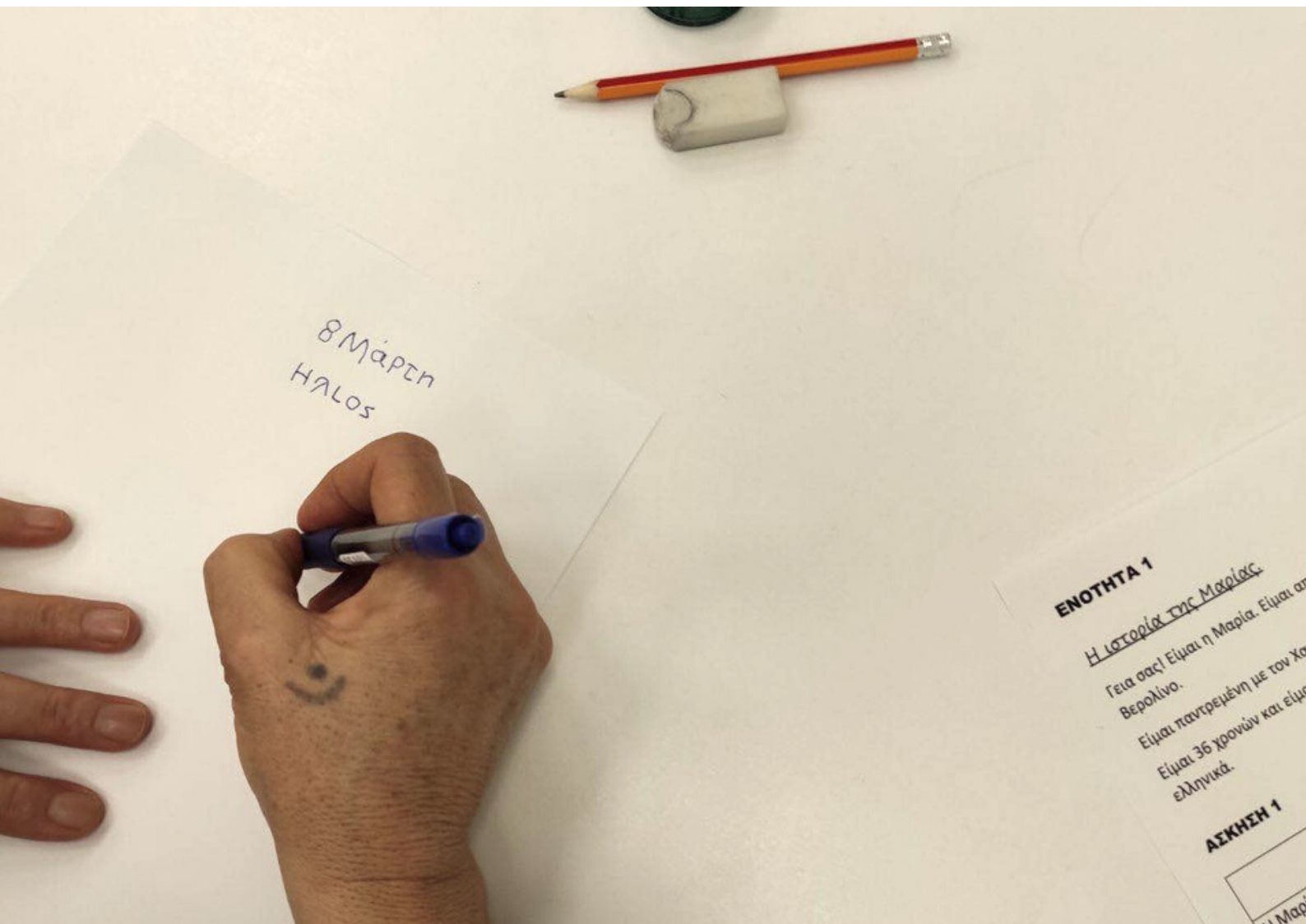


For the first time in a classroom through HELIOS Integration Project.



In the context of International Women's Day, we present the story of two refugee women from Afghanistan in order to show how education empowers women and positively affects their psychology.

The story.

Samira and Zahra are two women refugees from Afghanistan who, through the HELIOS program, had the opportunity to join the educational process for the first time in their lives since, until recently, they had never been in a classroom.

The two women, among others, were deprived of the right to education, as a result of which they could not read or write in their mother tongue. Through the Greek courses provided by HELIOS in the context of the integration of refugees and immigrants in the local community, they seized the opportunity for knowledge, giving themselves the opportunity to test their strengths, to stubbornly pursue knowledge, to learn how to learn.

As Greek lessons come to an end and on the occasion of the celebration of International Women's Day on March 8, students and educators entered the process to reflect on what these lessons actually offered them.

Samira, discussing how she felt when she learned that in the HELIOS program, she would enter a classroom and attend Greek lessons, answered **"I really liked the idea because I had never been to school before. Just thinking that I would pick up a pencil and write, made me to vigorously anticipate it"**, while Zahra confessed the following: **"At first, I was shocked because I could neither read nor write in my mother language and I was wondering how I can do it in a language I could not even speak"**.

Although this process was something new and unprecedented for them, the two women did not give up as they recognized from the first moment that what education offers them is multifaceted and is not limited to improving interpersonal communication.



Samira admits that "Greek is a very difficult language but there was a lot of help and encouragement. There was also bonding between the women of the team, so I did not even think for a moment to leave them. I really enjoyed learning. I went to the supermarket, for example, and everything no longer seemed so foreign to me."

Furthermore, Zahra states that "the first days were very difficult but with the patience, perseverance and encouragement of our instructor we managed to move forward. When I came to class, I was very happy because I was in a friendly environment where I learned other things besides letters."

As they both admitted, in addition to the knowledge they gained by attending classes at the Integration Learning Center (ILC), which operates under IOM HELIOS project as funded by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, the whole process gave them peace of mind, confidence and helped them fight fears that for other women do not even exist, such as getting into a bus and go somewhere alone.

Samira and Zahra, having now known what "school" means, what is the importance of the educational process for women and how much supplies they can each give, convey the following message to all women:

"I tell all women who have not gone to school to go, to move on in life!" - Samira

"I want to tell all women to continue to fight, not to back down from their rights in order to move forward in their lives..." - Zahra



Natasha, the educator of the women from Afghanistan, stands by the love she received during the educational process and states that she not only taught lessons, on the contrary, she also received a very important "lesson", that is, there is hope that as people insist, they can have a better life.

The alphabet will not stop "following" these women. On the contrary, it will continue to function as a "vehicle" for inner empowerment and self-confidence which will give them the strength to continue to claim the rest of their unfulfilled dreams that have not stopped accompanying them even for a moment.

The most important thing that the Greek lessons offered through HELIOS, is not the learning of the Greek alphabet but the participation in a process which brought these women one step closer to the fulfillment of their dreams. After all, it is not the destination that matters, but the journey.

**The names of the refugees are fictional. The two beneficiaries attended classes at the Integration Learning Center maintained by the PLOIGOS Educational and Developmental Company in Heraklion, as a partner in the implementation of the "HELIOS: Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection" project. HELIOS is implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and is funded by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.*

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