

INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS IN SCHOOLS - CURRENT EU TRENDS & GOOD PRACTICES – PROJECT ROMIGSC

Nada Trunk Širca

International School for Social and Business Studies, Slovenia
trunk.nada@gmail.com

Alexander Krauss

Institute for Socio-Scientific Consultancy, Germany
krauss@isob-regensburg.net

Anica Novak Trunk

International School for Social and Business Studies, Slovenia
anicanovak@yahoo.co.uk

Valerij Dermol

International School for Social and Business Studies, Slovenia
valerij.dermol@mfdps.si

Abstract:

Most EU countries have developed, to a greater or lesser extent, educational policies for immigrant children. Some countries have made greater efforts than others, in accordance with the relative size of their foreign-born population and, to a lesser extent, the level of integration policies in the realm of education. The article analyses key trends in EU regarding inclusion of migrant children in education (based on policy recommendations and good practices) and presents current situation in 5 countries: Slovenia, FYROM, Germany, Italy, Spain and Turkey.

Keywords: migrant children in schools, EU policies on education, good practices, project RoMigSc.

1. INTRODUCTION

While migration flows pose challenges for host communities, they also represent opportunities. Diversity has always been at the heart of human progress. Beyond that, migration can facilitate the adjustment in ageing societies. But to unlock the benefits of migration, effective education and social policies are necessary to integrate migrant children successfully into society. Education systems shape immigrants' ability to eventually participate in the labour markets of host countries, contribute to welfare arrangements, and feel part of their communities. The growing share of children among those fleeing conflict has led to a re-examination of how best to integrate foreign-born children into their new communities. This is particularly important given the high likelihood that a large number of young migrants will settle permanently in their country of destination (OECD 2018).

Education can help immigrants acquire skills and contribute to the host-country economy; it can also foster immigrants' social and emotional well-being and sustain their motivation to join others in work and life in their new communities – and, by doing so, help them integrate more easily. But ensuring that students with an immigrant background have positive well-being outcomes represents a significant challenge, because many immigrant or mixed-heritage students must overcome the adversities associated with displacement, socio-economic disadvantage, language barriers and the difficulty of forging a new identity all at the same time (OECD 2018).

Although policies on integration of migrant children through education been enormously present at the agenda of EU authorities, European Commission through European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) indicate that foreign born and second generation youngsters are at greater risk of poverty, more likely to leave school early and to be out of employment, as well as are less likely to have mastered basic skills (literacy, math) by age 15 (EPRS 2015). There are not many migrant children registered for pre-school and tertiary education. This situation was confirmed by the “Programme for International Students Assessment” – PISA (Sikorskaya, I. 2017).

In 2008 the Report on strategies for integrating migrant children in European schools indicated that “migrant students are disadvantaged in terms of enrolment in type of school, duration of attending school, indicators of achievement, dropout rates, and type of school diploma attained”. Socio-economic disadvantage and language barriers are two of the greatest obstacles to the successful integration of students with an immigrant background. (European Commission 2008, OECD 2018).

The ability of societies to maintain social cohesion in the presence of large migration flows depends on their capacity to integrate immigrants. Education can help immigrants acquire skills and contribute to the host-country economy; it can also contribute to migrants' social and emotional well-being and sustain their motivation to participate in the social and civic life of their new communities. But ensuring that students with an immigrant background enjoy academic, social and emotional well-being implies that these students must first overcome the adversities associated with displacement, socio-economic disadvantage, language barriers and the difficulty of forging a new identity – all at the same time. (OECD 2018).

Education systems, schools and teachers can play a significant role in helping students with an immigrant background integrate into their communities, overcome adversity and build their academic, social, emotional and motivational resilience. Introducing early assessment of language and other skills, providing targeted language training, building a diversity-aware teaching force that can support all learners, offering additional support to disadvantaged students and schools, implementing effective anti-bullying programmes, ensuring the availability of and participation in extracurricular activities, and engaging parents can improve the well-being of students with an immigrant background, in all of its facets (OECD 2018).

In next chapter are presented some initiatives and good practices on integration of migrants in schools.

