

CHAPTER
7

SAFETY OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN GREECE

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Abstract: This paper describes a number of activities in which the School Building Organisation in Greece is involved to provide safe and secure schools. It discusses the safety and security framework used to classify school safety issues, and the measures taken by the School Building Organisation and other bodies to ensure earthquake safety in schools, to encourage tolerance in multi-cultural school settings, and to address problems of AIDS, drugs and alcohol.

The concept of safety

The School Building Organisation (OSK) is responsible for the design, construction, planning and management of property and equipment of all schools in Greece. Another important role of OSK – and of other public bodies such as the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, the Secretariat of Civil Protection, the Earthquake Planning and Protection Organisation, and local and prefectural authorities – is to provide safe educational facilities.

In Greece, school safety and security issues are classified according to how school communities perceive safety. Based on research including a questionnaire on school buildings, which was conducted in all schools in collaboration with the National Technical University in 1998 and in 2002, the following school safety framework was identified:

- *Ensuring earthquake safety in schools.*
- *Enforcing structural and accommodation regulations* for wells, glass areas, fire protection, heat insulation and access for people with disabilities.
- *Using safe structural materials in buildings and equipment* with the aim of protecting the environment (*i.e.* by controlling colouring of materials, chemical emissions and use of asbestos-based fibre materials, and by providing natural ventilation infrastructure).
- *Using ergonomic standards* for the dimensions, shape, size and comfort of school furniture.
- *Ensuring hygiene* in all schools, particularly in sanitary areas and in electrical and plumbing installations.
- *Addressing issues of AIDS, drugs and alcohol in schools* by developing health education and welfare and prevention policies.
- *Ensuring student's safe arrival to and departure from school* by providing secure school routes, special traffic signs and pedestrian roads around school buildings.
- *Encouraging tolerance in multi-cultural school settings.* Socialisation can be an effective remedy for prejudice, alienation and anti-social behaviours. Schools are an ideal setting to promote the principles of democratic governance, tolerance and social responsibility.

Rather than describe specific school safety measures in Greece, such as fire protection regulations and school maintenance, this paper will focus on three of the items listed in the school safety framework above: ensuring earthquake safety in schools, encouraging

tolerance in multi-cultural school settings, and addressing the issues of AIDS, drugs and alcohol in schools.

Ensuring earthquake safety in schools

Protecting school buildings from earthquakes in Greece is a priority for the School Building Organisation (www.osk.gr/en/buildings_safety.html). On 7 September 1999, an earthquake struck Attica, killing 143 people and causing the loss of tens of thousands of homes, schools and other public and private buildings. Following the earthquake, OSK developed and implemented a comprehensive rehabilitation programme: 2 465 on-site surveys were conducted, 377 buildings repaired, 22 lots requisitioned, 530 prefabricated school rooms installed and 25 new school units constructed. The project was executed over a period of 400 days at a cost of EUR 60 million.

Since the earthquake, further progress has been made concerning earthquake safety in schools. First, a central staff service group was established within the School Building Organisation to ensure the prevention and management of natural disasters. The unit serves a research, training and co-ordination function, providing support for the decentralised services and organisations of the local government authorities. Second, in November 2003, a special project on the quality and safety of educational facilities was announced. The school building quality control pilot programme, co-ordinated by OSK and a team from the Technical University of Athens, involves existing school buildings in 40 municipalities in Attica. Data will be collected on the educational and structural soundness of school buildings, and also on the behaviour of school buildings during the earthquake of 7 September 1999. Approximate curves of seismic vulnerability will be drafted, and a strategy for the reinforcement or replacement of school buildings designed.

To share their experiences on crisis management and prevention policies concerning earthquakes, the School Building Organisation, in co-operation with the OECD Programme on Educational Building (PEB), organised an international conference on "Disaster Management in Educational Facilities" in Thessalonica from 7 to 9 November 2001 (OECD, 2004a). OSK also participated in the "*ad hoc* Experts' Meeting on Earthquake Safety in Schools" in February 2004, which was organised by PEB and GeoHazards International (OECD, 2004b).

