up to one year, with the possibility of an extension.[33] Reception classes also take the form of language learning support for children who have an average level of competence in Greek but require additional support. This support is either provided as parallel tuition or inside mainstream classes, and can last for up to two years.[34]

In addition to the programmes, the MoE has appointed Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs) to help ensure integration of refugee children into formal schools. The REC sits within the MoE and acts as a liaison between the MoE, refugee populations, public schools, local and national authorities, as well as NGOs and the civil society sector. The RECs are responsible for awareness raising with parents, administrative follow-up of children's enrolment, regular monitoring of school attendance to address school dropouts, and monitoring visits to schools. The Scientific Committee of the MoE highlights the significant contribution of RECs to the integration process serving as "educators, counselors, in-service trainers, social workers, psychologists, friends and parents."[35]

While national policies and systems are in place to ensure the right to education for refugee children, there remain many gaps in both access and quality. Some of the major systemic challenges to education include the establishment and staffing of both ZEP and DYEP; the location of camps and a lack of transportation to bring children to schools; and timetabling issues for ZEP meaning children cannot also attend mainstream classes.[36] On top of this there are aggravating circumstances within the asylum system which inhibit access to education. These include a lack of documentation required to enroll in public schools; freedom of movement restrictions in some Reception and Identification Centers (RICs) and camps; education access limited by the type of accommodation; and lack of required vaccinations to enroll in schools. Furthermore, ZEP and DYEP face the criticism that while these programmes are intended to improve integration, in many


Photo: Jenn Flemming

instances this has created further segregation, with some arguing that the ghettoized life that has been created in the reception centers is mirrored in the schooling system.[37]

Given these shortcomings at the state level, the civil society sector including I/NGOs have scaled up their education response to fill gaps. This includes the provision of non-formal education (NFE) activities in urban or camp settings with the aim to provide learning support and increase retention in state schools, or provide education for children with no access to education at all. With the right to education being so precarious for refugee children, it is little wonder that access to MHPSS services for these populations are equally deprioritized by the state.

2.1.2. MHPSS FOR LEARNERS

The relationship between mental health and the asylum experience has been widely documented by academics, civil society organizations, and professionals working on the ground across Greece.[38] Research indicates that people on the move face an array of stressors and precarious conditions spanning all phases of the migration experience.

In Greece after the increased migratory flows, INGOs raised collective concerns about the mental health status of youth refugee and migrants, notably triggered by detention, lengthy periods of insecurity during the asylum process, absence of family members and familial support, lack of access to school or viable education opportunities. Withdrawal, self-harm, aggression and even suicide attempts are realities among this vulnerable population.[39] A Rapid Assessment of Mental Health, Psychosocial Needs and Services for Unaccompanied Children in Greece carried out by the Institute of Child Health showed that around 75% of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) have mild, moderate or severe mental health problems, with half of them related to aggressive and violent behavior and bullying, while 8% of UASC were found to have substance abuse issues.[40] The same assessment indicated that the unaccompanied minors face more challenges in regard to mental health and psychosocial needs support compared to the general population.

Greece is signatory to numerous international and EU conventions outlining the rights of children, including the right to health. Greece ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1992[41] and since then has established monitoring of child rights and national human rights institutions.[42] In accordance with article 28, paragraph 1, of the Constitution, the rules of international law, as well as international conventions, become an integral part of the domestic Greek law and prevail over any other opposite provision of law. Ministerial Decision (FEK 2289/11.06.2019) states that all children have access to public mental health structures. The national law on the Organization and Function of Community Mental Health Centers for Children and Adolescents states that Mental Health Centers protect the rights of people with mental health problems, as foreseen in the UN Convention on the Rights for People with Disabilities (adopted under Law 4074/2012). Community Mental Health Centers for Children and Adolescents are key providers of prevention services, diagnosis and therapy, certification, allowances and collaboration with other state agencies and service providers.

In March 2023, the Ministry of Health introduced the National Action Plan for Mental Health, a 10-year action plan (2021–2030) containing policies and interventions for the promotion, protection and enhancement of mental health for the population, and especially for vulnerable groups.[43] It aims to ensure universal access to mental health services and eradicate stigma and social exclusion. The overall

objective is to achieve deinstitutionalization, by establishing an integrated holistic, recovery-oriented, community-based mental health services system.

In 2021, Greece took significant steps towards integrating mental health services into the education system and made proactive efforts to expand access to mental health services within its educational framework through the provision of school psychologists in general education schools, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of mental well-being in academic success and overall development.[44] These services are supported by the School Education Support Network (S.D.E.Y.) and the Interdisciplinary Committees for Educational Evaluation and Support (E.D.E.A.Y.) (Government Gazette 315/2014). The school psychologist is joined by a social worker, and together this team serves five different general education schools. The role of the school psychologist is to provide support, to students, their families, and the educational staff. This includes assessment, individual and group counselling, consultation for teachers, the implementation of inclusive education programs, and the promotion of prevention, information and awareness programs for teachers, parents, and students.[45]

A situation analysis for children and youth in Greece conducted in 2020 by UNICEF shows that Greece has made considerable progress in addressing and improving the rights of children in the country, however, there is an unfinished agenda when it comes to ensuring full rights realization as set out in CRC.[46] Greece has one of the lowest levels of public expenditures in the social sector among EU Member States and yearly financial commitments for children and child-specific policies and actions remain unfilled. This particularly impacts rights realisation of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups - e.g. children from refugee, asylum-seeking, migrant, or Roma communities; children with disabilities; and children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds – where there remain barriers around equal access to basic services such as health and education. Particularly in regard to the right to health, consistent reductions in total health expenditure, in part due to the previous decade of economic crisis, has led to Greece investing over a third less than the EU average (1,623 euro per capita)[47] creating gaps in the provision of health services to meet existing needs.

A series of challenges remain for child and adolescent mental health care, mainly stemming from a lack of funding that was aggravated by the Greek economic crisis.[48] There is lack of specialised mental health services for children, while many geographical areas lack mental health services altogether and Community Mental Health Centers are seriously under-developed. As with a lack of health services more generally, the limited number of child-specific mental health services in Greece disproportionately affects children at risk and vulnerable children including children on the move.[49]

Considering the urgent needs around mental health, especially for children and adolescents, UNICEF states that improvements are needed around the sectoral framework and coordination between mental health services at national/subnational level and central government.[50] In addition, mental health support activities for children and adolescents is a planned key action of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan of Greece.[51] The Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce recommends that social workers and psychologists must be placed in all schools, in order to better address the needs of children and provide connection to other specialized services and support.[52]

2.2. COLOURS OF KINDNESS IN GREECE

Amal Alliance[vi] is an NGO that aims to empower displaced and disenfranchised children through holistic education and social development programs within four areas of focus: (1) SEL, (2) Psychosocial support, 3) Early childhood development, and 4) peacebuilding. Colors[vii] is Amal Alliance's innovative and trauma-informed SEL approach. Colors aims to improve children's social and emotional skills, increase the overall wellbeing of children and their caregivers, increase access to inclusive education, and support equitable access to holistic education and social inclusion.


Photo: Amal Alliance

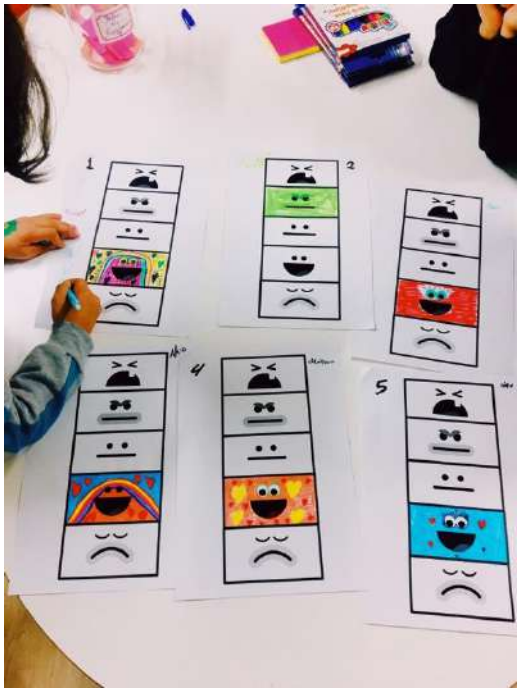
Colors focuses on six areas of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, creativity, social awareness, relationship-building, and responsible decision-making. SEL content is delivered through a series of podcasts and a digital workbook.[viii] Materials are accessible to teachers through an open-source app and Learning Management System (LMS) called Kolibri[ix] which works offline on low-cost devices and provides real-time implementation data that tracks teachers' use of each module. Colors has been contextualized for various locations of implementation, and there are different programme adaptations that include 10, 16, and 18 week modules. Colors modules are available in various languages.[x]

Colors is intended to be low-cost and scalable even in hard-to-reach contexts. Amal Alliance considers adaptability one of its key strengths. The content's design provides a foundational structure while leaving room for facilitators to create lesson plans and culturally responsive content that meets the specific needs of varying communities.

Colors was initially designed for EiE contexts, in which children face notable challenges in developing the academic, social and emotional skills and competencies needed to achieve their full potential. Since its design, it has been implemented in Bangladesh, Greece and Uganda. As of 2022, the Colors workbook had been downloaded in 175 countries, and approximately 276,000 children had been reached with its programming.[xi]

[vi] Amal Alliance website available at Amal Alliance
[vii] Colors of Kindness programme description available at Amal Alliance | Colors of Kindness
[viii] Colors of Kindness modules and SEL workbook can be accessed at Programs | Colors of Kindness
[ix] Kolibri can be accessed at kolibri.colorsofkindness.org
[x] Colors of Kindness modules and SEL workbook can be accessed at Programs | Colors of Kindness
[xi] Colors of Kindness website, Colors of Kindness | An innovative EdTech solution

In Greece, Amal Alliance implements Colors through its partners who integrate Colors into education response programming. Colors implementing partners in Greece are: Danish Refugee Council (DRC), ARSIS, Second Tree, Drop in the Ocean, Ladies Union of Drama, and Lifting Hands International.



Photos: Amal Alliance

2.3. APPROACH AND METHODS IN GREECE

2.3.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

At the start of the research, the MHPSS Collaborative team held an introductory workshop with Amal Alliance and the Colors implementing partners. A key objective of the workshop was to facilitate feedback on the content and methods of the project, most notably to add or adapt key research questions based on the needs and interests of Amal Alliance and IPs in order to assure the research results were useable and relevant to the implementation teams. The contextualisation of a set of global overarching questions was reiterated in bilateral feedback exchange with Amal Alliance. To respond to the specific learning needs and interest of Amal Alliance in the art-based component of Colors, a set of art-related questions was added which emphasized the collaborative approach and application-based priorities of the research itself. Based on this participatory process, an adapted set of research questions was developed for Greece. Their mapping onto the global overarching research objectives will allow comparison and commentary on the relevance of the research to global learning. These are indicated in Table 2, below.

Table 2. Research Questions for Greece

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1	What do children, caregivers, and teachers perceive to contribute to creating safe learning environments that promote holistic wellbeing and learning?
2	What do children, caregivers, teachers, and community members perceive is the role of education/schools/educators in contributing to the improved holistic wellbeing of children?
3	What do children, caregivers, teachers, and community members perceive is the role of creative or arts-based activities in schools to contribute to the improved holistic wellbeing of children?
4	How do teachers integrate the arts-based or creative activities into their classrooms? What are the enablers and challenges to these activities?
5	What is the perspective of partner organizations who are implementing Colors of Kindness with support/training from Amal Alliance?
6	What is the level of satisfaction and the perspectives of Colors of Kindness amongst different stakeholders in each context (for example, the MOE, INGO, UN, teachers, other community actors, etc.)
7	What is the sustainability of Colors of Kindness? And what is the role of Amal Alliance and the implementing partners once the implementation of Colors via Amal Alliance is over?
8	What is the impact of Colors of Kindness on the wellbeing of participating children, *from the perspective of children, caregivers, teachers, and communities?*
9	What is the impact of Colors of Kindness on families of participating children, *from the perspective of caregivers, teachers, and communities?*
10	What is the impact of Colors of Kindness on communities, *from the perspective of caregivers, teachers, and communities?*
11	What is the role of the arts-based component of Colors of Kindness, *from the perspective of caregivers, teachers, and communities?*
12	What is the impact of the arts-based component of Colors of Kindness, *from the perspective of learners, and caregivers, teachers?*

2.3.2. LOCATIONS OVERVIEW

A total number of 16 unique research locations were selected for this research. The locations included 15 Colors implementation sites and 3 sites for non-Colors engaged research participants. This section offers an overview of the methodology for the site selection process and the final research locations.

Research locations – Colors of Kindness implementation sites

As Colors was the focus programme study of this research, the first priority of the research team was to pre-identify locations in collaboration with Amal Alliance Colors implementers. During the introductory workshop, Amal Alliance IPs provided feedback on the selection of locations for research sites based on Colors implementation status, access considerations (including government permissions needed, especially in refugee camps), as well as staff capacity to support the data collection methods as outlined. Each IP integrated Colors programme within their ongoing non-formal education activities, either through a programme response within a refugee camp or through the operation of a community center in urban setting. Ultimately, the research locations included implementation sites from across the country and a variety of context and programme modalities covering both refugee camps and urban programming. The involvement of multiple locations and both camp-based and urban-based programme interventions offer a wide data ankle in terms of programmatic and contextual characteristics. The table below provides an overview of research locations with a breakdown of Colors site implementation per IP, type of site and type of learners.

Table 3: Research locations - Colors Implementation sites

Region	IP	Specific location	Type of site	Type of learners
Central Macedonia	DRC	Veria	Refugee camp	Refugees
Central Macedonia	DRC	Alexandreia	Refugee camp	Refugees
Central Macedonia	DRC	Lagkadikia	Refugee camp	Refugees
Central Macedonia	DRC	Diavata	Refugee camp	Refugees
Epirus	DRC	Agia Eleni	Refugee camp	Refugees
Epirus	DRC	Katsikas	Refugee camp	Refugees
Epirus	DRC	Fillipiada	Refugee camp	Refugees
Thessaly	DRC	Volos	Refugee camp	Refugees
Thessaly	DRC	Koutsochero	Refugee camp	Refugees
Attica	DRC	Schisto	Refugee camp	Refugees
Central Macedonia	Arsis	Thessaloniki	Community center	Refugees and host community

Epirus	Second Tree	Ioannina	Community center	Refugees
Central Macedonia	A Drop in the Ocean	N. Kavala	Refugee camp	Refugees
Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	Ladies Union of Drama	Drama	Community center	Refugees and host community
Central Macedonia	Lifting Hands International	Serres	Community center	Refugees

Research locations - Other sites (non-Colors engaged participants)

The selection of Colors implementation sites provided the guiding criteria for the identification of the rest of the research locations of non-Colors engaged participants (non-Colors learners and key state/NGO stakeholders). The wide geographical range of research locations identified for Colors implementation sites which ultimately had a country-wide coverage, entailed the equal expansion of site selection criteria for the rest research locations across the mainland of Greece.

Lesvos island, although it is not a Colors implementation site, was included in the research locations for key stakeholders due to the role the island played in the population movements and the attention it attracted globally for the living conditions of asylum seekers. Located in the Aegean Sea, just off the Turkish coast, since 2015 Lesvos has been associated with the arrival of millions of refugees into Europe, becoming a key location on the perilous journey known as the eastern Mediterranean route. In 2015, the residents of Lesvos were at the frontline of the humanitarian response, helping hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers to arrive safely on the island's shores and providing food and shelter. In the years that followed, however, EU and Greek state decisions on refugee crisis management associated the island with severe human right violations, precarious living conditions, restriction of movement and violent incidents that brought Lesvos in the media spotlight on countless occasions.

The table below provides an overview of research locations for key stakeholders and non-Colors learners.

