

Pre-Primary Schools' Earthquake Safety Initiative in Greece

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Abstract : Greece due to its location in the Eastern Mediterranean region is characterized by a high degree of seismicity and occurrence of severe earthquakes. It is generally accepted that preventive planning is vital in mitigating impacts, protecting those who are the most vulnerable namely children and increasing the degree of resilience of local communities. Worldwide, States have highlighted the need to ensure the safety of early childhood environments in case of disaster. A great number of children are enrolled in daycare facilities, so building and improving the preparedness of pre-primary schools to prevent injuries and fatalities in case of an earthquake becomes an important policy issue. It is more than evident that preparedness in early preschool level will be increased through awareness and education of the people who work to pre-primary classes and provide early childhood care. The aim of the present study is to assess the level of awareness and preparedness of the Greek pre-primary schools staff concerning earthquake protection issues, as well as their risk mitigation behaviors and earthquake management in case of a strong event. In this framework, specific questionnaire was developed and filled by the abovementioned target group at 30 different municipalities of Greece (2014-2016). Also in the framework of this study it is presented the Pre-Primary Schools' Earthquake Safety Initiative that has been undertaken by Earthquake Planning and Protection Organization (EPPO) the last years. This initiative aims to develop disaster-resilient day care centers through awareness, self-help, cooperation and education. Recognizing the necessity of integration of the disaster safety concept at pre-primary environments, EPPO published practical guidelines that focused on earthquake planning of these workspaces. Furthermore, dozens of seminars are implemented in municipality or prefecture-level every year by EPPO, in order the early childhood schools' staff to be appropriately educated and adequately trained to face the earthquake risk. Great progress has been made towards building awareness and increasing preschool preparedness in Greece but significant gaps still remain. Anyway, it is extremely important that the implementation of effective programs and practices and the broad collaboration of all involved parties have been recognized as essential in order to develop a comprehensive disaster management system at preschool environment.

Keywords : awareness, earthquake, education, emergency plans, preparedness, pre-primary schools

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