

## DIVERSITY-AWARE TEACHERS FOR SUPPORTING INCLUSION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS – CASE STUDY OF ITALY

Aleš Trunk

International School for Social and Business Studies, Slovenia  
ales.trunk@yahoo.com

Augusto Sebastio

Centre for Legal Informatics Studies – Taranto, Italy  
ausebas@tin.it

### **Abstract:**

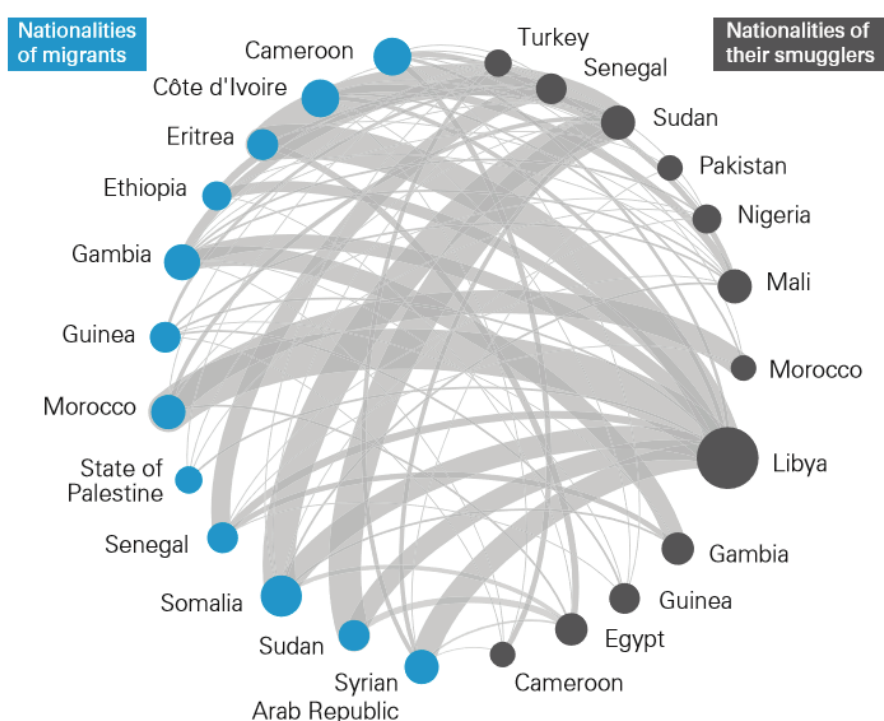
Immigrant children have almost doubled their presence in 10 years. Migration flows are profoundly changing the composition of classrooms. Analyses of PISA data reveal that in 2015, almost one in four 15-year-old students in OECD and EU countries was either foreign-born or had at least one foreign-born parent. Among the pupils in Italy's state schools, 193 different nationalities are represented. A crucial challenge for education systems is integrating children who settled in the country. From such a point of view, intercultural training of teachers occupies a position of importance. The OECD report from 2018 shows that 28% of teachers that participated in TALIS survey expressed the need for additional professional development when teaching in multicultural settings, which rises concerns. In this respect all teachers that work with heterogeneous groups should undergo trainings on diversity.

*Keywords: multicultural society, migrant children in Italy, EU and Italian policies on education, teacher trainings, project RoMigSc.*

## 1. MIGRANTS IN ITALY

In January 2015 Italian immigrants accounted for 8.2% of the population. The main countries of origin were Nigeria, Pakistan and Gambia (totalling 43% of applicants). The total immigrant population of Italy in 2015 (5,014,437) corresponded to 8.2% of the total Italian population (vs 6.9% for the EU28 average). Third-country nationals (3,521,825) arrived mainly from Albania, Morocco, China, Ukraine and the Philippines (which countries accounted for 45% of non-EU citizens). Between 2010 and 2014 (ISTAT) immigration flows declined (-38%) and the number of emigrants doubled. In 2015, the number of immigrants in Italy was fairly similar to the total number of Italian residents in foreign countries (4,636,647 persons, i.e. 7.6% of the overall Italian population) (Fondazione Migrantes, 2015). Immigrant children have almost doubled their presence in 10 years, representing 6.5% of the total number of children in 2005, and 11.7% in 2015. Picture 1 shows the relationships between migrants arriving in Italy and the smugglers who brought them there. The thickness of the connecting lines represents the frequency with which services were provided.

**Picture 1:** Network diagram showing the relationships between migrants on the Central Mediterranean route to Italy (blue) and their smugglers (dark grey), by nationality



Source: UNICEF, 2017.