2. SOME GOOD PRACTICES AND CURRENT TRENDS IN INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS IN SCHOOLS

In 2015 the European Commission presented Schools, VET and Adult education helping newly-arrived refugees in Europe resulted from the survey on practices and challenges of the organizations dealing with school education, vocational training and adult learning on their support of migrants and refugees.

Remarkably that answering the question on European Commission contribution to address the issues related to the refugee crisis, the majority of the answers (69,73%) was to disseminate information about good practices. It only confirms the fact that lack of such kind of information could form this sceptical reality in regards of great ideas of intercultural education (European Commission 2015, Sikorskaya, I. 2017).

European Commission initiated numerous granted programs on supplementing and enhancing the schooling practices on minority and migrant students' inclusion. To list a few: European Policy Network SIRIUS aimed at educating people with a migrant background. EURYDICE Network provides education institutions and organizations with the guidance and good practices on how to tailor the provision of education for migrants. The European Network for Intercultural Education Activities (ENIEDA) facilitates the exchange of good practices on the integration of migrants and funds relevant projects across the different levels of education. H2020 has a certain section of projects dedicated to migrant education and their integration. From 2015 have been launched Erasmus+ Programmes with special focus on encouraging projects that support social inclusion, notably of refugees and migrants (Sikorskaya, I. 2017).

2.1. Language of host country

Language is crucial for supporting children's performance in the educational system. Most EU countries implement specific language training in their educational systems. Specific practices that prove to be more effective include early language intervention, the integration of language and content learning, parents' involvement, assessments of individual needs and training for teachers.

Investing in acquiring the host-country language has a positive impact on almost all facets of life but especially so on the integration of immigrant children in education settings. Language fluency enables children with an immigrant background to participate actively in the social life of their school, and develop a sense of belonging at their school community and beyond. Language facilitates the socialisation of children with an immigrant background in their new environment and supports their acculturation in the destination country. Children with an immigrant background with language difficulties are found to be more likely to be bullied, discriminated against and are more likely to suffer emotional problems, such as depression and low self-esteem (OECD 2018).

Most countries provide language courses specially designed for migrant children. These take place, in most cases, at the stage when the children first enter the school system, and in the form of extra school hours, while in other cases children are withdrawn from certain class periods.

In order to ensure better proficiency of migrant children in the language of host country, it is also very important to promote early language assessment.

Examples of policies to promote language training

In Norway the national strategy plan, "Equal Education in Practice!", strongly recommends language support in both the mother tongue and Norwegian in pre-primary education, primary, secondary and higher education, as well as adult training. About 150 different projects were implemented between 2004 and 2009, some of which are ongoing (OECD 2018).

Some practices that promote early language assessment of children

In Germany, the majority of Länder introduced screening processes to identify pre-school children in need of additional language support. These assessments are usually conducted 12 to 24 months before children's transition to school. Support for other mother tongues besides German is only provided within individual projects or on the initiative of early childhood and education staff/centres/ providers. The most common practice to improve children's skills in German is the child-oriented approach Alltagsintegrierte Sprachliche Bildung (i.e. language education embedded into daily routines). This approach was spread nationwide through the federal programme Frühe Chancen: SchwerpunktKitas Sprache und Integration (Early Chances: Childcare centres with special focus on language and integration), and continued through the follow-up programme Sprach-Kitas: Weil Sprache der Schlüssel zur Welt ist (Language day nurseries: Because language is the key to the world) (OECD 2018).

In the Netherlands, young children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are entitled to receive language-development support. These children can participate in early childhood and education targeted programmes (vooren vroegschoolse educaties) that provide support before and during the first years of school. All toddlers (2.5 to 4 years old) who are part of this programme receive 10 hours of language development per week. For the rest of the day, targeted toddlers attend the same early childhood and education programme as their non-targeted peers. Findings from the Pre-COOL national cohort study show that this approach is effective (OECD 2018).