Table 4: Research locations - Other sites (non-Colors engaged participants)

Region	**Specific location**	**Participants**
Central Macedonia	Thessaloniki	Refugee Education Coordinator
Central Macedonia	Thessaloniki	Child Protection NGO worker (social worker)

Central Macedonia	Thessaloniki	Non-Colors learners
Central Macedonia	Thessaloniki	Public school psychologist
North Aegean islands	Lesvos	Refugee Education Coordinator
North Aegean islands	Lesvos	Academic researcher in University of Aegean / Public school teacher
North Aegean islands	Lesvos	Child Protection NGO worker (psychologist)
Thessaly	Volos	Refugee Education Coordinator

2.3.3. PARTICIPANTS OVERVIEW

The research coordinator collected data from 62 individuals from 16 unique locations across Greece. The data was collected from four different participants' categories.

A) **Colors-engaged participants**: Included IP staff (teachers, social scientists, management & administration staff), Colors learners, and their caregivers. All nine Amal Alliance IPs in Greece were represented in the sample via participation of staff in KIIs, as well as by supporting the research logistics (such as mobilizing Colors learners and their caregivers).
B) **Non-Colors learners:** Included children who had no prior exposure to Colors.
C) **Key state & NGO stakeholders:** Included professionals from the Ministry of Education (Refugee Education Coordinators), the University of the Aegean, and non-Colors NGOs.
D) **Amal Alliance staff:** Included interviews with the CEO and implementing staff.

Data was collected through 42 data collection events (5 FGDs and 37 KIIs). FGDs were conducted with children (Colors and non-Colors learners), and KIIs were conducted with all adult participants. The key reason to shift from FGDs to KIIs for adult participants was to increase access to participation by offering virtual interviews across locations. Tables 5-7 below provide descriptive information about all research participants.

Table 5: Participant overview per data collection methodology

Participants category	Participants	FGD	KII	Total participants
Colors engaged participants	Child learners	4		20
	Caregivers		5	5
	Teachers		16	16
	Social Scientists		2	2
	Management / administration staff		5	5
Non-Colors learners		1		5
Key state & NGO stakeholders			7	7
Amal Alliance			2	2
Total data collection events		**5 FGDs**	**37 KIIs**	**62 participants**

Table 6: Total participants overview (breakdown by participant category, type, actor & gender)

Participant category	Participant type	Actor	Female	Male	Total
A. Colors engaged participants	Children learners	IPs	18	2	20
	Caregivers	IPs	4	1	5
	Teachers	IPs	12	4	16
	Social scientists	IPs	2		2
	Management / administration staff	IPs	5		5
B. Non-Colors learners	Children non learners	Art-engaged class	4	1	5
C. Key state & NGO stakeholders	Refugee Education Coordinators	Ministry of Education	2	1	3
	Public school psychologist	Ministry of Education	1		1
	Academic researcher in University of Aegean / Public school teacher	University of Aegean	1		1
	Child Protection NGO worker (social worker)	NGO sector	1		1
	Child Protection NGO worker (psychologist)	NGO sector	1		1
D. Amal Alliance staff	Founder & Executive Director	Colors designer	1		1
	Implementing staff		1		1
Total			**53**	**9**	**62**

Table 7: Colors Engaged participants breakdown per Colors IP

IP	Learners	Caregivers	Teachers	Social Scientists	Management/administration staff	Total
DRC			5	2		7
ARSIS	6	2	2		1	11
Second Tree		1	4		1	6
A Drop in the Ocean			4		1	5
Ladies Union of Drama	14	2	1		1	18
Lifting Hands International					1	1
Total	**20**	**5**	**16**	**2**	**5**	**48**

2.4. GREECE SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

In addition to the broad limitations indicated in the previous section, there were specific limitations of the research encountered in Greece. These include:

- From the beginning of the project, Amal Alliance and the Colors implementing partners flagged that gaining government permission for data collection in camps would be complex and lengthy, with a very low likelihood of being granted permission. As such, the research team made a decision to omit camp settings as a data collection site, and instead conduct KIIs with implementing staff outside the camps or virtually. This meant the research could not include the perspectives of children or their caregivers residing in refugee camps, and therefore the actual number of Colors learners and caregiver participants was lower than the proposed sample size. The wide geographical scope of the research sites which eventually had a country-wide coverage, including mainland and North Aegean, created significant logistical challenges to the data collection. In addition, multiple actors were targeted as part of the research, with each one having different operation plans, implementation timelines, organisational capacity, internal protocols and procedures, and work culture. This diversity required intense bilateral coordination efforts between the Research Coordinator and the IPs, tailored engagement approach, continuous adaptation of methodology, flexibility and adaptability from the side of research team to conduct data collection. The wide geographic coverage coupled with the heavy coordination needs made it unfeasible to conduct all data collection activities in person within the timeline of the project. In order to mitigate the operational challenges, an hybrid modality was applied and data collection events were either implemented in-person or virtually (out of the 42 data collection events, 31 KIIs were virtual). For the virtual KIIs it is acknowledged that physical distance creates potentially barriers to the establishment of trust and comfort between the researcher and the participant thus the depth of data collected might be affected.
- This research is not an impact assessment. However, it intended to capture and report the perspectives of educational actors and communities on the impact of Colors. Amal Alliance monitoring systems and methodology is intended to offer specific indication of impact; this research was intended to complement such data with in-depth and context-specific description.
- It was not possible to gather the same number of participants for each location and from each IP. The findings of the research therefore do not represent all locations or all IPs equally.
- Many KIIs and FGDs were held in Greek, since it is the native language of many participants. Some nuances may be lost in translation.
- Some recordings of the data collection events were not of high quality due to ambient noises or internet cuts. In these occasions, the data relies on the existing notes or the review from the RC who is better positioned to recall discussions or points made during discussions.

3. FINDINGS

This report summarizes the perspectives of learners, students, teachers, caregivers, psychologists, child protection workers, implementing staff, refugee education coordinators (representing MoE), and other education actors on the enabling environments to implement MHPSS programs in education settings. It refers to the actors that participated directly in interviews or focus group discussions of this study. Findings are organized into three sub-sections: (1) context overview; (2) holistic wellbeing and the role of education in context; and (3) Colors implementation in Greece. A summary of all findings is presented as Table 8, below.

The sections build from the general to the more specific of the studied intervention itself. An important foundation of this research was to create a holistic picture of the enabling environment around an MHPSS intervention, thus it is critical to report on contextual constraints and enablers, as well context-specific perceptions and understanding of wellbeing and MHPSS programming. These findings are constructed to be relevant to a broad audience of actors interested in MHPSS programming in the specific settings visited, but also Greece more broadly. The final section of findings presents the key findings related to Colors, which is intended for both the same broad audience but also specifically for Amal Alliance program and organizational learning.

Table 8. Findings

Findings: Context overview	
1	Displaced families across Greece face significant challenges in their daily lives—including unmet basic needs, financial insecurity, and the precarity of awaiting asylum decisions—which have notable impacts on mental health and wellbeing.
2	Refugee learners' varied educational experiences as well as exposure to risk in their countries of origin and while on the move impact their holistic needs and opportunities upon arrival in Greece.
3	Integration into Greek society is an ongoing challenge for refugee learners and their families.
4	Refugee services providers face many barriers in providing sustainable, quality support, including inconsistent coordination and collaboration with government actors.
5	Integration of refugee children into the formal school system is encumbered by persistent challenges at the policy, school, and classroom levels.
6	Across all research sites in Greece, there was limited access to MHPSS resources and services for refugee children and their families.
Findings: Holistic wellbeing and the role of education	
7	Research participants emphasize that a critical aspect of a safe learning environment is assuring the emotional and psychological safety of all children.

8	Caregivers, teachers, implementing partners, other education actors, and community actors describe the value of school and/or education as strongly linked to children's wellbeing, especially as a place to develop character and values, and to learn social and emotional skills.
9	Caregivers and teachers perceive school as playing an important role in fostering tolerance and exposing learners to diversity.
10	Children perceive the greatest sense of safety and wellbeing from their immediate environments, especially their homes and schools, and from their close relationships, particularly with family and friends.
11	Teachers, caregivers, and other education actors believe that supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students is a critical part of a teacher's job.
12	Teachers and education actors consider the involvement of caregivers as essential to children's education, but in the refugee context in Greece there are many systemic barriers to caregiver engagement.
Findings: Colors implementation and impact	
13	Colors is viewed as a positive, relevant, and effective approach by the majority of research participants.
14	The majority of Colors learners who participated in this research described positive impressions of Colors and could give specific examples of how they used it in their lives and how it made them feel.
15	Colors teachers describe the usefulness of Colors activities in their classroom and for supporting and understanding their students.
16	Teachers, implementers, and caregivers perceive a number of clear outcomes related to children's holistic wellbeing as a result of Colors. These include improvements in emotional recognition, emotional regulation and management, social and communication skills, self-esteem, and ability to express themselves.
17	Colors implementers perceive a number of learning outcomes that relate to learning readiness and improved concentration and engagement.
18	Colors implementers perceive that a whole-family approach to Colors could improve social and emotional skills and positively impact dynamics in the home.
19	There were a number of classroom-level challenges to successful implementation of Colors that were described by teachers and implementing staff. These included language, concepts and terms, age and development, duration of lessons, use of technology/tablets.

20	There were a number of implementation-level challenges to successful implementation of Colors. These included high turnover rate of teachers and implementing staff; lack of access to camps, living spaces, and caregivers; ongoing mobility of learners; and space-related limitations.
21	In all sites of implementation, Colors has been contextualized to meet the specific needs identified in each location.
22	Implementers and teachers had suggestions for program improvements, and these often related to requests for further guidance, as well as simplification due to the challenges of the implementation context.
23	Amal Alliance's sustainability strategy for Colors in Greece aims at institutionalization of Colors into the formal education system, with adoption by the Ministry of Education and eventual integration into the formal schools in Greece.

3.1. CONTEXT OVERVIEW IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MHPSS PROGRAMMING SUCH AS COLORS

In order to better understand the research findings, this document starts with context findings as a foundational step, ensuring background and environmental understanding in order to fully grasp the subsequent findings and recommendations. In Greece, these context findings—related to the lives of learners, families, and communities outside of school/NFE, as well as challenges of the education system more broadly—are relevant to understand the implementation of Colors, both in terms of implementation and impact. This includes a description of the sociocultural and economic issues faced by the target population, as well as how such factors affect their mental health and wellbeing. These details are also relevant for planning the logistical aspects of programming, such as access and materials.

Finding 1: **Displaced families across Greece face significant challenges in their daily lives—including unmet basic needs, financial insecurity, and the precarity of awaiting asylum decisions—which have notable impacts on mental health and wellbeing.**

Across all research sites, participants described the vulnerability of refugee families – both those living in camp settings and those integrated in host communities. Greek systems and processes for supporting and accommodating the basic needs of asylum seekers were described as inadequate, a perspective that is shared by refugees themselves, Greek host community members, NGO workers, and other education and humanitarian actors.

> *There is a lack of financial support for parents and families...which in turn leads to a lack of adequate food and access to clothing, hygiene products, etc. These are typical barriers faced by refugees in Greece.* ***Implementing Partner Staff***

> *I think it certainly is the precariousness, the insecurity of living in a hospitality structure (or a camp). The fact that now even very basic facilities and services, access to them is not a given. There is a lot of pressure and anxiety and uncertainty about what will happen in the*

future. Children do not have stability in the way they live in a "camp", and because, I work with a population of young children accompanied, that is, they are here with their families. I believe that anxiety and uncertainty are also transferred from the family to the children, so that the children themselves do not have clear motives and goals. But again, something I mentioned at the beginning, and I think it is the most important thing, is that even very basic services, such as access to food, health care, interpretation, and being able to communicate with key bodies and services are no longer a given for the population. ***Psychologist, Implementing Partner Staff***

Current refugee camp residents live in harsh conditions, characterized by electricity and water shortages, poor hygiene and sanitary conditions, lack of access to services (health, social services, education) due to the remoteness of camps, and lack of transportation options. These challenges are consistent across all of the locations of this research. The latter–the remoteness of camps and lack of transportation options—leaves refugee families often isolated and reliant on NGOs for aid. Such isolation further hinders the integration of refugees into Greek society.

Displaced families in Greece are in a specifically precarious position when waiting for asylum decisions, which can have notable impacts on the mental health and wellbeing of adults and, in turn, their children. From about 2015-2020, Greece was notoriously slow in processing asylum claims, with many asylum seeker families waiting significant periods of time—sometimes years—for final decisions or status updates.[53] Research participants—notably those familiar with the asylum process—described that this has been significantly improved in recent years. Still, the precarity of awaiting asylum decisions can be a significant cause of stress, anxiety, and other mental health concern for individuals.[54]

Laws and policies that offer protection and support to those awaiting decisions are often unclear and may change quickly. Research participants describe services and clear, up-to-date information as difficult to access. Even with the reduced number of total refugees currently residing in Greece compared to 2015-2018, there are significant barriers to refugee access to healthcare, education, employment, and livelihood opportunities.

The most basic challenge is the process of surviving during their transition into Greek society and... the ambiguity of the context as a refugee. There is no clear information about what exactly awaits them and people do not know where to get support when they arrive. There is some legal support from lawyers and organizations, but there is a general ambiguity, made worse by constant policy change [regarding asylum]. ***Refugee Education Coordinator***

In recent years, there have been changes to many official policies and approach to the management of and support to asylum seekers as they await decisions. For example, the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) program—which offered support to housing, as well as cash assistance and meals—was closed in 2022.

When policies change, there is change to the support the people receive. In May, [camps] started to cut off food support to families living in the camps if they received a negative asylum decision. ***Refugee Education Coordinator***

The lack of clarity on their future asylum status has significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of both adults and children. Research participants emphasize how such precarity and its impacts on

adults, in turn, impact the family as a whole and children, in particular. Due to often changing policies and support programs, refugees find themselves unsure of both their present and their future.

Finding 2: Refugee learners' varied educational experiences as well as exposure to risk in their countries of origin and while on the move impact their holistic needs and opportunities upon arrival in Greece.

Refugees in Greece originate from a wide range of countries and contexts, each with unique circumstances that led to their displacement. These differences in pre-migration experiences impact their interactions with and experiences of life in Greece. Research participants note how access to education and professional skills development in their home countries may better position refugees to find employment opportunities that match their qualifications. In contrast, those who faced prolonged displacement or limited educational opportunities may struggle to compete in the labor market, leading to financial instability and dependence on assistance programs.

Education actors note that, for learners, their educational background prior to displacement is relevant to integration into the Greek formal school system, as well as their experiences in non-formal education programming that seeks to support their transition to the formal system. Children who had consistent access to quality education in their home countries are likely to have a stronger foundation in basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. This can facilitate their transition into Greek schools and their ability to keep pace with their peers. Conversely, learners who experienced prolonged educational disruptions or had limited schooling opportunities may require more intensive support and remedial programs to bridge gaps in their knowledge and skills. The length of time spent out of school is another consideration, as extended periods without education can hinder children's cognitive development and social-emotional well-being.

The stark differences in the experiences of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine—the three origin countries with the largest refugee populations in Greece currently—exemplify this diversity of backgrounds and its impact, and was described in depth by research participants. Syrian refugees, who have been displaced for over a decade, often face the compounded effects of prolonged conflict, limited access to education, and the erosion of social and economic capital. Afghan refugees, many of whom have endured multiple displacements and exposure to violence, may grapple with the psychological toll of their experiences while navigating linguistic and cultural barriers. In contrast, Ukrainian refugees, who have been more recently displaced due to the ongoing conflict, may have had greater access to education and resources directly prior to their arrival in Greece, potentially facilitating their adaptation and integration.