Main documents on inclusion of migrants are: “The Italian way to intercultural school and integration of foreign students (from 2007) and Guidelines for reception and integration of foreign students (revised in 2014, however, its application depends on the interest of schools)”. Ministry of Education, Universities and Research, is currently implementing two actions to support immigrant children’s education: language support for “newcomers”, i.e. students who arrived to Italy in the last academic year, and teacher training.

The first action (language support) involves an average of 5-10% of all immigrant children (33,000 – 66,000 students), mainly in the pre-teen and teenage groups (11-15 years old). Funding for language support is allocated at a national level. Any school wanting funding must apply through national calls for bids announced every year.

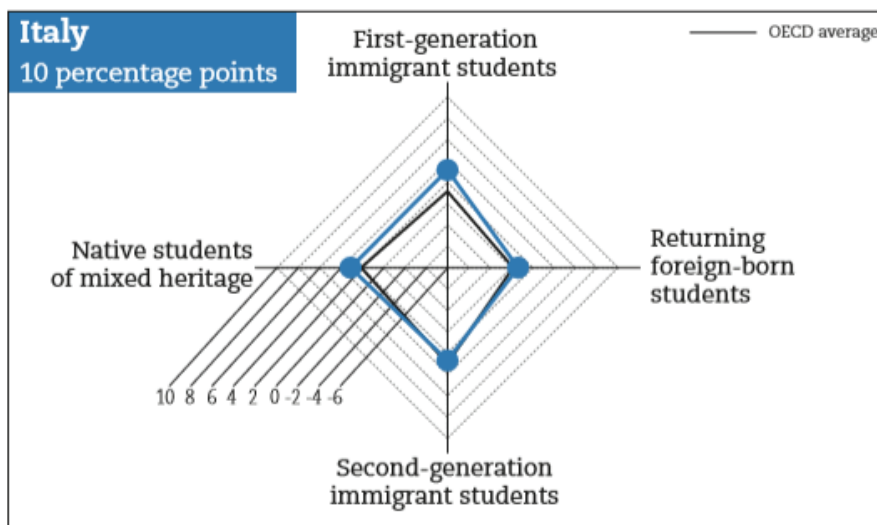
The second action (teacher training) aims to provide teachers and head teachers with organizational skills for working in multicultural schools. Every year, seminars and training sessions are held in different

cities across the country. In frame of our article we will mainly focus on needs for intercultural trainings and skills of teachers.

## 2. INTEGRATING CHILDREN IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS

A crucial challenge for education systems is integrating children who settled in the country at or after the age of 12. By contrast, students who had arrived in the country of destination before the age of 12, referred to as “early arrivals”, usually started their schooling in the host country or at least attended several years of primary school in that country. While these students were largely socialised in the host country and community (and thus were confronted with fewer language barriers and less disruption in their studies because of changing education systems), they nonetheless have experienced migration personally (OECD, 2018).

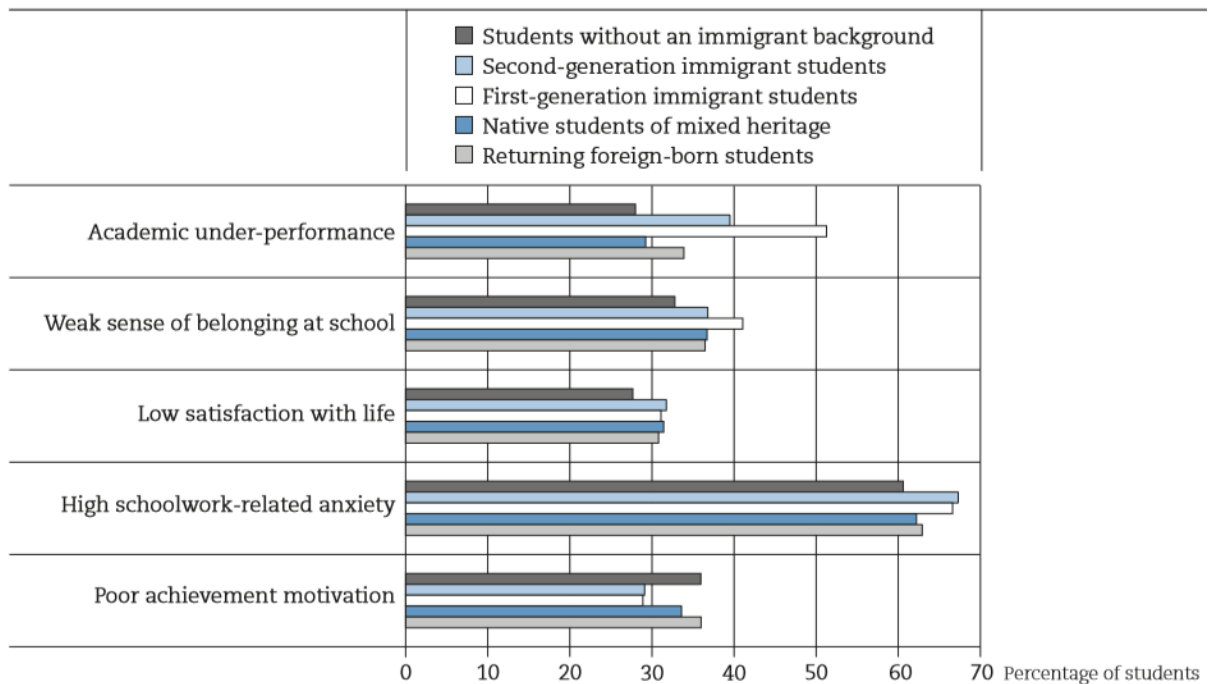
**Picture 2:** Trends between 2003 and 2015 in the percentage of students with an immigrant background, by group