2.2. Overcoming socio – economic disadvantages

Disadvantaged students and schools need additional support, which is most often provided in the form of greater resources. Many countries provide additional resources to schools to overcome language difficulties among newly arrived students, with funding provided to promote second-language teaching and learning and to support the creation of innovative teaching modules (OECD 2018). All initiatives in the chapter 2; from 2.3 to 2.6 are connected to overcoming socio-economic disadvantages.

2.3. Intercultural competencies of teachers

In teaching students from diverse backgrounds, especially when it comes to immigrant students and students who do not speak the language of the assessment, teachers often feel the need for additional systemic support. On average, around one in ten teachers participating in the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) reported the need for additional professional development when teaching in multicultural settings. In some countries, the reported need is significantly higher than the average. As relates data of the countries of project RoMigSc, available are data of following countries: Italy 28 % teachers expressed need for professional development - Spain -19% teachers expressed need for professional development (OECD 2018).

Support for teachers takes place in the form of intercultural training. Most of this support, however, is provided in the form of materials and guidelines, rather than actual courses.

Key trends/practices suggested

Diversity training, intercultural pedagogy and language development are considered necessary measures integrating the whole school professional development programmes(OECD 2015). It has been suggested that the training programmes should include diversity on a transversal basis, rather than limiting it to specific modules (European Parliament 2017).

To understand and teach immigrant students effectively, it is helpful for teachers to learn how to teach students with different mother tongues. Various methods are taught in teacher training, including language-sensitive teaching. In this approach, teachers learn to become aware of the language dimension of teaching and learning content in their subject, and to acquire teaching strategies and techniques which link language to curriculum content and academic standards (OECD 2018).

2.4. Participation of migrant children in extra-curricular activities

Extracurricular activities include any organised social, artistic or physical activities for school-aged youth that occur during out-of-school time, usually before or after school or during the summer. But schools are not the only venues where after-school activities take place; these activities are also often provided by communities or religious organisations.

Examples of good practices

For example, the German Football League (DFL) started a “Willkommen im Fußball” (Welcome to Football) initiative in 2015, leading to 24 of the country’s professional clubs launching similar schemes (e.g. Werder Bremen’s “Bleib am Ball” (Stay on the Ball) project and Bayer Leverkusen’s “Bayer 04 macht Schule” (Bayer 04 does school project). Around 65 training sessions involving about 800 refugees aged between 4 and 30 take place in Germany every week, and around 600 of these participants have begun playing in amateur leagues (OECD 2018).

At the EU level, the “European Sport Inclusion Network (ESPIN): Promoting Equal Opportunities of Migrants and Minorities through Volunteering in Sport” involves those who are at risk of social exclusion. Equal access to organised sport is promoted among disadvantaged groups (OECD 2018).

2.5. Parental involvement in the school community

Parental involvement can help create a socially connected school where students, teachers, parents and principals work together to create a positive learning environment. Supportive relationships among teachers, students and families can also improve student performance, particularly among disadvantaged students. Parental involvement can thus improve the academic and social resilience of immigrant students. On average across OECD countries, the children of parents involved in the community were six percentage points more likely to report that they feel like they belong at school and that they are satisfied with their life (seven or six percentage points, respectively, across EU countries). Eg. In Germany, immigrant students are less likely than native students to have parents who are involved in the school community, and parental involvement increases the likelihood of students reporting low anxiety and high motivation by around five percentage points (European parliament 2017).

Key trends/practices

Fostering parents’ participation, which in turn involves them in academic support, is positively related to children’s achievement; at the same time, it helps to integrate the parents themselves (European parliament 2017).

Visiting homes, recruiting culturally appropriate and trained specialists, providing learning resources and information to families, launching awareness campaigns, and training teachers and staff to work with culturally and linguistically diverse children are all ways that education systems can support immigrant parents in their efforts to help their children succeed (OECD 2018).

Example of an effective way to engage marginalized parents in early childhood education is the HIPPY28 (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) programme, which operates in 10 countries spanning 5 continents. The programme is designed especially for those parents who may not feel comfortable in their own abilities to support their children’s (pre-primary) education. Similar initiatives are found in Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland. HIPPY has gained recognition as an efficient method for raising families’ awareness of their potential as educators. Once a week the family is visited by trained peers from the same socio-cultural background who provide first-language assistance and learning activities for children. The visitor acquaints parents with games and learning materials in their mother tongue. Parents are also encouraged to create learning situations for their own child. Several research studies have shown positive results both for children and families alike (OECD 2018).