The diverse backgrounds of refugee children and learners also have significant implications for their mental health profiles. Education actors in Greece—including teachers, psychologists, and NGO workers—note that exposure to traumatic events, such as violence, loss of loved ones, and forced displacement, can lead to a wide range of psychological and emotional challenges. Children from countries with prolonged conflicts, like Syria and Afghanistan, may have experienced multiple adversities over an extended period, increasing their risk of developing mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. On the other hand, children from more recent conflicts, like those from Ukraine, may be grappling with the acute stress of sudden displacement and the uncertainty of their future. These varied mental health needs require culturally sensitive and trauma-informed interventions that take into account the specific experiences and cultural backgrounds of each child.

> *She [the learner] does not feel safe in school, because there are big windows and doors. She is very afraid that someone could come inside and begin shooting people. She does not feel safe.* ***Facilitator/translator of FGD with learner from Ukraine***

Additionally, the presence of **unaccompanied minors adds another layer of complexity to the mental health landscape of refugee children in Greece.** Unaccompanied minors, who have been separated from their families or have undertaken the journey to Europe alone, are particularly vulnerable to psychological distress. These children often face a combination of traumatic experiences, including exposure to violence, exploitation, and the absence of a stable support system. Without the protective presence of family members, unaccompanied minors are at heightened risk of developing mental health issues and may struggle to access appropriate care and support services. The high number of unaccompanied minors among certain refugee populations, such as those from Afghanistan, underscores the need for targeted interventions that address their unique psychosocial needs and prioritize family tracing and reunification efforts. Providing a safe and nurturing environment, along with access to mental health services and educational support, is crucial for promoting the resilience and well-being of these vulnerable children.

Finding 3: Integration into Greek society is an ongoing challenge for refugee learners and their families.

Participants describe a lack of social inclusion, from passive lack of acceptance to explicit hostilities by the Greek communities alongside whom they live. There are many different—and often times conflicting—perceptions of this problem from both refugees themselves and the Greek actors that participated in this research. This finding underscores the complex dynamics at play in the integration process and the varying perceptions held by both refugees and Greek actors.

Barriers to social inclusion may be due to a range of factors, including language differences, cultural disparities, and limited opportunities for meaningful interaction with the host community. These obstacles can hinder the development of social networks and a sense of belonging, which are crucial for successful integration. Additionally, research participants described that refugees encounter discrimination and prejudice from some members of the Greek community, further exacerbating feelings of isolation and exclusion. Such experiences can have a detrimental impact on refugees' mental health, self-esteem, and overall well-being, making it more challenging for them to navigate their new environment and build a stable life in Greece.

> *There is racism and xenophobia in our society... When we have someone who does not look like us or resemble us, and have very different norms and culture than us, it is very difficult for us to take steps to accept them. And there is reproduction of this at the political level, and then refugees are made to live as second-class citizens. This is why it is not easy [to integrate into Greek society].* ***Teacher, NFE and Formal***

The conflicting perceptions of the integration challenge held by refugees and Greek actors add another layer of complexity to the issue. According to research participants, refugees may perceive the lack of social inclusion and acceptance as a result of systemic barriers, discrimination, and inadequate support from the host community and government. They may feel that their efforts to integrate are hindered by limited access to language classes, vocational training, and employment opportunities. Simultaneously, some Greek actors attribute the integration difficulties to cultural differences, the reluctance of refugees to adapt to Greek norms, or the strain on local resources and infrastructure. These divergent perspectives

highlight the need for open dialogue, cultural sensitivity training, and collaborative efforts to foster mutual understanding and build bridges between refugee and host communities.

The challenges of integration into Greek society have particularly profound impacts on refugee children, affecting their social, emotional, and educational development. **For children living in camps, there is significant isolation from their peers that make integration challenging.** According to research participants, the inability to invite friends to their homes can lead to feelings of loneliness, exclusion, and stigmatization among refugee children. Lack of interaction with Greek peers can hinder children's language acquisition and cultural understanding, further impeding their integration into the host society.

> *These kids live in a camp with a wall that is six meters high, and they need to check in and out every time they come and go from the camp. Soon there will be x-ray machines when they come and go, too. [This leads to] a sense of feeling trapped, of being in prison, of not being able to move freely, of feeling like a secondary citizen, and of not being treated like everyone else.* ***Implementing Staff***

The limited opportunities for refugee children to socialize with their Greek counterparts also have implications for their educational experiences. Schooling plays a crucial role in facilitating integration, as it provides a structured environment for children to learn, interact, and build friendships. However, if refugee children feel isolated and disconnected from their classmates, they may struggle to fully engage in their studies and participate in extracurricular activities. This can lead to academic difficulties, reduced motivation, and a heightened risk of dropping out of school.

Finding 4: Refugee service providers face many barriers in providing sustainable, quality support, including inconsistent coordination and collaboration with government actors. Since 2015, there has been significant concern about the sustainability of the support provided by I/NGOs throughout Greece.

This finding emphasizes the complex landscape of refugee support services and the difficulties in ensuring effective and coordinated assistance in partnership with the Greek government. I/NGOs play a crucial role in providing essential services and support to refugees, including healthcare, education, legal aid, and psychosocial assistance. Simultaneously, the Greek state maintains ultimate control and provision of many of these services, including control of all camps, as well as granting approval for work of the I/NGOs.

In Greece, both international and national organizations operate under challenging circumstances, such as limited resources, bureaucratic hurdles, and shifting political priorities—all of which occur both within Greece and on the global humanitarian front. The research suggests that I/NGOs in Greece encounter considerable obstacles in their efforts to deliver comprehensive and sustainable support to refugee populations. These challenges can range from inadequate funding and staffing to difficulties in accessing refugee communities and navigating complex legal and administrative frameworks.

Simultaneously, the research points to numerous examples of I/NGOs and the government working in alignment and collaboration.

> *As a representative of the Ministry of Education and working in the public schools... I think we had an excellent relationship with the NGOs. We had no problems, we have very good cooperation. We achieved a lot and believe that the NGOs helped a lot, especially with support for the whole families even after they have left this location.*

With the closure of the ESTIA program, I know there were many problems, but for us there was a very good working relationship. ***Refugee Education Coordinator***

The incongruous descriptions of how I/NGOs and government actors work together further complicate the landscape of refugee support. While effective coordination amongst actors is essential, the research indicates that there may be discrepancies in how this collaboration is perceived and experienced by different stakeholders. **Within this project, some I/NGO actors report positive and productive partnerships with government agencies, while others describe a lack of coordination, communication, or mutual understanding.** These inconsistencies can lead to duplication of efforts, gaps in service provision, and a fragmented approach to addressing the complex needs of refugee populations. While there was considerable coordination amongst humanitarian actors in the early phases of refugee influx (i.e. around 2015-2016), such coordination mechanisms have largely dissolved over time as the overall number of displaced persons decreased.

The challenges faced by I/NGOs and the inconsistencies in their collaboration with government actors can have significant implications for the quality and effectiveness of refugee support services. When I/NGOs struggle to function due to resource constraints or operational barriers, it can lead to reduced capacity to meet the basic needs of refugees, including their educational, health, and psychosocial requirements. Moreover, a lack of coordination between I/NGOs and government agencies can result in a patchwork of services that may not adequately address the holistic needs of families and individuals.

Implementer staff that took part in this research, for example, describe the challenges they face due to restricted access to camps. In multiple interviews, staff for these I/NGOs noted that critical aspects of their programming, such as parental engagement, were often impossible since they had limited ability to visit the homes of learners and interact with caregivers.

Simultaneously, official education actors representing the MoE emphasize that—since the ultimate goal for the education of refugee learners is integration into the formal system—state actors such as the DYEP should be the first line of educational response. These actors note that I/NGOs often do good work when in close collaboration with the official Greek response efforts; however, this good work occurs alongside much unsustainable, short-term programming that is often unclear in how it intends to prepare children for formal school. Many I/NGOs in Greece since 2015 have functioned for short time periods, with international staff and often short-term volunteers. This lack of consistency, paired with the lack of clear information of official pathways for refugee learners, has created a complex and often poorly functioning system of support for children and families.

Additionally, research participants note the negative perception of I/NGOs that is (or was) held by many local communities in Greece. Alongside anti-refugee sentiment as described in Finding 3 above, there has been considerable pushback against I/NGOs and those working with them.

NGOs have been demonized by the people, as well as in the public discourse, which has created a very hostile attitude. We see this a lot here in the societies of the islands, which includes a very hostile attitude towards the NGO workers, the volunteers, those who are friends or interact with refugees. There have been extreme events, people and organizations that are helping have been criminalized. There have been attacks on people. Yes, NGOs are helping, but then there are the reactions to that help by society. ***Teacher, Formal***

Importantly, Amal Alliance describes an effective and collaborative relationship with the Greek government, characterized by open communication and shared goals. Amal staff offered explanations of this successful relationship that included regular dialogue, respect for processes and structures of permissions, patience, and an alignment of efforts. As is elaborated on in Section 3 of the findings, Amal operates through implementing partners on the ground, and these organizations are a mix of Greek and international NGOs. As of the time of this research, Amal Alliance was also working with the Greek MoE to integrate Colors into the formal school system as the country's official strategy for social emotional learning.[xii]

Finding 5: Integration of refugee children into the formal school system is encumbered by persistent challenges at the policy, school, and classroom levels. Such challenges include multiple languages spoken, overage learners, and learners with serious behavioral challenges.

Challenges to integration from NFE to formal school

Refugee learners are intended to be integrated into the Greek formal school system. However, there are a number of integration challenges, which are addressed via the DYEP classrooms as well as the provision of nonformal education programming (implemented by NGOs) specifically targeting refugee learners. While the ultimate goal of both DYEP and the nonformal programs is integration into the formal system (or provision of education prior to that integration), certain challenges persist across both formal and nonformal spaces.

Research participants who are actors in the education space (teachers, refugee education coordinators, NGO staff) interacted with learners in these three space: NFE programming, DYEP spaces, and the formal schools. Participants noted significant challenges in cooperation and coordination across these spaces – all of which were intended to support refugee learners in their integration into both the formal education system and Greek society broadly.

DYEPs are intended first and foremost to support refugee learners in language skills in order to help them transition to the formal school classrooms. These classrooms are also meant to support learning readiness—a key approach for learners who have often missed out on significant periods of schooling. Research participants describe that teachers are often inexperienced in working with refugee populations, including how to manage behavioural challenges and cope with multi-language and multi-age classrooms. Significant turnover of these teachers (due to the structures of teacher assignment dictated by national education policy; young teachers are assigned to specific posts but "move up" to better posts over time) mean a lack of consistency for students, as well as a lack of application of learning on the part of teachers. Additionally, these classes are typically set up in response to demand, so refugee students whose addresses may not be registered are often not able to access such initial education opportunities.

Refugee education coordinators who participated in the research also described the challenges of coordination across the system. Outreach to parents, for example, may be construed as appropriate for the formal school officials only. Formal school teachers are often not prepared to support learners with

[xii] While this process was outside of the scope of research, documentation of the successes and challenges of the experience would provide notable learning opportunity for stakeholders working in the MHPSS, education, and humanitarian space.

histories of exposure to violence and trauma, nor to navigate the social complexity created when students within a classroom cannot communicate because of language barriers. The role of refugee education coordinator also comes with little power—research participants expressed significant frustration when recognizing a problem or a child in need, but had no recourse to effect change in that child's circumstances.

Challenges to integration at classroom level

Education actors—including teachers, implementers, and NGO staff—describe **the prevalence of mental health and psychosocial challenges among refugee children, such as significant behavioral issues that become apparent in an education setting.** Learners have been exposed to violence, loss, and displacement, and these experiences can manifest in various behavioral and emotional difficulties, such as aggression, withdrawal, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating. When left unaddressed, these MHPSS challenges can significantly impact refugee children's ability to learn, form healthy relationships, and thrive in the school environment. Schools and educators are often not adequately equipped or trained to identify and support children with MHPSS needs, further compounding the challenges of integration.

> *[When a child shows sign of needing additional support], what I want is to have a meeting with the parents. I want the parents to come here to the school; for an interpreter to come (arranged by the school via a Greek NGO); for the school psychologist if there is one to come; for the classroom teacher to come. If there is also a Reception Class, I want the Reception Class teacher to come... I want to have this meeting with the parents, to let them know what we are doing and why, what the school is offering the child, how we are going to try to help. Because all together, we can [provide] support for the child above all, but also for the parents to feel safe. To know that their child is in a safe environment. If they don't feel that way, we have lost. And this is not happening. Although this is the plan, it is not happening.* ***Refugee Education Coordinator***

Teachers and coordinators describe instances of severe bullying, often attributed to a lack of possible communication due to language barriers. Coupled with behavioral issues—teachers and coordinators describe aggression, lack of emotional control, and poor communication or social interaction skills—there are notable challenges in all types of education setting.

> *Psychologists need to be here...We say that we try to create a safe environment at school, a positive climate for the learners. But when there is problematic behavior, teachers do not know where to turn. I have seen schools go to the extreme of calling police [when there is aggressive behavior]. I believe we must focus, above all, on the safety and proper mental health support of all children. Not only refugee children, but all children.* ***Refugee Education Coordinator***

Another primary challenge described in the research at the classroom level is the **multiple languages spoken by refugee children** upon arrival in Greece. Since there are a range of origin countries, newly arrived learners have a range of linguistic needs which makes integration challenging. Even in the context of the REC classrooms—which emphasize language skills to prepare children for formal classrooms—numerous languages within a class poses considerable challenges to both teachers and learners. In nonformal education spaces, often learners have yet to encounter any language support in Greek or English, meaning communication and learning poses notable challenges.

Linguistic diversity can hinder effective communication between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves which leads to barriers in both learning and social interaction. Without adequate language support and resources, refugee children often struggle to keep pace with their peers and fully engage in the educational process.

> *A big challenge is when they are in [formal] school, they struggle to integrate with their classmates because they can't catch up to the level of Greek and of English that might be spoken in the classroom. They perhaps feel quite behind their peers...and sometimes a bit ostracized by their peers, not able to fit into the social groups that have already been formed at that age. I think all of those things can present big challenges. And these children...will often have had large chunks of their school years missing because of all of the things that they have been through in their lives, such as having to leave behind their homes.* ***Teacher, NFE***

Another significant challenge is the **presence of overage learners** among refugee children. Many refugee children have experienced prolonged educational disruptions due to displacement, conflict, and limited access to schooling in their countries of origin or transit. As a result, they may be significantly older than their grade-level peers when they enter the Greek school system. This age gap can create social and academic challenges, as overage learners may feel out of place and struggle to adapt to the curriculum and classroom dynamics designed for younger students.

Research participants were also able to describe positive experiences providing education and MHPSS to refugee learners – most of these descriptions were community-based and focused on familiar, culturally relevant approaches to education.

> *We held classes in small groups for Afghan asylum seekers, which could be attended by both adults and children. There was great intimacy in the space, because it felt like a center for the whole community of people in Moria (i.e. the largest camp in Greece from 2015 to 2020) and they felt a sense of security. Was it the intimacy in the cultural background? Was it the common language? The fact that the parents could go there with the child and also learn English? I am not sure why it worked, but there was a familiarity, an intimacy, there was a greater comfort and I could see that the children felt safe coming in and out of the space. They felt the place was their own. This was effective.* ***Refugee Education Coordinator***

Finding 6: Across all research sites in Greece, there was limited access to MHPSS resources and services for refugee children and their families.

Research participants emphasized that school psychologists and counselors are intended to be present in all formal schools. Participants who worked in the education space beyond NFE noted that specialized psychological services for children were often provided by I/NGOs, which were often more accessible than through the formal system.