Encouraging tolerance in multi-cultural school settings

Greece has a high proportion of students from different ethnic, religious, educational and cultural backgrounds. According to 2002/03 national statistics, non-national students comprise 8% of students in pre-primary education, 11% of students in primary education and 10% of students in secondary education. Non-national students are defined as students who do not have the citizenship (passport) of the country in which they are enrolled. In Greece, these students include the Muslim minority group, who reside in Thrace in the north, and the Roma. Adding to the diversity of the population are economic immigrants, whose official population in Greece is 500 000; this figure rises to about

700 000 to 800 000 when illegal immigrants are added. The recent waves of economic immigrants have affected the school population in significant ways because although the total school population has actually decreased by an estimated 3% to 4% each year, the rate of increase for non-national students is about 50% (Houndoumadi, Pateraki and Doanidou, 2003).

The children of immigrants can experience a number of difficulties in school as they adjust to a different cultural and social environment and to a new language. To promote cultural tolerance and reduce the risk of intercultural conflict, which can often lead to xenophobia, racism and violence in schools, the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs has implemented measures for multi-cultural education in the framework of regulations provided by Law 2413/96. The Special Secretariat for the Education of Greeks Abroad and Multi-Cultural Education has also implemented special programmes, in co-operation with the Pedagogical Departments of Athens and Ioannina Universities, to establish a multi-cultural curriculum, encourage integration and provide psychological support for non-national students. Similarly, the School Building Organisation is constructing new schools and renovating existing facilities with the aim of providing multi-cultural settings.

Addressing issues of AIDS, drugs and alcohol

According to a report by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA, 2003), in the last decade in European Union countries, drug-related deaths and the use of cannabis by people under 20 years of age increased, and the average age of users of solvents or inhalants is 13. In ten European Union countries, nearly two-thirds of students between the ages of 15 and 16 reported being drunk at least once in their lives. Those described as "experienced drinkers" – having drunk alcohol 40 times or more in their lifetimes – rose in at least six of these countries between 1995 and 1999. In the European Union, 550 000 adults and children live with the AIDS virus; six more people under the age of 25 become carriers every minute; and over 22 million people around the world have died from AIDS-related illnesses since 1981.

Although cannabis use among young people in Greece is much lower than in other European countries (EMCDDA, 2003), research conducted by the University Research Institute for Mental Health in Greece and by specialists in the adolescent therapy community of "Strofi" revealed that substance abuse is a problem in the country. Nine out of ten young people first use a substance before the age of 15. Concerning alcohol consumption, according to European Observatory data, reporting of periodic violence towards children by alcoholic fathers and mothers is common, and a significant number of fatal traffic accidents involving young people – around 40% – are caused by alcohol. In Greece, 2 015 AIDS cases were reported up to the end of 2000, 32 of whom were children under the age of 12. According to data presented at the 14th Pan-Hellenic Conference in Thessalonica, an alarming 50% of the population are ignorant about AIDS.

These statistics indicate a need to adopt and promote prevention policies at school, in co-operation with the scientific community, teachers, parents, self-government

authorities and non-governmental organisations. The School Building Organisation, in co-operation with the Chief of Hygiene Education in the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, has launched a major information and prevention campaign, which involves distributing educational software about AIDS, drugs and alcohol to all schools. This material is the result of many years of research and has been approved by international and national organisations such as the World Health Organisation, the World Federation for Mental Health, the Pedagogical Institute, the Therapy Centre for Dependent Individuals, the Organisation Against Drugs, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Hellenic Centre for Infectious Diseases Control. One set of material was prepared to increase students' awareness of the issues, and a second set was developed to systematically address the issues. A series of events and speeches will also take place in schools to promote the product and educate students about AIDS, drugs and alcohol.

References

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