2.6. Mentoring (tutoring) schemes

Mentoring can provide additional, nonprofessional support to students with an immigrant background and thus improve their well-being. Mentors can be teachers, other school personnel or peers.

Good practice

For example, the (peer) mentoring initiative in Hamburg, Germany, Junge Vorbilder (Young Role Models), targets students in grades 8 to 11 (lower secondary school) with an immigrant background. Mentors are university students who come from immigrant backgrounds and often share similar cultural and linguistic heritage and school experience as their mentees (European Commission 2015). Mentoring is conducted at the homes of the mentees so that mentors can learn about their mentee’s family environment and develop a good relationship with their parents. Mentoring consists of tutoring, social and emotional support, and educational and vocational orientation (OECD 2018).

3. PROJECT ROMIGSC

The project RoMigSc, titled Inclusion of Roma and Migrants in Schools: Trainings, Open Discussions and Youth Volunteering Activities is part of Erasmus +, KA3, and delivered in the period 2017- 2019. The main aim of the RoMigSc project is to support a better integration of Roma and migrant children in education. Various activities are implemented in the partner’s countries (Slovenia, Germany, Italy,

Spain, Turkey, FYR of Macedonia): initial study, training for volunteers and volunteering activity – projects for schools, training for teachers, E-platform on inclusion in schools and intercultural topics, national seminars for different stakeholders, international conference. Through those activities we will stimulate innovative policy development, policy dialogue and implementation, as well as the exchange of knowledge in the fields of education, training and youth. The engagement of youth in volunteering is also fostered in the project.

3.1. Integration of migrants in schools – key facts about RoMigSc countries

The key facts/findings were retrieved from the documents of European Commission 2017 and from RoMigSc Initial study - compilation of national reports (ISOB 2017).

Germany

Germany is an old immigration country in Europe, with 8% of its total population possessing foreign citizenship and around 20% with an immigrant background, mainly from Poland, Turkey, Italy and Romania. As a federal country, educational policies and immigrant integration are competencies shared to different degrees between the federal government and the Länder (the federal states). School success is mainly dependent on social situation and education of parents.

Some good practices: detailed, regular and comprehensive monitoring as a key resource for coping with and predicting the needs of students, teachers and schools; different practices targeted at building good contact to migrant parents; forming inter-professional and inter-agency support networks; volunteer engagement to assist migrant ...

Italy

Currently, immigration in Italy represents 8.2% of the total population. Italy centralizes its responsibility over education and immigration in the Italian government and Parliament. The Ministry of Interior is responsible for immigration policy, while the Ministry of Education, University and Research is responsible for all matters concerning the education of immigrant children. In 2014 the Ministry created a National Observatory for the integration of foreign students and intercultural relations, which is intended to promote and suggest policies for integrating immigrant students within the school system and verify policy implementation through monitoring. To date, no report on the Observatory's activities has been published. In February 2014 the Ministry published the revised "Guidelines for reception and integration of foreign students", however its application depends on the interest of schools.

Risk factors include language, difficulties of integration of other family members, low economic status of family, material deprivation, inappropriate living conditions, difficult communication with the migrant parents, difference between education system of children's' home country and of the host country.

There are many good practices on integration such as:

interactive platform on the main academic disciplines designed for the new pupils enrolled in lower secondary school with low knowledge of Italian; Interventions in cultural linguistic mediation and educational consultancy; activities outside kindergartens for children and parents

Spain

Immigrant population in Spain rose from 1% of the total in the early nineties to 12% in 2011. Within its wide diversity of origins, Ecuadorians, Romanians and Moroccans are the most numerous groups. Currently, immigrant children make up 8% of the total number of children in Spain. As a unitary, decentralized country, the Spanish government is responsible for the basic regulations in the area of education while the design and implementation of education systems is decentralized to the autonomous communities. There is no homogeneous system for meeting immigrant child educational needs, and each autonomous community applies its own policies, leading to a highly disparate scenario.