Implementing partners employed their own referral mechanisms for learners that were identified (often by teachers) as needing specialized services. Still, implementing staff, teachers, and other education actors noted that specialized services and MHPSS resources broadly were not readily accessible, nor was information regarding where to obtain such support. Participants—especially those working within the Greek education system—emphasized that progress (in the form of policy and training) had been made to

address these gaps for refugee learners (and for learners more broadly in Greece) in recent years. However, in practice access to such support continued to be extremely limited.

> *There is now formally in many schools the presence of a psychologist-social worker. But rarely with daily attendance at school. However, the positive thing is that more and more such workers are entering our schools. But again, not in all schools. There are programs as we said. For example, this year we did one for emotional education and training, with an addiction prevention center. I think that we are not the only school, that is, I hear from other colleagues that these programs exist, but these are somewhat more circumstantial, and rare. That is, to have a psychologist or counselor that supports the school, I think is basic and that it would be very useful to exist in our schools in general.*
> ***Teacher, NFE and Formal***

WHY ARE THESE CONTEXT RELATED FINDINGS IMPORTANT IN RELATION TO MHPSS PROGRAMMING?

For actors that wish to address the MHPSS needs of refugee communities in Greece, there is a need to understand how context interrelates with specific MHPSS challenges. In order to implement a successful MHPSS program, it must be context-sensitive, leading to certain questions that are critical to ask before implementation:

- What are the specific challenges of this community and the impacts these challenges have on community members?
- What are the specific needs of this community that are not met, and how can a program contribute to them?
- How does the program consider the current education system, including its limitations and challenges in relation to any school-based MHPSS intervention?
- How does the program consider the diversity of the communities, including their cultural references and values?
- How can a program assure inclusivity from the outset, and in particular in a context where there are specific children who may be more difficult to reach/include such as overage learners, learners with disabilities, and girls?
- What MHPSS services are available and how can the program generate coordination to facilitate access to them?

Overall, these context findings in Greece emphasize how, ideally, MHPSS programs need to be accompanied by interventions that help meet the basic needs of the population in order to truly improve mental health and wellbeing. In addition, there are significant current challenges within the education system itself that will persist as obstacles to the success of a school-based MHPSS intervention. It is critical to consider how an intervention implemented in schools may itself be impeded by those same challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms or multiple languages. Ultimately, the goal is to effectively and inclusively reach children in the context of these challenges.

3.2. UNDERSTANDING HOLISTIC WELLBEING AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN CONTEXT

Wellbeing and the role of education in supporting children's holistic wellbeing were a central topic of the research. The second group of findings emphasizes the perceptions of educational communities around learner wellbeing and how it is related to education programming—in particular the NFE that children attend—as well as formal school. When implementing education-based MHPSS programs, it is crucial to understand how different actors perceive school/NFE, and in particular what space and support are available for non-academic activities and how such activities are valued.

Finding 7: Research participants emphasize that a critical aspect of a safe learning environment is assuring the emotional and psychological safety of all children.

Research participants acknowledge the relative physical safety of children and their families since arriving in Greece (in comparison to countries of origin or the journey to get to Greece), but note that their psychosocial needs are often significant and there is a notable lack of support in the Greek asylum and education systems. **This finding emphasizes that emotional and psychological safety is viewed as foundational for both wellbeing and education, and that it is a first and necessary step to build from in the school.**

Refugee children often have a distinct mental health profile shaped by their experiences of violence, loss, and displacement. The trauma and adversity they have faced can lead to a range of psychological and emotional challenges, such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and difficulties in social interaction.[55] [56] These mental health concerns have been well-documented in Greece, and are emphasized by teachers, implementers, and Greek education actors in this research. Children grapple with the psychological aftermath of their past experiences, as well as the ongoing challenges of adapting to a new environment, language, and culture—and the challenges of daily life as a refugee in Greece.

> *When we talk about a refugee population, we are talking about a child who does not have...a stable environment in which he resides and grows up. So it is very important to try to create safe conditions and a stable environment for these children in [education] spaces. And it is important to support them with skills they need, which will help them during the period they live in the camp... but the constant changes in conditions, and the changes to their refugee status... this does not create good conditions for the wellbeing of children.* ***Teacher, NFE***

Teachers, education implementers, psychologists, and other education actors **describe significant psychosocial and mental health challenges amongst refugee learners, and note that these are often far beyond the capacity of teachers or schools to deal with.** Many research participants describe the lack of capacity in schools to provide the psychological and emotional support that refugee learners need to be able to meaningfully participate in education, as well as to maintain a safe environment for all students.

> *There was a child who held a knife to another child in the classroom. The school called the police. When they came, they discovered it was about bullying...the child had been bullied so much by the others at school... They could not communicate because of the language barrier. This is a problem, making the school unsafe. And the school has no ability to respond to this correctly, so they called the police.... The child had very real needs for*

support, and the school should be proactive in seeing this and making a plan. ***Refugee Education Coordinator***

Participants underline the critical need for refugee children to develop stress and emotional management skills, as well as effective communication abilities, in order to establish a baseline of safety in their educational environment. **Teacher, caregivers, implementing staff, and other education actors describe the importance of providing emotional and psychological safety within the learning environment, and emphasize that this is a central role of school.** It is only once such safety has been established that schools, teachers, and program staff may build onto this in order to support overall wellbeing and resilience. This safety means creating a nurturing, supportive, and inclusive atmosphere where children feel valued, respected, and understood. A central aspect of that safety is being able to communicate and form trusting relationships with both adults and children.

I believe the most important to create a safe environment for children is to establish relationships of trust between the teacher and the children. To have a stable framework in which children feel comfortable and are freed to express their opinions, and yet there need to be clear boundaries for safety. A challenge is that all of this takes space and time. And also stability, which honestly can be difficult to maintain in our context, because everything changes every day. But we try to keep a stable schedule, to have fixed hours that we pick up the children and to remind them when they do not come, we outreach to find them so we create this condition of responsibility. We slowly to establish relationships of trust with the children. ***Teacher, NFE***

Education here should be about getting children to a level at which they can interact as equals with their [Greek] peers. So that there is not this sense of… ostracization, of racism, of discrimination. But I think that that is very often is lacking, that this is not accomplished in the schools here. ***Implementing staff***

A safe learning environment prioritizes the emotional well-being of all children, recognizing that their ability to learn and thrive is closely linked to their mental health and sense of security. As noted above, this is foundational and should be a first step to establish safety in the education space. According to this research, there are still considerable challenges to establishing that feeling of safety for refugee children in the formal schools, in the DYEP classrooms, and even in nonformal spaces.

Finding 8: Caregivers, teachers, implementing partners, and other education actors describe the value of school or education as strongly linked to children's wellbeing, especially as a place to develop character and values, and to learn social and emotional skills.

While research participants note that the establishment of feelings of emotional and psychological safety and security is the first step in an education response for refugee children (Figure 7), they also emphasize how school and education programming can build on such safety to develop children's holistic skills. Caregivers, teachers, implementers, and other education officials describe the crucial role that schools play in promoting the well-being of children, particularly in terms of character development, learning values, and the acquisition of social and emotional skills. This finding underscores the perceived importance of education beyond academic learning, recognizing the holistic needs of children and emphasized for those in Greece who have experienced displacement.

The classroom is where children learn lessons, they learn to socialize, to express themselves... standard knowledge for life. ***Caregiver***

The role of education for children is to act as a catalyst. The school is the first 'society' of its own, a context in which [children] will begin to develop character. To grow and cultivate the child. The school has a catalytic role in the child's well-being. ***Teacher, NFE***

Teachers, caregivers, psychologists, refugee education coordinators, and other education actors describe the role of education in developing children's character, values, identity, and sense of self. Displacement can disrupt a child's sense of identity and belonging, leading to feelings of confusion and isolation. Schools should provide a stable and nurturing environment where children can explore and affirm their identities, both as individuals and as members of their communities. Education plays a vital role in promoting values such as respect, empathy, and tolerance. Through explicit values education and the modeling of positive behaviors by educators and staff, schools help refugee children develop social and emotional skills which can contribute to improved wellbeing and resilience.

As was stated in Finding 7, the development of children's social and emotional skills is reliant on relationship building. Teachers and refugee education coordinators, in particular, describe how relationships and social skills are absolutely central to an education system, and that these skills are particularly important for refugee learners.

Apart from the academic objectives, there are also the emotional and the social goals for the children. The aim of the educational process is not only to learn the subject and to transfer information about it, but at the same time to develop life skills. For me it is very important and inherent to the wellbeing of the students, that children feel that school is a safe space where they feel good, can discover themselves, can develop their abilities. There are no expectations about who they will be, that is, in the classroom they can be themselves. ***Teacher, NFE***

Education is critically important. It contributes to the mental health of each person, and to their growth. Especially at a very young age, when a child goes to school it creates a fuller, bigger picture of their life. The world beyond just the home or family. Without school, a great deal of socialization is lost. Children need to have this stimuli, in order to learn rules, to be able to express themselves as a person, to gain the necessary social skills. ***Psychologist, Implementing Staff***

Finding 9: Caregivers and teachers perceive school as playing an important role in fostering tolerance and exposing learners to diversity.

Research participants emphasize the importance of education as a means of fostering social cohesion, promoting diversity, and nurturing values of tolerance and understanding among all students. School is a place where children are exposed to diversity, and an important role of education is teaching about diversity and understanding across differences. Schools therefore play a crucial role in facilitating the integration of refugee children with their peers.

For all children in Greece, the school environment serves as a primary avenue for interaction and engagement with children from different backgrounds, including both refugee children and those from the host community. These interactions are essential for breaking down barriers, dispelling stereotypes, and building bridges of understanding between refugee and Greek children. Through shared experiences in the classroom and during extracurricular activities, children have the opportunity to form friendships, learn about different cultures, and develop a sense of belonging.

Teachers and caregivers both describe how exposure to diversity within the school setting is a key factor in promoting tolerance and appreciation for difference among children. They note that Greek children benefit from the presence of refugee students in their classrooms, as they learn to appreciate and value diversity, challenge their own biases, and develop empathy and understanding for those who have experienced displacement. However, such tolerance and integration must be highly valued and supported at the school, classroom, and individual teacher level. **Research participants note that while some teachers and schools are committed to such inclusive practices, these are likely rare in Greece as a whole**.

Still, research participants largely believe that schools play a critical role in addressing and preventing discrimination, xenophobia, and bullying that children, and especially refugee children, face.

> *For the refugee children, they need to become part of society, to make friends here...Now, when they make a friend at school, their friend cannot come to the camp and visit their home. First, it is difficult because of the distance, and second the security is so strict in the camps that it is very difficult for children to leave or enter. An important part of wellbeing is being able to socialize, to learn to exist in a social context, to develop relationships, and to express themselves with children their age, to develop a framework and understanding to learn these social skills. The most important thing is to have that framework, and for children of refugee backgrounds that is just impossible at the moment.* ***Teacher, NFE***

Finding 10: Children perceive a sense of safety and wellbeing from their immediate environments, especially their homes and schools, and from their close relationships, particularly with family and friends.

The immediate environments and close relationships play a key role in shaping the sense of safety and well-being among children. This finding highlights the importance of fostering nurturing and supportive spaces, both at home and in school, and the significance of strong family and peer connections in promoting the overall welfare of refugee children. Figure 4 displays answers from the learner FGDs.

Figure 4: Learner perspectives

The research suggests that children derive the greatest sense of safety and well-being from their homes and secondly schools, both of which serve as primary anchors in their lives. These environments provide a sense of familiarity, routine, and predictability, which can be particularly comforting for children who have undergone significant upheaval and change.

At home, the presence of supportive family members—including parents, siblings, or extended family—is essential for creating a safe and nurturing environment. Family relationships offer a source of emotional support, comfort, and belonging. Children describe engaging in outings and activities with their families as enhancing their wellbeing. As well, peer relationships offer a source of companionship, emotional support, and shared experiences. Children emphasize that at school they tend to turn towards their friends for support, while at home to immediate members of their families.

A child's illustrations of (1) where they feel safe, (2) what they do to feel safe, (3) what relationships are most important, and (4) what experiences contribute to their wellbeing.

> *There are places that make me feel good—walking by the sea, the mountain, the fields. I am altogether with my family and it makes me relax. There is a nice landscape, I can make a wreath with leaves. It takes away my tension.* ***Learner***

Similarly, schools play a role in providing a safe and supportive environment for refugee children. Children, caregivers, and teachers describe how positive relationships with teachers, school staff, and peers contribute significantly to children's wellbeing. When schools create an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere, foster a sense of belonging, and provide opportunities for meaningful engagement, refugee children are more likely to feel safe, valued, and supported.

> *I feel cared for in school because I am with my friends. When I have a problem, I can share it with them and they understand me without judging what I say. They give me advice and generally it helps me a lot to talk to them.* ***Learner***

Simultaneously, children describe negative experiences at school that lead them to feel unsafe, such as instances of bullying, exclusion by other children, pressure to behave well and succeed at academics, and harsh punishment from teachers. Perceptions of school safety, thus, vary by school and location. This aligns with the perspectives of other types of research participants (teachers, psychologists, NGO workers) who offer many diverse accounts of safety in both the formal and reception classrooms.

Children describe many activities and experiences that contribute positively to their wellbeing. Creative activities were the most frequently mentioned, including various kinds of art, music, and drama. The other most frequently described experience was being outside and in nature, including walking in parks, or being at the sea, in the mountains, or in forest. Children describe excursions to visit these places (often through education programs) as making them feel calm, safe, and happy.

Figure 5: Learner perspectives on their wellbeing

Finding 11: Teachers, caregivers, and other education actors believe that supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students is a critical part of a teacher's job.

The role of teachers extends beyond academics, and research participants emphasize that supporting the learners in their classroom holistically is essential to their work. This includes prioritizing the establishment of trusting relationships, and facilitating a space where learners feel secure to be themselves and ask for help or support when needed. Teachers describe the many specific needs of refugee learners, and how a key part of their job is to attend to the needs of the individual student while also helping them integrate into the classroom or school.

> *The role of the teacher in the classroom is, most importantly... to make students feel safe and understood. To make them feel that they have an adult they can trust, with their feelings, their problems, with bad thoughts. The teacher is a guide and a role model for children. They are always present for each student, and are able to adapt to their needs. They are able to listen and understand both the needs of individual students and also the class as a whole. My role as an education is mainly as a mentor and a trusted adult for every child.* ***Teacher, Formal***

> *The teacher is not just a profession alone, but is an important role in society. This involves shaping the character of the children, together with parents. And to give knowledge to the children and create the foundation for something better in the future, to give hope.* ***Parent***

Refugee education coordinators and other education actors emphasize that there are many systemic limitations that teachers must contend with in both the formal and DYEP classrooms. This includes a lack of training on how to appropriately support students with serious behavioural issues and experiences of adversity. As well, teachers are often the first to be exposed to significant mental health needs of individual children in their classroom, and in many cases there are not adequate or sufficient processes in place to refer children to specialized care when needed.

> *Education for a child is about support. A child cannot have wellbeing unless they feel that their teacher wants to know and support them. The teacher wants them to be able to come to them about all the things that concern the child. It is what should always be done in education, and that is something that is not incorporated into the Greek system, not at all. And it is a failure.* ***Psychologist, Implementing Staff***

Finding 12: Teachers and education actors consider the involvement of caregivers as essential to children's education, but in the refugee context in Greece there are many systemic barriers to caregiver engagement.

Different implementing partners had notably different descriptions of their ability to engage parents in Colors. In certain contexts—and when the NGO had established programming in the camps with regular access—parental engagement was built in and described as effective. For example, in the camp settings where the NGO DRC works, Colors was a part of a larger set of programs targeting refugees. DRC staff and teachers were able to describe positive experiences interacting with parents and caregivers, and noted

that outreach to parents before the start of a new program, as well as throughout the program, was a priority.