Note: Percentage-point increase between 2003 and 2015 in the size of the population of students with an immigrant background and of the four groups of students included in that population.  
Source: OECD, 2018.

Migration flows are profoundly changing the composition of classrooms. Analyses of PISA data reveal that in 2015, almost one in four 15-year-old students in OECD and EU countries was either foreign-born or had at least one foreign-born parent. This figure is considerably higher than the statistics reported using PISA data on the number of immigrant students in OECD and EU countries (European Commission, 2017).

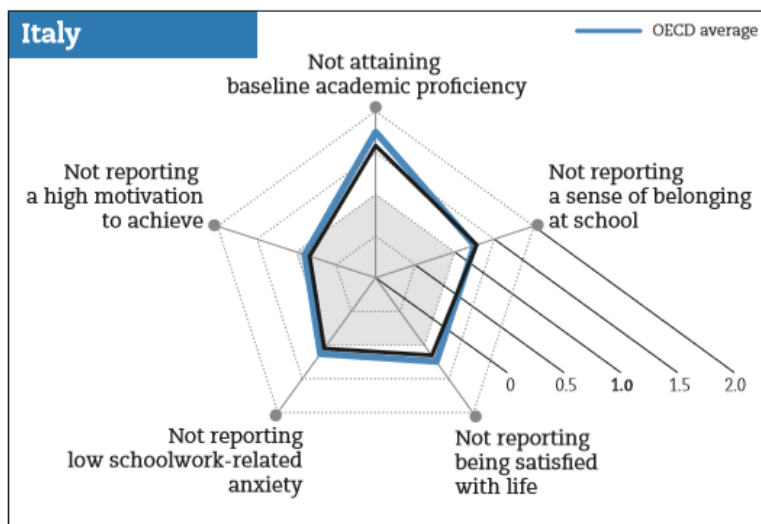
**Picture 3:** Academic and well-being outcomes, by immigrant background



Source: OECD, 2018.

Academic underperformance is common to most students with an immigrant background, but particularly first-generation immigrant students. As much as 51% of first-generation immigrant students failed to reach baseline levels of academic proficiency in reading, mathematics and science in 2015, compared to 28% of students without an immigrant background (OECD, 2018).

**Picture 4:** Relative risk for immigrant students of not being resilient, by resilience outcome



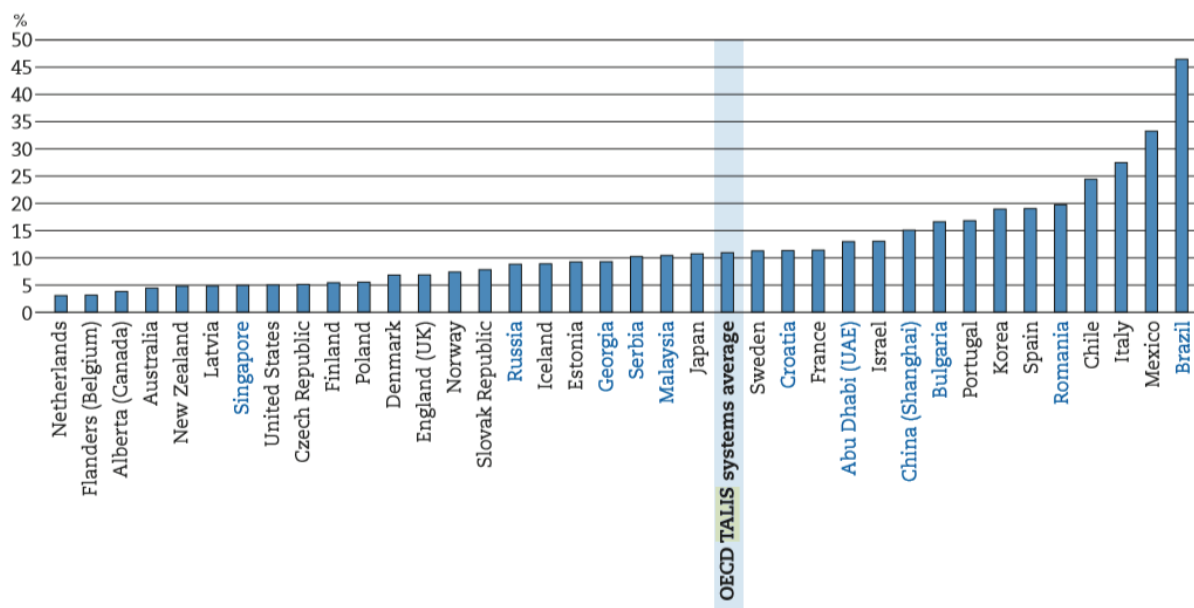
Source: OECD, 2018.