Good practices: volunteers for supporting vulnerable parts of society on a diversity-oriented perspective can add value

Slovenia

In Slovenia 11.3% of the population were born abroad, with a large proportion coming from the Western Balkans. The immigrant child population represents 16% of the total number of children. As a unitary country, Slovenia centralizes the responsibility for education policies and immigrant child education policies in the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. Language problems and low social status of parents are main problems of migrant integration in schools.

Some good practices on integration of migrants in school refer to: projects that focus on enhancement of intercultural competencies of teacher; school initiatives that focus on intensive teaching of Slovene as foreign language.

FYROM

In FYROM is prevalence of outgoing and transitory migration, no specific policy on migrants. A list of policy recommendations is given, among them support for investment to migrants and better health provision and integration into regular structures.

Turkey

Discussion about migration in Turkey is fully focused on refugees from Syria. Data from 2017: out of 833.039 Syrian school-age children, 496.653 were registered in school. Education is provided in State schools vs 400 temporary education centres (TEC), run by NGO, based on Syrian curriculum and Arabic language at a ration of 1:2. TECS will be out phased and all Syrian children will be integrated into regular Turkish schools and educated along the Turkish curriculum. Policies to integrate Syrian students have been recent, after it became apparent that their stay would not be of short duration.

Problematic situations: traumata, discrimination, exploitation, child marriage, child labour. Language barriers and the other risk factors lead to under performance and drop-out.

Some good practices: Exemplary efforts in fields as orientation programmes with 1:1 peer mentoring, visits to Syrian families by teachers, weekly parent-teacher meetings, Turkish language courses in school for parents.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Low socio-economic status and bad command of language of host countries has been proved as main risk factors in integration of migrant children in counters of RoMigSc project. These two factors have been proved as key risk factors also in OECD countries.

For example, differences in socio-economic status explain over one-fifth of the gap between immigrant students and students without an immigrant background in the likelihood of attaining baseline levels of academic proficiency, on average across OECD countries. Similarly, immigrant students in OECD countries who do not speak the language of assessment at home are around eight percentage points less likely to be academically resilient than native-speaking immigrant students.

As has been reported through the article, different initiative, and different practices exist at national levels or at local levels that can contribute to better integration of migrants in education. In this respect, it is very important that authorities (national, local) and schools are working actively to reach the aims of contributing to better social inclusion of migrant children...

The project RoMigSc also focuses on intercultural competencies of different target groups: teachers, volunteers, and general population. In this respect it is important to stress that Intercultural education has been understood differently over time. Initially at 1970s-1980s, intercultural education was linked mostly to the questions of language proficiency. The last decade in Europe cannot be described as a period of peaceful, harmonious development of multicultural societies where citizens appreciate cultural diversity. Refugee flow of the last years was recognized by EU officials as a crisis. Unfortunately manifestations of prejudice, discrimination and hate speech have become common, and certain political

parties advocate extremist ideas. There is an increasing trend of viewing immigration, cultural diversity and multiculturalism through the prism of potential threats and problems. These problems are linked to socio-economic and political inequalities and misunderstandings between people from different cultural backgrounds and affiliations. Thus there is an increased imperative for intercultural education, as a type of education to help live together in culturally diverse societies.

REFERENCE LIST

1. European Commission. (2015). Schools, VET and Adult education helping newly-arrived refugees in Europe. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/documents/school-vet-adult-survey-refugee_en.pdf
2. European Parliament. (2017). Research for cult committee – migrant education: monitoring and assessment. Retrieved from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses>
3. ISOB. (2017). Initial study - compilation of national reports RoMigSc.
4. OECD. (2018). The Resilience of Students with an Immigrant Background. Retrieved from https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-resilience-of-students-with-an-immigrant-background_9789264292093-en
5. Sikorskaya, I. (2017). Intercultural education policies across Europe as responses to cultural diversity (2006-2016). Centro Studi Europei – Università degli Studi di Salerno.