> *We had a gathering to explain [the program] with the parents of learners...so that they could understand our approach and our educational methodology. We made it very clear that apart from cognitive skills, our program has other goals [which are] social and emotional. The way they have reacted to this is very positive, with the expression of positive emotions and gratitude. Parents are very happy that we treat education and teaching this way, and that the school approaches their children in this way.* ***Teacher, Colors***

In other locations, implementers described challenges to accessing and maintaining engagement with caregivers. For example, the implementer Second Tree, which operates Colors from an urban community center, noted how interaction with parents was a key challenge even when it was considered a priority. Staff and teachers were unable to access the camp where many learners live, and caregivers may not frequently come to the center. In such instances, it was difficult to assure parental buy-in or understanding of the program.

Research participants noted that there were challenges to engaging parents that were specific to the contexts, and often reflected cultural norms or understandings. Refugees who came from countries where MHPSS programming and holistic learning were not emphasized in the formal education system were described as less engaged, and also expressed less understanding of both program activities and its goals. In camp contexts, where basic needs of the household often go unmet, children's programming aimed at creative expression or outings in nature were often less prioritized.

Teachers, implementers, and refugee education coordinators all emphasized that parents were a critical aspect of attending to the whole child and their wellbeing. They underline that there are very real, and often systemic, challenges to effectively engaging the various relationships and aspects of a child's life.

> *It is important for us to consider all aspects of the family. This affects the way we approach the child because we are able to see them holistically. This way the child feels that we accept them, understand them, want to get to know them... so then the child feels much better because we are [invested] in their whole world. A child wants you to understand them in order to build trust.* ***Psychologist, Implementing Staff***

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND PERCEPTIONS OF HOLISTIC WELLBEING, AS WELL AS THE ROLE OF EDUCATION, IN CONTEXT?

Interventions and programs that seek to address holistic wellbeing in school or NFE must consider what those concepts mean to the communities they are working with, in order to assure that the intervention is relevant and addresses the perceived needs of the communities. The values held by communities will directly relate to their engagement and commitment to the program and activities, which will ultimately define the possible impact of the intervention. As seen in the findings of this section, this perceived value of MHPSS programming and the roles of education in relation to it, varies among actors. Understanding perceptions of holistic wellbeing and education should foreground the

work of implementers in the planning stages of a program. In order to do so, potential implementers of school-based MHPSS programming should consider certain questions:

- How can the program support communities to build a shared vision of education that includes the needs of all actors?
- How can the program build value of MHPSS into the perception of actors that still do not prioritize it? Why are they not currently prioritizing it? This question is especially important in terms of the involvement of education authorities at both local and national levels, who ultimately lead the way in what schools or NFE can implement and what support they receive.
- How can programs take into account the spaces and activities that make children feel safe? How can programs integrate children's own perceptions of what supports their wellbeing and mental health?
- How can an implementer enhance coordination to improve existing MHPSS services and assure complementarity in new interventions?
- How can teachers of refugee learners be better supported to understand and respond to the needs of all children in their care?

3.3. COLORS OF KINDNESS IMPLEMENTATION

In addition to study of the relationship between education and MHPSS programming, this research specifically studied Amal Alliance's Colors of Kindness program, implemented by a number of partner organizations in different locations across Greece. This section of findings shares key learning about perceptions of Colors broadly, about the perceived impacts, and other relevant implementation details.

3.3.1. PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROGRAMME

Finding 13: Colors is viewed as a positive, relevant, and effective approach by the majority of research participants.

Participants describe the specific relevance of Colors in the Greek context because of the unique psychosocial profile of refugee children. Teachers and implementers also emphasized the impacts of COVID on children's mental health and wellbeing, and how it was a particularly critical time for organizations and the education system to approach children's learning from a more holistic perspective.

> *Part of the motivation for using this program was because of COVID. There was real need. We were aware of issues with mental health, after all that we suffered being confined in our homes during lockdown. And that is especially relevant to children...What does it mean to be a child? To be able to play and grow. When you deprive a child of play, you deprive them of socialization, you deprive them of going out in the world and running, laughing, falling, screaming, getting angry. Learning to do these things. All those feelings were put on hold for years. At some point, I think this will come up into the psyches of every child and it will break and explode like a volcano. So we wanted to prevent precisely these effects of that explosion, and we believed that this program, the aim of this program, was exactly that.* ***Implementing Staff***

> *The children [we work with] can get bored and distracted very easily. This is a challenge to work with them. The structure [of Colors] is such that it stimulates and motivates them. They want to continue with the activities and they stay engaged.* ***Implementing Staff***

Research participants also describe how social emotional learning—and programs such as Colors that offer this—are notably lacking in the Greek formal education space. In particular, teachers now working in nonformal education programs such as Colors who had previously taught in formal schools, described how such approaches were lacking in training and curriculum during the latter. Both such teachers and caregivers describe how holistic learning and the wellbeing of children is not always prioritized in the Greek classroom setting. These participants further noted that it is via programs such as Colors and its demonstrated efficacy that such larger systematic changes can be further influenced to benefit all learners in Greece.

> *I believe that Colors is an appropriate program and good for the wellbeing of children, and what I like very much is that it guides you as an educator. Because... in Greece, the universities we graduate from do not prepare us well, as teachers, to be able to deal with the psychological needs of the children, and especially refugee children.* ***Teacher, NFE***

> *As teachers in Greece we are trained to focus more on the academic parts, but it may be that a child is not a good student because he has other challenges. But the child doesn't know how to mention that to us. For me Colors is a very good guide, because I understood that we can, through simple things, help children to be empowered to be confident, to be able to talk about things that are difficult, to trust us. These are very important.* ***Teacher, NFE***

Finding 14: The majority of Colors learners who participated in this research described positive impressions of Colors and could give specific examples of how they used it in their lives and how it made them feel.

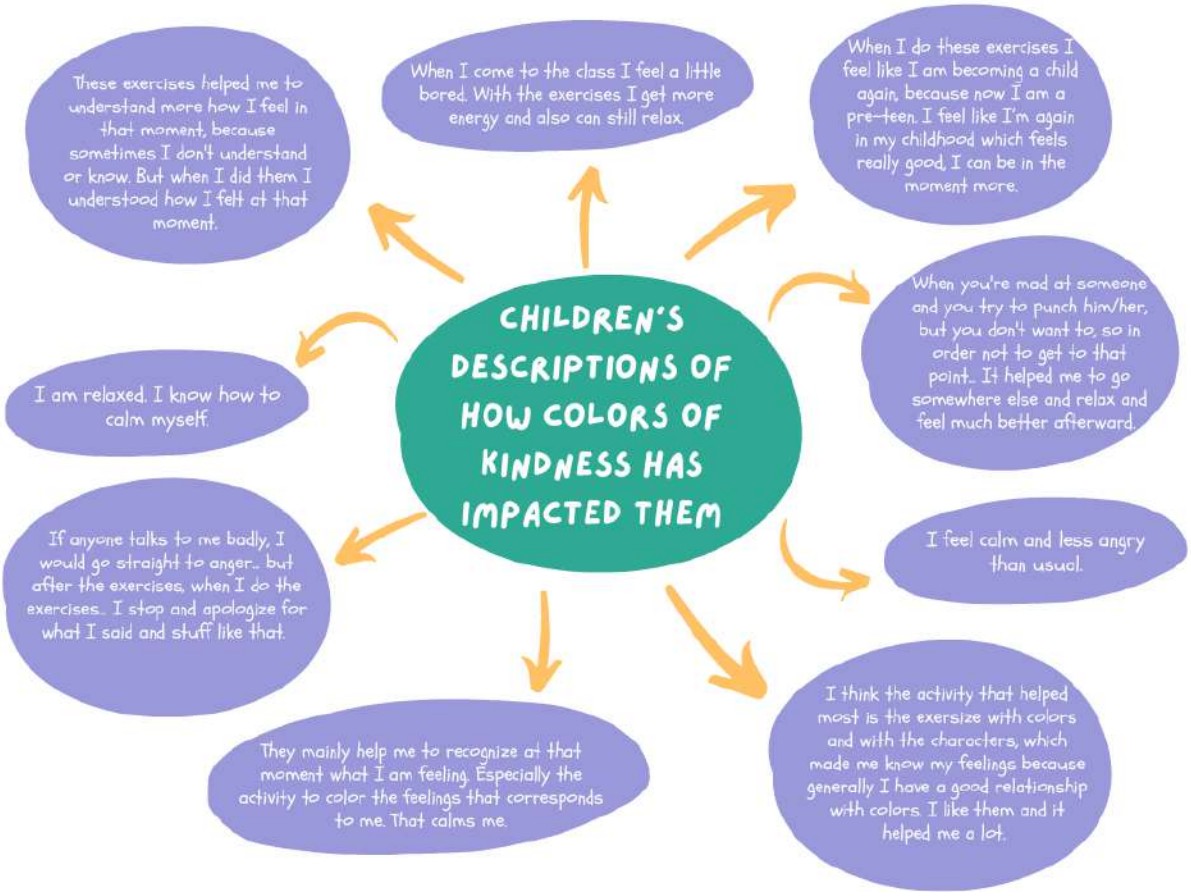
While learners in the FGDs were notably quite distractable, most were able to take part and describe ways that Colors had helped them or why they enjoy the activities. Some children, despite being Colors participants, were not able to talk about the program or activities, or simply answered no to many of the questions.[xiii] Still, this was a minority.

> *Colors helped me to better control my emotions, like when I get angry or feel something too much. I think it's good for us to understand first of all what we feel and then be able to control it. For example, my brother and I used to fight a lot because we were angry or be frustrated. And we are siblings. But now before we fight I find a way to stop and calm down so that we don't have to be angry towards each other. I learned this from Colors because I can explain what bothered me and led me to feel the need to fight. It helped me explain to others what I feel, so that they understand that at that moment, for example, I am in a slightly more special psychological state. That I am angry and that it is better... if others are angry also... to talk and not fight.* ***Colors Learner***

The majority of the descriptions of Colors by learners focused on two SEL outcomes: emotional recognition and emotional management. Children also used works such as "relax" and "calm" to describe how they felt during activities. The most commonly mentioned activities were breathing exercises and the "colors of emotions." Figure 6, below, shows children's descriptions of Colors in their own words.

[xiii] In these cases, when it seemed that the children were not enthusiastic participants, the research coordinator allowed them to be excused from the FGD if they so chose.

Figure 6. Learners describe Colors in their own words



Finding 15: Colors teachers describe the usefulness of Colors activities in their classroom and for supporting and understanding their students.

Colors activities provide teachers with new strategies to engage their students beyond traditional academic instruction. Many Colors teachers report that the social-emotional focus of these activities offers fresh approaches to fostering classroom participation and engagement from students. Rather than relying solely on pedagogical methods centered on cognitive skill development, Colors activities allow teachers to connect with their students' holistic needs as learners. Teachers note that the activities are particularly useful for a group of learners that have a hard time concentrating and participating.

> *At first time, I was a little worried about how it would work in the classroom. The children have impatience and they do not concentrate well. It is a challenge to do a lot of activities. So I was a little hesitant at first, not sure if they would benefit from it. However, once we started it I was very fond of the program. Besides clearly helping the children, especially certain activities such as the breathwork, it helped me a lot because I learned so much about the kids. They better understood the feelings of other children, but so did I. I was able to better understand the meaning of aggressive behavior, for example. This has helped me a lot in the class.* ***Teacher, NFE***

Prior to implementation, Amal Alliance runs a series of training workshops for teachers in order to introduce the material itself, including concepts that may be quite different to typical classroom materials. Additionally, the trainings concentrate on student-centered teaching methods and how to use interactive activities, group work, and creative and arts-based expression. These are aimed at making learning—and being present in the classroom—more engaging for learners. Teachers describe how such approaches were effective, and how this has led them to greater commitment to using such approaches beyond just Colors lessons. For some IPs, teachers that attended in-person training then cascaded their learning to other teachers, facilitators, or implementing staff members.

> *I use approaches to emotional learning for children in my work and this program was very concentrated. It had a nice structure. That is, it worked very well as a guide for me, as a personal tool, to have it by my side. It was an amazing guide and really acted as a baseline for further activities, for developing themes, for enriching the units with more activities on a relevant topic. In this respect it was really very helpful to me. And to tell you the truth I took things and used them in other classes because I saw that they work. I saw that a lot of good material has been gathered.* ***Teacher, NFE***

The majority of Colors teachers are not from refugee communities, meaning that they cannot directly relate to the experiences of displacement nor current daily challenges facing their learner. Teachers indicate that the activities have enhanced their ability to understand and connect with their students, despite this lack of experiential understanding or often language skills to aid in communication. Through exercises that promote self-reflection, perspective-taking, and open communication, teachers gain insight into the unique backgrounds, challenges, and mindsets that their students bring into the classroom. This heightened awareness and appreciation for students' diverse experiences equips teachers with the capacity to tailor their instructional approaches and supportive interventions to the specific needs of their students.

> *Colors has helped me a lot as a teacher because I've learned so many new things about my students. What they really think and feel, what they like, and what is hard for them... All of a sudden a child would come to me and open his heart and tell me the things he was feeling. I felt so happy that this worked for him, but I also really gained something.* ***Teacher, NFE***

3.3.2. PERCEPTIONS OF IMPACT OF COLORS

Finding 16: Teachers, implementers, and caregivers perceive a number of clear outcomes related to children's holistic wellbeing as a result of Colors. Key perceived outcomes include:

- **Improved emotional recognition:** Teachers and implementers describe learners' increased ability to recognize and communicate about their emotions as the strongest impact of Colors. Specific Colors activities, such as the color of emotion activity, were regularly mentioned as particularly effective. Learners, as well, describe an increased ability to recognize and talk about their feelings (see Figure X, above).

> *At completion of the program, I saw that children began to get acquainted with certain concepts and especially with emotions. How emotions are expressed and how they*

recognize them. They became more familiar with participating in some activities, especially group activities. ***Implementing Staff***

All of the children were understanding the emotions, and they were [naming them] correctly. At the beginning they didn't know any of these emotions, the words or concepts or what they meant. And now I think they express themselves more. This could be because someone arrives in the class and asks how they are today. They get to express an answer to that, and are able to. ***Teacher, NFE***

- **Improved emotional management and less aggressive behaviors:** While teachers and implementers also comment on learners' ability to better manage difficult emotions, learners were the ones in this research who most often described better emotional management as an impact of the program. Both teachers and learners describe that they have improved strategies for calming and relaxing the mind, in order to react appropriately in challenging situations. This includes positive feelings of calmness, relaxation, and a clear mind as the result of Colors exercises.

- **Improved social and communication skills:** Learners, implementers, and teachers all describe how negative social behaviors—and in particular aggressive and conflict-producing behaviors—may decrease with the use of Colors exercises. Teachers additionally describe the usefulness of Colors group activities in helping facilitate learners of different groups, such as countries of origin, integrate and work together more cohesively.


Photo: Amal Alliance

I can say before we started working with Colors, we noticed that a certain group of students, because they were children from different countries of origin, practically every time we had to work in a group, they chose to separate based on their country of origin. It was difficult for the teams to communicate with each other, so hard to be able to make a different division of groups and work on it. I can say that because several activities required the children to work in dyads, or in smaller or larger groups, this worked very well and they became familiar and more and more able to get to know each other and communicate. ***Implementing Staff***

- **Improved self-esteem and ability to express themselves:** Teachers and implementers describe how learning about emotions and how to express them in healthy ways, in turn, leads to improvements in children's self-esteem and confidence.

I think it's very important and it's vital for them to be able to be given that space to express themselves, which, given the context of them often perhaps not being granted those opportunities in mainstream school and often coming from families who are going through [a lot of challenges]. Where some of their needs might be... a little bit less of a priority at that moment. I think having that space to come together with the peers and with teachers

and really feel heard and listened to is very important for the overall well-being. I think there has been a big impact on their self-esteem and sometimes their confidence from this. ***Implementing Staff***

Finding 17: Colors implementers perceive a number of outcomes that relate to learning readiness and improved concentration and engagement.