### 3. INTERCULTURAL TRAINING OF TEACHERS

Among the pupils in Italy's state schools, 193 different nationalities are represented (European Parliament, 2017). From such a point of view, intercultural training of teachers occupies a position of importance: it is only by starting from correct formulation of educational work in schools that one can

hope to diffuse an increasingly necessary 'culture of coexistence'. Many teachers lack adequate training. What is more, in-service training, by which teachers are able to bring their development up to date and equip themselves to reflect on their own practices, is not obligatory. As a result, a significant number of these teachers appear to lack the intercultural competencies required to manage increasingly heterogeneous classes, in the context of situations in which they are required to address a variety of tasks for which they may feel inadequately prepared. The OECD report from 2018 shows that 28% of teachers that participated in TALIS survey (OECD 2013) expressed the need for additional professional development when teaching in multicultural settings, which rises concerns.

**Picture 5:** Teacher's need for professional development in a multicultural setting



Source: OECD, 2013.

In this respect all teachers that work with heterogeneous groups should undergo trainings on diversity; it is also important that trainings offered are of high quality. Training for teaching in culturally diverse classrooms and awareness of ethnic/social discrimination shall also be mandatory for all teachers candidates (Dusi, Rodorigo and Aristo, 2016). EU policies suggest that the training programmes should include diversity on a transversal basis, rather than limiting it to specific modules.

#### 4. TRAINING OF TEACHERS – PROJECT ROMIGSC

Training for teachers are being organised also in frame of Erasmus + project: Inclusion of Roma and Migrants in Schools: Trainings, Open Discussions and Youth Volunteering Activities (RoMigSc). In 2018 and 2019 we expect around 40-50 teachers to undergo 16 hour training, which will be supported with e-activities. Main topics of teacher trainings are Inclusive strategies for work in multicultural society, Intercultural competencies, Inclusion in Schools (with specifics for migrant and roma children), Youth Activisation (involving volunteers in school projects). In addition to training of teachers, we will discuss the issue of intercultural competencies of teachers also at national seminars (that will gather around 100 stakeholders in 2018 and 2019).

First part of our paper will discuss current situation on inclusion of migrant children in Italian schools, with focus on teachers competencies for work in multicultural classes. The second part will focus on research conducted in frame of the activities RoMigSc, conducted in Naples, Italy in 2018: evaluations of training for teachers and national seminar.

## REFERENCE LIST

1. Dusi P., M. Rodorigo, P. A. Aristo. (2016). What Intercultural Competencies do Italian Primary Teachers Need? In: *Procedia*. Vol. 217, pp. 576-584
2. European Commission. (2017). *Migrants in European Schools: Thematic Report from a Programme of Expert Workshops and Peer Learning Activities*, Publication office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
3. European Parliament. (2017). *Research for cult committee -migrant education: monitoring and assessment*. Retrieved from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses>
4. Fondazione Migrantes. (2015). Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo 2015 [Italians in the World 2015]. Retrieved from <http://www.migrantesonline.it>
5. OECD. (2013). *Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS): 2013 Complete Database*. Retrieved from [http://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?datasetcode=talis\\_2013%20](http://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?datasetcode=talis_2013%20).
6. OECD. (2018). *The Resilience of Students with an Immigrant Background*. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-resilience-of-students-with-an-immigrant-background\\_9789264292093-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-resilience-of-students-with-an-immigrant-background_9789264292093-en)
7. UNICEF. (2017). *A child is a child: Protecting children on the move from violence, abuse and exploitation*. Retrieved from [https://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_95956.html](https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_95956.html)