Key perceived outcomes include:

- **Better concentration and increased engagement with content:** Teachers and implementers describe that Colors activities help learners to concentrate on both the activities and other tasks within the program. The interactive activities are child-centered and promote group work, discussion, and hands-on learning of various skills. Such activities enhance concentration and engagement.

  The language of communication that is used...helps children to develop their vocabulary because the program has many open-ended questions. It asks for the children's feedback and [engagement], so the children have to communicate a lot. This is important... because it contributes to their cognitive development, and so helps their learning. ***Teacher, NFE***

  By the end children were more familiar with participating in classroom activities, following the structured lesson, with worksheets, and focusing on specific language skills. ***Implementing Staff***

- **An improved learning environment:** Teachers and implementers note that Colors activities, and the resulting engagement and concentration of learners in these activities, makes the environment itself more conducive to learning. An effect of this concentration is often improved behavior, including reduction in aggressive or disruptive behaviors. By building activities around social-emotional competencies like self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills, teachers can proactively address potential obstacles to student focus and receptiveness. Colors teachers describe utilizing these activities to create an environment conducive to learning, where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and receiving individualized guidance. The emphasis on cultivating social-emotional intelligence provides teachers with tools to de-escalate disruptions, validate students' experiences, and offer personalized support strategies.

- **Improved readiness to partake in education in a classroom setting:** For learners participating in Colors, an important outcome of the program is their improved readiness for school. Particular skills—such as improved communication, ability to concentrate, reduced disruptive behaviors—help prepare them to integrate into the more traditional classroom settings of the Greek formal schools.

  At first, kids are a little skeptical. When we start and say let's take a breath or do this exercise. But through the process I see the change directly. Children come and are very tired and bored, not engaged. Immediately they wake up and are activated very powerfully to participate in the class. ***Teacher, NFE***

Finding 18: Colors implementers perceive that a whole-family approach to Colors could improve social and emotional skills and positively impact dynamics in the home.

Many participants emphasized that the kind of support that was provided for children through Colors should ultimately be delivered through a whole family approach. It was noted often that teachers or implementers are not aware of exactly what is happening in the home, and rarely have the opportunity to interact with caregivers.

> *I can't answer if this [Colors] impacts home life because I don't know exactly what is going on there. It would be good if we could see this, talk to them, and understand how they think this has affected the child's behavior.* ***Teacher, NFE***

> *Sometimes I think that all of the work that we did... it just stops before it reaches the house. Because the parents don't understand. I have an example: when a child makes an amazing craft I might say you can keep that and bring it home to your room. But they would put it in the bin, and I didn't understand that at first. But then I discovered that the parents did not want more things, because they were just moving and moving and moving. And they couldn't keep more things. It's really complicated, and impossible because the children could not describe that this is a thing that is important to them... I think we need to involve the parents to understand this.* ***Teacher, NFE***

As is noted in Finding 10, above, children describe both home and school as a location where they feel safest, and point to the important relationships in each location (teachers and caregivers) as those that most positively impact their wellbeing. In locations where Colors implementers (including teachers and other staff) could not easily or consistently access the homes and caregivers of learners this was noted as a challenge to fully addressing the needs of those learners.

Teachers, Colors implementing staff, and refugee education coordinators emphasized the importance of understanding and supporting learners within the larger context of their lives in Greece. This means acknowledging that children do not develop in isolation, and that supportive structures beyond the school/NFE need to be in place to truly address their MHPSS needs.

Importantly, in locations where Colors implementers had more consistent and reliable access to caregivers, communities, and the homes of learners, these implementers described parents as supportive of Colors. The more they were made familiar with the program, its content, and its goals, the more enthusiastic they were about their children's participation. In contrast, in locations where access to the home (and in particular, camps) was limited and interaction with caregivers irregular, implementers describe more barriers to caregiver buy in. This included more description of, for example, different cultural norms and contextual realities (such as children accompanying parents to appointments to help with translation) that were perceived as barriers to buy in and support for Colors.

3.3.3. COLORS IMPLEMENTATION, CHALLENGES & SUSTAINABILITY

Finding 19: There were a number of classroom-level challenges to successful implementation of Colors that were described by teachers and implementing staff. The most frequently mentioned challenges were language, concepts and terms, duration of lessons, and use of technology/tablets.

- **Language:** Teachers and implementers noted that language poses challenges for the effective implementation of Colors; this was the most emphasized classroom-level challenge described in the research. While implementing organizations work hard to provide translation, real time translation—sometimes in multiple languages—impacts if a lesson can be carried out as intended in terms of timing and content. Additionally, translation is not always possible, especially with multi-language classrooms and newly arriving learners who may have new language needs. Teachers in multiple sites described the difficulty in trying to carry out lessons with the use of pictures, demonstrations, and hand gestures. They note that this both limited the effectiveness of communication and relationship building, as well as slowed down the lesson itself for all learners present.

  > *At the moment we have children from Ukraine, Syria, Sudan, and Albania, who do not speak the languages (Greek or English). Some can understand some words, and many may not understand any words at all. So there is parallel translation to these languages, and we also have to maintain the interest of the other children during this translation process for every instruction and activity.* ***Teacher, NFE***
  >
  > *Often, many of the activities do not reach their conclusions or their objectives because of language. We cannot go in depth or sometimes even figure out alternative terms.* ***Teacher, NFE***
  >
  > *In the camp where I work, we sometimes have six children with six different languages in one session. In this case, there are many things in the Colors session as proposed that just cannot be done.* ***Implementing Staff***

- **Terms and concepts:** Relatedly, many teachers noted that the concepts within Colors—even in their simplified form—can be challenging for children to understand and often need contextualization in real time. This can mean slowing down a lesson for a considerable amount of time until all children understand the words and meanings.

  > *In one class we did an exercise as a warmup that was related to body language and how feeling confident and happy can have a big effect on the image that you present to the world. So if you're feeling happy, you may walk with your shoulders back and your head [held] confidently. Whereas if you're feeling unhappy or if you're feeling less confident, you may have a closed posture, you might be looking down. I think this is a really important lesson to learn, but it was too challenging to describe these concepts in full because it was* ***both*** *the feeling* ***and*** *the body language—this was just too complicated with this group of learners.* ***Teacher, NFE***
  >
  > *The concepts were also difficult, for example setting goals and taking steps towards achieving that goal. It's quite a difficult concept for a child of seven or eight generally. And many of these children are not at the same emotional level of their peers because of their situation. And for a child that doesn't have the language skills either to explain more, many of the words and concepts are quite a challenge to use.* ***Teacher, NFE***

  Teachers noted that, while this was mainly true for the mental health and wellbeing related concepts, it was often also true of more simplified day-to-day terms. For example, multiple teachers noted that the concept of "excursion" was difficult to translate across cultural norms.

The activity where they have to go on an excursion with their friends, they don't understand this idea at all. Some children... don't have anything like that experience. Children will ask me what this word means but the cultural context is too much of an obstacle. ***Teacher, NFE***

I tried to speak about nature because it was the topic, and it took nearly five minutes to get through to the children what I meant when I said nature. By the time we get to the place where we paint about it or do an activity about it, most of the time has passed. The discussion and storytelling just isn't possible [at that level] of understanding. ***Teacher, NFE***

- **Age and development range:** Teachers also note that there is often a large age range of learners in their Colors sessions, and that even children of the same age can be at very different developmental stages. While Colors targets children of a certain age range (6-12), there are frequently children outside of this age range that attend. This causes challenges to effectively delivering the lessons, and influences what activities are feasible. Often, these decisions have to be made in real time by teachers.

  If I remember correctly, the age range for Colors is 6-12. I think in our program we had kids between 8 and 16. This is because some children have missed out on school so are older than the age range for many education programs or school. And then also some of these 12, 13, 14 year olds may be mature for their age because of what they have been through. So having a classroom with such a wide range of maturity was very difficult to manage as well. ***Implementing Staff***

  At 6-12, which is the age group that is addressed by Colors, many times I see that cognitively and emotionally they are much further behind than other children of their age would be. I am not sure that this is taken into account, or how it can be taken into account here. ***Teacher, NFE***

- **Duration of lessons:** Teachers note that the short duration of the lessons themselves meant that lessons were vulnerable to a single disruptive event or issue that could derail the entire day's material. They also note that due to lengthy conversations about concepts and norms, it was often the case that the time to partake in the activities themselves were then shortened. Many teachers emphasized that disruptive behaviors were a frequent and frustrating challenge that they often felt ill-equipped to respond to—and that the short nature of sessions made such challenges even more stressful for them.

  A great difficulty was the length of Colors session... 45-five-minute lessons. I just don't think Colors could be easily done in this time and will need to be adjusted. There are too many challenges to it to happen successfully in that time. ***Teacher, NFE***

  I think that the material is too much, and it was not realistically possible to do it all in one lesson. ***Teacher, NFE***

- **Tablets and use of technology:** The use of the podcast materials in Colors presented some additional but related classroom level challenges. Teachers describe the issue stemming from the format's incompatibility with the diverse needs, languages, and attention spans of the young

learners. As above, the concepts were challenging for learners, and so in a purely audio format led to disengagement. This disengagement is exacerbated by the multiple languages, with similar challenges as described above related to parallel translation or lack of understanding.

Teachers and implementers describe the increased challenges of maintaining learner focus when using tablets or audio material. Teachers observe that children struggle to sustain attention on the tablets, which often leads to restlessness and diminished participation. **They note that activities which are more dynamic and interactive (such as art or movement-based activities) are better aligned with the needs of learners in the sessions.** Consequently, teachers find themselves adapting the program, often forgoing the audio components entirely in favor of more hands-on activities.

> *The audio tracks are pretty non-applicable. When a child tries to listen to the four-minute description of concepts such as "self-awareness" or "perspective", they tell me they're bored and are not listening... it is a big challenge of my job to keep them alert and keep them interested. I don't think that these tracks help with that.* ***Teacher, NFE***

> *The children want something more energetic... even if we had the podcast in multiple languages such as Arabic or Farsi, maybe that would help. But really the feedback I have gotten from other teachers too is that the means of delivery is not ideal. The children need to be engaged more.* ***Teacher, NFE***

- **Behavioral challenges:** Teachers and implementers note that the specific behavioral and mental health challenges present in the Colors classrooms present significant obstacles for teachers. Many children struggle with basic classroom behaviors, such as sitting still, listening attentively, or even feeling comfortable in enclosed spaces. This hypervigilance and dysregulation are symptomatic of children still operating in "survival mode," a state that prioritizes immediate safety over learning readiness. The challenges manifest in various ways, including difficulty focusing, inability to engage in structured activities, and a tendency to disrupt peers who are attempting to participate.

  Teachers describe high levels of frustration among learners, often expressed through conflicts and deliberate disruption of activities. This creates a challenging classroom dynamic where even motivated students may struggle to engage with the material. Teachers and implementers are aware that such behavioral issues stem from emotional and psychological needs that must be addressed before effective learning can occur. Consequently, implementers find themselves dedicating significant time and effort to preparatory work, focusing on creating a sense of safety and stability before introducing more structured activities. Even with a SEL-focused program such as Colors, these behavioral issues stimy implementation of many of the activities.

  > *We have a lot of frustration in the kids. It is often expressed in conflict amongst their peers. It is hard for them to sit still, to listen, to focus. It is a challenge for all learners in the room to focus together. Often they are trying to disturb and distract each other. They are really frustrated and don't know how to express themselves.* ***Teacher, NFE***

  > *I think we just have a lot of children that are still very much in survival mode, and they need more time to come out of that. Many of them are not even comfortable sitting inside, or being still for more than a couple of minutes. They need to feel safe*

first, in order to then become comfortable sitting still for [classes]. ***Implementing staff***

We have a lot of deregulated children that can't even sit still enough to play a game. So we have been going through the Colors exercises and activities to try to pick things that we can do while the kids are still in this state. It's a lot of work to get kids to the point of even participating at all in these activities sometimes. ***Implementing Staff***

Finding 20: There were a number of implementation-level challenges to implementing Colors, especially in relation to the Greek context. While many of these challenges exist outside of the control of both Amal Alliance and its implementing partners, they are relevant to many of the implementation decisions made and can be useful to consider for Colors delivery across contexts.

- **High turnover rate for teachers, facilitators, and NGO staff:** The high turnover rate among teachers, facilitators, and NGO staff in the locations of this research pose challenges to effective implementation of Colors. Implementers note that teachers—often working as volunteers—may be in a position for on average six months. Such time frames are also common for NGO staff. This constant flux of trained staff can undermine continuity and quality of program implementation, including instruction and teaching, as well as the ability of teachers and facilitators to build meaningful relationships with learners. Shorter term staff and volunteers can be limited in their opportunity to gain a comprehensive understanding of the program's intricacies, the specific contextual nuances of the environment, and the unique needs of learners. The lack of long-term engagement can result in a less standardized or consistent implementation of the program, where the subtle yet crucial aspects of trauma-informed teaching and culturally sensitive approaches may be less feasible.

  Frequent staff turnover necessitates an ongoing cycle of training new teachers and facilitators, which is both time-consuming and resource-intensive for implementing organizations and Amal Alliance. Implementing staff note that such constant "starting over" can lead to fatigue among long-term staff members responsible for training, and may result in inconsistent program delivery as new teachers grapple with understanding both the content and the context of their work. Short term staffing also hampers the development of organizational knowledge and best practices that could help evolve and grow the implementation of Colors over time.

- **Lack of access to camps, living spaces, and caregivers:** As noted in previous sections, restrictions on access to camps where learners reside poses challenges to the effective implementation of Colors. These challenges include the establishment of safe spaces as locations of programming, but also and importantly the ability of staff and teachers to consistently access the locations of learners and caregivers. Often, since teachers are not from the same population as learners, there can be greater mistrust or lack of buy in from communities since these teachers are not present in community spaces.

  The facilitators may do a great job, but when you are not part of the camp and not from the same background as the residents, they will always see you somewhat differently... this can affect participation, if there isn't buy in from the community. ***Implementing Staff***

We need more participation with the parents, in order to make sure the children have the same kind of environment and support in the home. But if we can't access the parents, and they don't come to the center, then we have no way to do this. This is a limitation of how much we can impact the learners, and we can't do much about it. ***Teacher, NFE***

- **Continued mobility of learners:** The ongoing displacement of children into and within Greece presents challenges to Colors implementation (and implementation of education and other humanitarian programs broadly). Learners come and go at various times throughout the year, with little predictability. This transient nature of the student population creates an ever-changing classroom environment that educators and implementing staff must navigate with flexibility and adaptability.

  The children change all the time. The new children arrive and for the first weeks they are often fully in survival mode. This is a really difficult time to start any program, because the children cannot focus or really engage yet...so we give them time. They really need to learn to feel safe, to be in our space, and how to engage with each other. But several times we've then been ready to start [Colors], and then there was a huge turnover and all new children. ***Implementing Staff***

  Teachers and staff report that the frequent turnover of students disrupts the continuity and progression of the program. Children often leave unexpectedly, sometimes without notice, preventing educators from conducting proper closure activities or providing a sense of completion. Simultaneously, new children arrive at various stages of the program, creating difficulties in integration and catching up with ongoing activities. The constant flux requires teachers to repeatedly explain concepts and activities, potentially disengaging current leaners while also struggling to involve newcomers.

  Since the population is changing so often, many children who have started the program leave in the middle of the program. They also leave without us being informed, without me being informed as a teacher. So I haven't been able to do a "closure" activity or say anything to the child about the program itself. ***Teacher, NFE***

  At any time, new children are coming so we have to think about how a child will enter the program. When we are in the middle or in the end of it? If they have not gone through the beginning, how will they enter the classroom and into these activities? How will the rest of the children accept the new child? We need to consider how this classroom environment impacts this child, how to make them feel safe and not scared or intimidated. ***Teacher, NFE***

  New learners have different language, educational, and MHPSS needs which impact the classroom environment, and they often need sufficient time to adjust to Colors and its facilitators. Inconsistent attendance further complicates the situation, as children may miss crucial sessions, creating gaps in their understanding and experience of the program. Additionally, this challenges the relationship building and relational dynamics of the group.

  My difficulty is mainly with the approach of children attending on a regular schedule. Since class is optional...we have children who come late, or don't come again for three weeks. We don't have consistency. This creates a problem then because you have to

explain all over again. The rest of the children do not want to hear it again because they know it and it creates more frustration. ***Teacher, NFE***

- **Space-related limitations:** Both teachers and implementer staff described several challenges related to the spaces that Colors is implemented in. Often, the space is designated by what is available in the community, and may not be ideal for the types of activities included in Colors. Teachers in some locations describe how large, open spaces--wherein other programming may also simultaneously take place—cause challenges for children's engagement and focus.

  Relatedly, internet connectivity can be inconsistent in camp and community spaces. Teachers describe how the unpredictability of internet impacts their lesson planning and their ability to adapt to the needs of learners in real time.

  Sometimes, you need to be able to show the children a picture or a video, especially when you cannot communicate about a term. In the last several months there has been a problem with the internet here, and that can trap us at times if we cannot find ways to communicate. ***Teacher, NFE***

Finding 21: In all sites of implementation, Colors has been contextualized to meet the specific needs identified in each location.

As described in the introduction, this research examined Colors implementation in 15 locations via six different implementing partners. As such, Colors itself has been contextualized by each of these partners to be appropriate, relevant, and feasible to implement in each location.

Partners noted that Amal Alliance was both supportive of such contextualization, and regularly initiated feedback in order to assure that any adaptations made would still reflect the overall program objectives. Amal staff noted that flexibility and empowerment of teachers to make changes as needed were an important part of the Colors training.

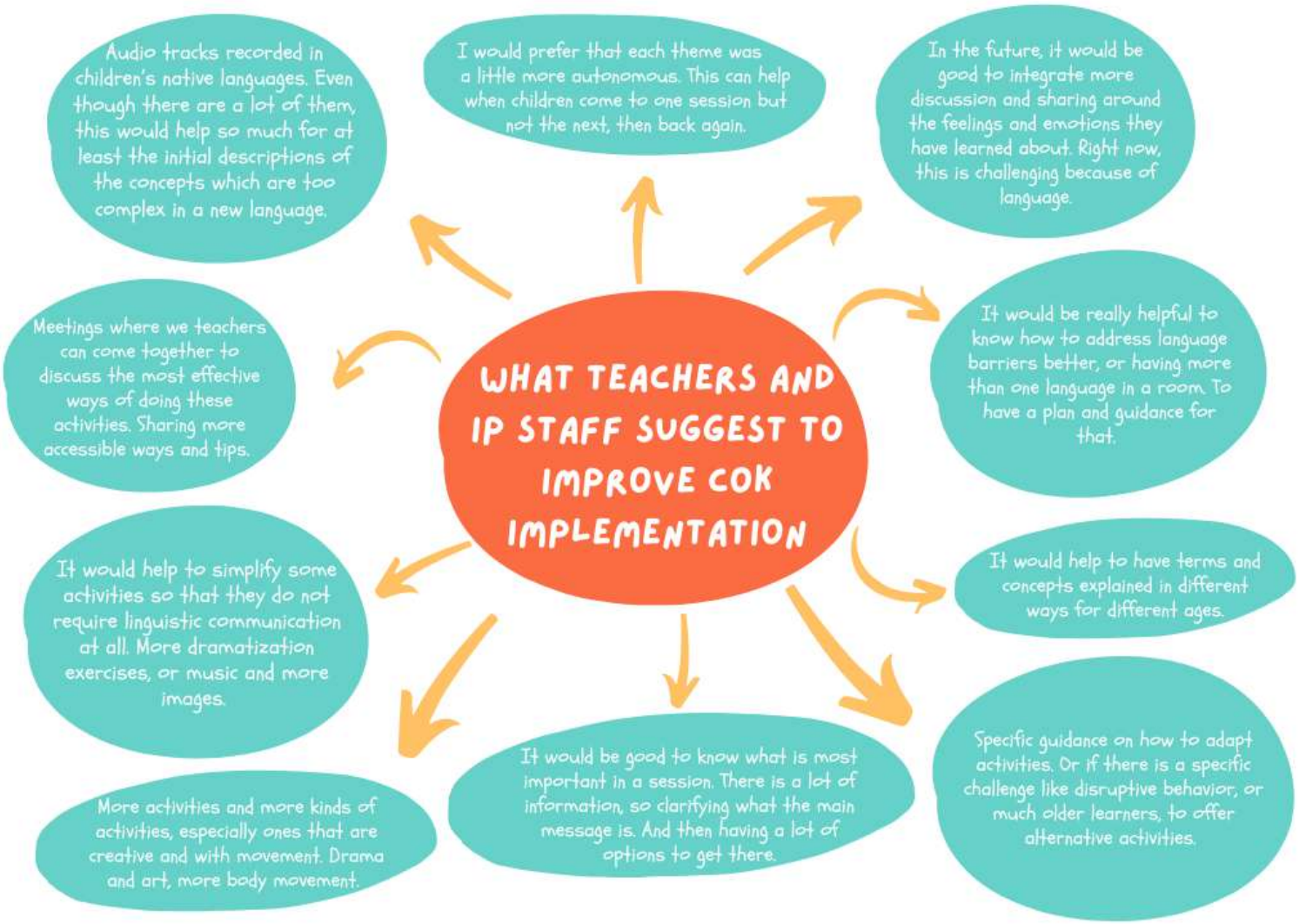
Overall, the majority of contextualization details described related to two of the classroom-level challenges described above: (a) explanation and simplification of terms and concepts and (b) real time changes to activities based mainly on children's attention and behavioral challenges.

While research participants—mainly teachers and implementing staff—noted that Amal Alliance encouraged contextualization and emphasized flexibility, there was no description of support or guidance to such contextualization. Instead changes were most often made at the classroom level and in response to the context of the class, session, and learners. While empowering teachers to make such changes as needed is important, it was also noted that tools to support these changes (such as options for activities based on limitations, or word/term banks) would be notably useful.

Finding 22: Implementers and teachers had suggestions for program improvements, and these often related to requests for further guidance, as well as simplification due to the challenges of the implementation context. Despite the challenges faced, implementers were not discouraged and the level of motivation, excitement and commitment to incorporate Colors into non-formal education activities persisted. There were seven main suggestions that were frequently mentioned, and these are elaborated on via direct quotes in Figure 7 below.

1. Simplify the program and/or the sessions, given the specific challenges of the context of implementation.
2. Make lessons more autonomous from each other in order to assure that children who do not consistently attend can meaningfully participate.
3. Integrate more opportunities for reflection and discussion amongst the children.
4. Provide more guidance to address language barriers.
5. Provide guidance to contextualize, based on assessment of the specific challenges of the location of implementation.
6. Increase variety of activities, acknowledging that both active and creative activities were described as useful and enjoyable by learners and tablets/technology more challenging.
7. Create more spaces for sharing experiences and learning amongst teachers and implementers of Colors, possibly even across countries.

Figure 7: Suggested improvements for Colors of Kindness, in teachers' words



Finding 23: Amal Alliance's sustainability strategy for Colors in Greece aims at institutionalization of Colors into the formal education system, with adoption by the Ministry of Education and eventual integration into the formal schools in Greece.

It was outside of the scope and timeline of this research to explore both the stages of this scaling and the process of adoption of Colors at the national level in Greece. However, the integration of Colors into national education strategy in Greece is a notable and important step towards the program's sustainability.

Amal Alliance has engaged closely with the MoE in order to prepare for pilot implementation in the formal schools. After this pilot—and based on findings of impact—Amal Alliance will further advocate for adoption of Colors as a preferred resource and SEL approach in national curriculum.

Amal has thus far provided technical support to government actors through training in Colors practices, effective implementation strategy, and MEL. Support to teacher training—and importantly in how Colors approaches and activities can be integrated into the formal school classrooms—is a key component of this support. As was noted in the previous finding, significant change to curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and teacher training at scale will take time, but has the potential for significant impact on education actors.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research is based on a social ecological framework that considers the complex interplay between the individual learner; their home and school environments; their community; the relationships built across these levels; the systems and institutions around them; and finally the policy and funding environment of humanitarian and education programming broadly.

Children learn in an environment that is situated within a larger "ecosystem." Their lives and wellbeing are notably influenced by their relationships with families or caregivers; with friends and peers; with teachers and school administrators; and with other community members such as religious leaders. Schools and education programming are a critical site of influence, and learners, teachers, and families see the role of education as contributing to holistic wellbeing, human development, and learning that includes both academic and life skills. Such education relies on actors and action in the education system largely, including education and health policies that reflect mental health and wellbeing of children as clearly articulated priorities.

Increased understanding of these priorities—and actionable commitment to them—is required across all levels of actors described above. This crucially includes the Ministry of Education and other policy and decision-makers that influence relevant policy. It also includes humanitarian actors, such as implementers from NGOs (both at national and global level) and donors.

This final section presents enabling factors and recommendations for actors of different levels of this social ecological framework, **acknowledging that, in order to enhance the impact of a program in the**

mental health and wellbeing of communities they work with, a comprehensive approach that involves all actors of the system is required.

It is important to acknowledge that qualitative research provides a snapshot of a specific context with specific actors, and does not provide a comprehensive approach that could apply for "all children", "all children in Greece" or even "all refugee children in Greece." Many of the recommendations may not apply to all MHPSS programs, due to different contexts of implementation. Also, some recommendations may be out of the scope of what is possible for implementers, but are still included in order to provide a comprehensive picture of what is needed to enhance enabling environments for MHPSS programming.

4.1 ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS FOR MHPSS PROGRAMMING: ACTION POINTS FOR IMPLEMENTERS AND EDUCATION ACTORS

This section summarizes enabling factors for wellbeing from the perspectives of the participants in this research. The enabling factors have been structured around a socio-ecological model, as described above, which help us to understand the wellbeing of any individual as a collective issue that is influenced by the structures and people around them. The perspectives of participants (a) learners (b) caregivers (c) teachers and principals, and (d) the wider community, and have been summarized around key actions and question prompts which are designed to provoke deeper thought about *how* a particular action might be met. These are not intended to be fully comprehensive processes, but starting points for discussion amongst key stakeholders. Suggested key stakeholders have been listed at the end of each action.

4.1.1 LEARNER LEVEL ENABLING FACTORS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Ensure that learners' basic needs are met. Participants across all sites in this study spoke of the daily challenge of unmet basic needs including adequate food, water, clothing, and hygiene products. Child-headed households and unaccompanied minors face even greater challenges in meeting basic needs. It is imperative that programs are aware of the basic needs of learners and their households and either provide a response or make referrals to external services.

- What referrals systems are in place between the education and health, nutrition, psychosocial, and protection services? How can these referrals be strengthened?

Key stakeholders: School administrators, educational authorities, country directors of NGOs or I/NGOs, sector working groups, security services, local governmental actors.

Develop supporting, trusting relationships between learners, teachers and their caregivers. Learners in this study shared that they feel emotionally and psychologically supported by the close, consistent relationships with adults in their lives, mainly teachers and caregivers.

- List out all the activities – whether in the classroom or the wider school community – which foster interpersonal relationships for learners. This could be part of the daily routine or weekly or monthly activities.
- What opportunities are there to build and strengthen these relationships inside and outside of the classroom?

Key stakeholders: Learners, school administrators, teachers, program implementers, caregivers.

Support learners to develop positive relationships with peers. Learners spend considerable time in interaction with their peers, and these relationships can be both a source of support and happiness (with friends) and also of stress and fear (with bullies or students from different backgrounds).

- What types of skills do learners in your context need to develop to strengthen relationships with their peers e.g. conflict management skills, active listening, developing tolerance
- What opportunities are there to model and practice these types of skills within your program or school? List out some examples of activities that might promote these SEL skills.

Key stakeholders: Learners, teachers, caregivers

Facilitate learners to interact with peers of different backgrounds. An integral part of education, and one that is of particular relevant in Greece, is the development of cross-cultural communication skills and tolerance.

- What opportunities could be provided for refugee learners to practice newly acquired language skills through recreational activities with other learners? List out some existing activities and think about how these could be made more inclusive. What key vocabulary is needed?
- What holidays or festivals could be celebrated within multi-cultural learning environments as an opportunity to share culture and traditions, and learn about other communities? How can caregivers and the wider community be involved?

Key stakeholders: Learners, teachers, caregivers

Support learners to recognize and talk about different emotions. Learners who participated in this research consistently described how Colors helped them to better recognize and manage their emotions.

- What opportunities do learners in your setting currently have to talk about their emotions?
- What further opportunities could be provided to them to be able to identify and name different emotions and feelings?
- What type of coping strategies do learners in your setting use to deal with big emotions?
- What contextual or cultural factors need to be taken into consideration during such activities?

Key stakeholders: Learners, teachers, school counsellors

Engage caregivers in supporting their children at home and in school. Caregivers recognize the value of school in promoting children's psychosocial wellbeing, and engaging caregivers in these programs or activities can support a more holistic approach, ensuring learners receive support across both environments.

- How could the content of MHPSS programs be shared with caregivers so they can continue some activities or strategies at home?
- What would caregivers in your school need to feel confident to support their children at home with some of these techniques?

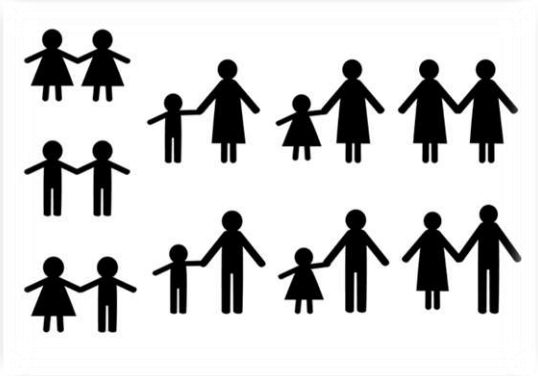
Key stakeholders: caregivers, teachers, program implementers

Provide opportunities for play and recreational activities: Learners shared that they experience joy and relief from stress when they are engaged in play or recreational activities, especially outside and in nature. These activities promote emotional and physical wellbeing, and offer further opportunities for children of different backgrounds to come together.

- List out the opportunities your school already provides for children to participate in active and engaging activities.
- Who are the adults or young people in your school community that could introduce or lead some new activities?
- Describe any opportunities for integrating playful activities into the school day.

Key stakeholders: Learners, teachers, program implementers, caregivers

4.1.3 CAREGIVER LEVEL ENABLING FACTORS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS



Provide MHPSS for caregivers. Learners shared that their homes contribute to them feeling emotionally and psychologically safe. It is important to ensure that caregivers are provided with support that can help them to support the children they care for. This could include sessions on parenting skills and positive reinforcement, sessions for learners which involve their caregivers, or activities for caregivers to provide them with some respite.

- What kind of caregiver sessions or activities does your program offer?
- What are some opportunities to involve caregivers in the delivery of some MHPSS interventions, which supports both caregivers and learners?
- Make a list of any activities involving caregivers that have worked particularly well in the past. Think outside the box – what new activities could you try?

Key stakeholders: Caregivers, program implementers, teachers, school administrators

Ensure active participation of caregivers in school/NFE life. Caregivers expressed that they trust education staff to provide support for their children and understand the critical role education plays in children's wellbeing. It is important that caregivers are given opportunities to actively participate in education programming, from providing feedback to involvement in decision-making.

- List all the ways that caregivers are already involved in education programming opportunities.
- What are some creative ways that caregivers can be given opportunities to participate further? E.g. caregivers are involved in teacher training sessions on MHPSS, or teachers deliver dedicated caregiver sessions
- How are caregivers currently involved in decision-making at the school and/or for education programming?

Key stakeholders: caregivers, teachers, program implementers

Strengthen relationships between caregivers and the wider community. Stronger community connections can support the wellbeing of caregivers as well as learners, and schools/NFE can be an important place in the community to bring people together and share information about ongoing activities.

- List all the current ways your school or program involves outreach to the wider community e.g. events, outreach, volunteering
- What are some opportunities for bringing caregivers and the wider community together? Find out if there are any major barriers, such as childcare or other responsibilities, which prevent community engagement and work with communities to come up with creative solutions.

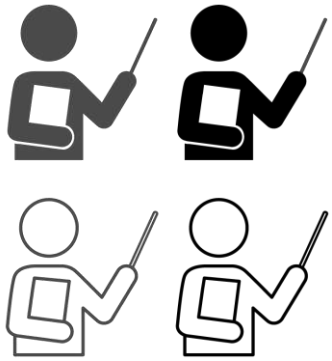
Key stakeholders: program implementers, community leaders, teachers, caregivers

Ensure that programs are sustainable and continuous. Caregivers emphasize the importance of consistency in the programs. They believe that for MHPSS programs to be effective, they need to be consistent and continuous. They also express a desire for continuity in terms of educators and supporters, suggesting that having the same teacher can offer stability to learners.

- What is the duration of current MHPSS programs?
- What are the opportunities to extend these and what would be needed in terms of resource, capacity, and time?
- Which MHPSS activities could be embedded within the school day and/or the curriculum?

Key stakeholders: donors, education authorities, program implementers

4.1.2 TEACHER AND EDUCATION PROGRAM ENABLING FACTORS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS



Ensure that schools are safe and protective. While research participants acknowledged the relative physical safety of children and their families since arriving in Greece, they spoke about the lack of psychological safety that many refugee children experienced including at school.

- List out any physical risks the school building poses to the school community e.g. no perimeter fence, cracks in walls, lack of or inadequate WASH facilities
- What are the priorities for improving the safety of the school environment?
- What activities can be introduced for children to learn social and emotional skills such as respect for differences and managing conflict positively?
- What opportunities are there for capacity strengthening for teachers to create positive and safe learning environments?
- What is the process for staff and students to report and respond to incidents of violence?

Key stakeholders: School administrators; interagency working groups; implementing organizations; local education authorities; teachers

Provide continuous training and professional development for teachers. Education actors acknowledge the value of ongoing training and professional development for teachers to understand and respond to the mental health and psychosocial needs of refugee children.

- What type of training, mentoring, coaching or professional development is currently available to the teachers in your context?
- What type of training, including MHPSS training, should be prioritized for teachers in your context?
- List out all the ways that teachers could be provided with opportunities for professional development – teacher learning circles, workshops from I/NGOs etc.

Key stakeholders: Teachers, program implementers, school administrators, external MHPSS service providers, health authorities, education authorities

Prioritize teacher wellbeing. Teacher wellbeing is an important outcome to support in and of itself, in addition to how it impacts learner wellbeing. In all contexts, but particularly where teachers are supporting students who have experienced displacement and/or conflict, teacher wellbeing must be prioritized by the school and educational authorities.

- What support systems are currently in place for teachers in your school?
- What systems, services, or activities could be put in place to provide more support for teacher wellbeing?
- How can MHPSS for learners also integrate elements of support for teacher wellbeing?

Key stakeholders: Teachers, program implementers, school administrators, external MHPSS service providers, health authorities, education authorities

Integrate MHPSS and SEL activities into the curriculum. Integration ensures a sustainable approach to the provision of MHPSS and SEL, and teachers and schools require support and guidance on integrating activities and approaches into their planning and daily routines.

- What are some ways in which MHPSS, SEL, or any activities you think support children's wellbeing are already being integrated in daily or weekly activities?
- What is working well, and how could this be expanded upon?
- What type of support do teachers and school administrations need to make this integration standardized?

Key stakeholders: Teachers, program implementers, school administrators

Center inclusion and ensure MHPSS activities are relevant for all learners. This research highlights once again the multiple barriers to inclusion within education settings, in particular for learners with disabilities, overage learners, and girls. MHPSS activities must be designed with inclusivity at the center.

- Which groups are most marginalized in your setting and what are the main barriers to inclusion?
- What are some inclusive practices that are already being applied?
- What type of support is required to adapt activities to be fully inclusive of all learners?

Key stakeholders: Teachers, program implementers, school administrators, inclusion specialist

4.1.4 COMMUNITY LEVEL ENABLING FACTORS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Strengthen relationships between schools and the wider community to improve integration. Poorly implemented integration policies have been a key challenge raised by participants of this research. In lieu of national policy functioning effectively, members of refugee and local communities can be encouraged to develop stronger relationships with each other through school activities. Stronger relationships between schools and the community can offer significant mutual support and can be an essential source of strength and resilience which supports learner wellbeing.

- List all the current ways your school involves outreach to the wider community e.g. events, outreach, volunteering

- What are some opportunities for involving the wider community in MHPSS activities or programming?
- Are there any common needs across the wider community and the school community that could be addressed by a common solution?

Key stakeholders: program implementers, community leaders, teachers, school administrators

Support non-school-aged community members to access MHPSS services. Just as with support for caregiver and teacher wellbeing, support for the wellbeing of the wider community can have a big impact on learners. This might be particularly important in Greece where many barriers to social integration are prevalent.

- What are the MHPSS needs of the wider community? Where could you access this data, if it already exists?
- What MHPSS programmes or activities exist for the wider community?
- List out any possible activities or ways of involving members of the wider community in existing MHPSS activities – could any activities for caregivers be adapted or expanded, for example.

Key stakeholders: program implementers, community leaders, teachers, school administrators

Strengthen relationships between the school and other community-based institutions and spaces. There are many spaces within communities that support the wellbeing of community members, such as religious spaces or community centers. Relationships between these spaces and schools allow for children to have streamlined, cohesive support across multiple trusted adult actors.

- Which community spaces are more important to the learners in your setting?
- In way ways do the teams who runs these spaces interact with one another currently? Is there any information sharing, or referrals that happen?
- How could these relationships be strengthened? List out all the possible ways these spaces could collaborate, e.g. hosting joint events, or using community centers to conduct MHPSS activities.

Key stakeholders: program implementers, community leaders, teachers, school administrators

Provide access to MHPSS for older adolescents and youth. Colors is intended for use with children aged 6-12 years old, and while research participants shared that they have used it with mixed groups including older students there is a need to provide adolescent MHPSS programming which deals with issues experienced by this older age group.

- What opportunities are currently available to older adolescents in your setting? Do these include MHPSS activities?
- What are the interests and needs of this age group? If not known, what type of assessment might be needed and appropriate to gather this information?
- How could members of the wider community support with developing opportunities for older adolescents?

Key stakeholders: program implementers, community leaders, teachers, school administrators

Ensure that programs are sustainable and continuous. As refugees face so much instability and insecurity in Greece due to poorly implemented and changeable policy, it is important that MHPSS programs provided offer continuity.

- What is the duration of current MHPSS programs in your school?
- What are the opportunities to extend these and what would be needed in terms of resource, capacity, and time?
- Which MHPSS activities could be embedded within the school day and/or the curriculum?

Key stakeholders: donors, education authorities, program implementers

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING ACTORS

Based on the findings and building from the perspectives of the interviewed stakeholders, the following section provides recommendations for global-level implementers (such as international NGOs), national-level implementers (such as national actors, education system actors, and national offices of INGOs), and donors.

4.2.1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTORS AT A GLOBAL LEVEL

Recommendation 1: Provide sufficient time, support, resource, and guidance for contextualization of MHPSS programs. The findings of this research reinforce the idea that what is needed and what is possible in terms of MHPSS programs is very dependent on context. Where an organization has developed an MHPSS program or approach, ensure that clear contextualization processes accompany the program materials, and that implementing teams are provided with the sufficient time, support, resources, and guidance to conduct meaningful contextualization of the materials.

For Colors specifically, both contextualization and adaptation of the Colors techniques, concepts, and activities should be clearly supported and documented to assure that objectives remain consistent and subjective implementation is avoided.

Recommendation 2: Advocate for integration of MHPSS into policy and curriculum at a national level. In the interests of both sustainability and equal access to MHPSS services and activities within schools, global actors must advocate and work with national governments, education authorities, and health authorities for integration into policies and curriculum. Ensure that advocacy efforts amplify the voices of affected populations, and are cross-sectoral (health, protection, education, WASH, nutrition, GBV).

Recommendation 3: Center localization in MHPSS programming. The knowledge of local implementers about the context is critical to the success of MHPSS programming such as Colors. This includes recognizing the value of local knowledge and expertise, and encouraging programs to be led or co-led by local or national actors, ensuring cultural relevance and community buy-in. MHPSS programming should consider all aspects of localization which includes capacity strengthening of local and national actors.

Recommendation 4: Ensure sustainability of programming. Prioritize programs and strategies that have sustainable models, such as the integration of MHPSS into teacher training modules with educational authorities or linking them with national risk management plans.

Global or national level implementers can work with local authorities to develop capacity sharing approaches and a sustainability plan to hand over implementation to local education actors. Implementers can also offer support and advice to education authorities for integrating MHPSS into education, present the program as a policy initiative to ensure it is integrated into annual plans and create guidance to standardize practices based on the specific needs of the population.

Amal Alliance, for example, provides technical support to government actors in Greece through training in Colors practices, effective implementation strategy, and MEL.

Recommendation 5: Engage in cross-sectoral collaboration. MHPSS is a cross-sectoral intervention which requires collaboration with actors from across Health, Education, Protection, Child Protection, Nutrition, Food Security, WASH, GBV, Mine Action, and Camp Coordination. Implementers of MHPSS programming in education must seek out interagency working groups or other relevant forums and ensure that programming complements ongoing efforts across sectors.

This recommendation is relevant for global and national actors.

Recommendation 6: Develop and maintain an effective monitoring and evaluation framework. Develop comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks for MHPSS programs, assuring that outcomes measured reflect the objectives of the program. Use qualitative data to both supplement measurements, and to assure that MEL tools are measuring the most important impacts of a program. Test MEL tools and allow for flexibility and adaptation over time.

4.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL LEVEL IMPLEMENTERS OF MHPSS PROGRAMMING

Recommendation 7: Alignment MHPSS outcomes with the national curriculum. Ensure that the MHPSS programs are aligned with the national curriculum framework, learning objectives, and educational standards. If national curriculum does not include explicit MHPSS/SEL components, assure that activities

and approaches of the MHPSS intervention are cohesive with national curricula and can be integrated without significant additional burden to teachers, school administrators, and principals.[xiv]

Recommendation 8: Recognize and address the foundational need for basic services and security. While MHPSS implementers will not have control over certain contextual risk factors such as local violence by armed actors, neighborhood gangs, or poverty, there are actions that can be taken to strengthen protective factors. Many of these actions are addressed above in section 4.1 and include improving safety and security within and on the route to schools; creating a safe classroom environment; strengthening interpersonal relationships; and collaboration with other sectors including health, nutrition, and WASH.

Recommendation 9: Contextualize and adapt programs to meet the needs of your setting. Many MHPSS programmes and materials have been designed outside of the context in which they are used, and it is essential that materials are adapted before implementation. Global actors should provide contextualization guidance to support this process (Recommendation 1).

Recommendation 10: Center inclusion in MHPSS programs. Programs should seek to accommodate all students and their needs into the activities and materials of the MHPSS activities. This includes ensuring that there is space for students with mobility issues (especially in regard to overcrowded classrooms), alternative activities to be adopted for mixed groups, activities for students with hearing or visual impairments, and support to teachers to adapt activities and approaches as needed to their specific classroom.

For resources on inclusion in psychosocial programming, see: https://pscentre.org/resource/different-just-like-you-training-manual-english/

Recommendation 11: Strengthen coordination between schools and MHPSS services. Organisations have an important role to play in terms of facilitating coordination and referrals between schools and service providers, whether bilaterally or through Clusters and working groups, and conducting awareness sessions so that *all* community members know what services are available to them.

Recommendation 12: Facilitate dialogue around a shared vision of how schools and/or education support wellbeing. Finding 8 revealed that in the contexts studied in this research, all actors perceived that the value of school is strongly linked to holistic wellbeing and development of learners. It is important to establish for each school the ways in which the environment, teachers, caregivers, and learners can contribute to improving wellbeing, and where the limitations lie. MHPSS programs can support school leaders to work on unifying a shared vision on what wellbeing is for their communities and what can school contribute to it.

Recommendation 13: Include children's own healthy coping strategies in MHPSS programs. As the findings show, learners have clear ideas about what supports their wellbeing and have developed their

[xiv] As described previously, Amal Alliance's work in collaboration with the Ministry of Education to scale Colors to the formal school system offers a notable example of such work that offers opportunity for learning in the future. Such learning will be relevant to Amal Alliance as well as other international actors seeking to support the institutionalization of PSS/SEL into national systems.

own coping strategies accordingly such as playing with their friends, moving their bodies, being in nature, or finding time and space to be alone. By listening to children and involving them at the assessment phase, programs can ensure that they build on the existing strategies used in a given context – meaning that strategies are locally-led and already context-specific.

Recommendation 14: Provide ongoing training and support to teachers to integrate MHPSS into the classroom. Teachers in all schools, but particularly those with refugee populations, must be given the skills and resources needed to effectively implement MHPSS activities. The scaling and integration of Colors into the Greek curriculum is an important step for provision of MHPSS and SEL across all schools, and this must be accompanied with the relevant ongoing training and support to teachers to adapt and deliver the content.

Recommendation 15: Provide support for teacher wellbeing. As mentioned throughout this report, the teacher plays an essential role in supporting learner wellbeing but it is equally as important to support teacher wellbeing as an outcome unto itself. Teachers must be given opportunities to learn about and be given support for their own mental health and psychosocial wellbeing through access to MHPSS and ongoing training and development.

Recommendation 16: Actively engage caregivers and the community in MHPSS programming. The impact of any program can be enhanced when the home environment reinforces it. Ensure that caregivers are a part of any MHPSS programming for learners, whether through caregiver specific sessions, or by engaging them in their children's activities and progress.

Recommendation 17: Explore opportunities for resource mobilization and partnerships. Programmes can be more sustainable when they involve partnerships with mutual benefits for all those involved. This could be around resource mobilization, and involve partnering with local organizations or relevant government agencies.

Recommendation 18: Collaborate and share resources, learnings, and expertise on MHPSS implementation. MHPSS is a growing field, and the more that can be documented and shared from one organisation or one school to another, the more effective it can become. Innovate ways of sharing lessons learned and expertise between organisations, whether through a formal Cluster system, or a similar interagency forum.

4.2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

Recommendation 19: Provide more, multi-year and flexible funding for MHPSS programs. MHPSS programs often require sustained interventions to be genuinely effective and build resilience within communities, especially in settings of ongoing displacement such as Greece.

Funding must cover a comprehensive needs assessment and analysis phase, and be flexible for programming to respond to the results of the needs assessment.

In the interests of localization, funding should be allocated as directly as possible to local or national actors.

Recommendation 20: Fund institutional capacity strengthening. In the interests of promoting localization and sustainability of MHPSS programming, funding is required for training and ongoing professional development for education actors including teachers, principals, and education authorities.

Recommendation 21: Fund multi-sectoral programs. Understanding that MHPSS is multi-sectoral, and that access to basic security and services is fundamental to the outcomes of any program that supports wellbeing, funders should consider the increased impact of funding programs that take a multi-sectoral approach.

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