

Integrating migrants and their children through education

Migrants' life stories reveal different levels of difficulty or ease in the process of integration. The key importance of education as a means of integration is widely acknowledged. For a number of years, the European Parliament has called for tangible commitments and proposed practical measures to integrate migrants and their children through education, training and the recognition of skills.

Immigrant profiles

Immigrants do not fit neatly into a single profile, and many who live for some time in another country are not consistently classified as migrants. The parameters can vary depending on who is using the term. For statistical purposes, Eurostat [includes](#) anyone who changes their usual country of residence for at least 12 months, and sets the distinction between recent and settled migrants at eight years of residence. Eurostat also distinguishes between different categories of migrants: 'foreign born' for those not born in their current country of residence; third-country nationals (TCNs), for those who are not citizens of a European Union Member State; and 'second generation' for those who live in the country in which they were born, but whose parents (either one or both) are foreign born. On the other hand, some [researchers](#) point out that the terms migrant or immigrant may also connote a lack of belonging. Some people could be defined as migrants on the basis of their physical appearance, their dress-code or the way they speak. Some individuals are treated as outsiders both where they reside and in their own or their parents' country of origin. Others may be acknowledged as foreigners but without being thought of as migrants.

Educational outcomes

[Eurostat](#), [OECD](#) and [European Commission](#) data indicate that foreign born and second generation young people are at greater [risk](#) of poverty, more likely to [leave school](#) early and to be out of employment, education or training, and are less likely to have mastered basic skills (literacy, maths and science) by age 15. This scenario is also [linked](#) to parents' income and level of education. [Girls](#) tend to out-perform boys at school but they also seem more likely to lower their ambitions for the future. Educational performance has a direct impact on life chances. Identifying obstacles and supports to educational success is useful in developing strategies for integration through education.

A [study](#) funded by Horizon 2020 which was conducted in nine different EU Member States (CZ, DK, FR, DE, HU, RO, SK, SE, UK) on young second generation migrants, and another [study](#) on Kurdish young people in Sweden, reveal certain patterns. Migrant parents with a low level of education often opt for predominantly migrant neighbourhoods and schools, where they may feel more at ease. Conversely, 'locals' tend to transfer their children out of those schools. Teachers may encounter difficulties if they do not share [common ground](#) with students and their families, and may respond by lowering educational and disciplinary standards to achieve some success and to avoid constant confrontation. Schools can also have difficulties in securing the resources needed to provide quality teaching. Students tend to resent what they consider unfair treatment. Some 'put up defences' by emphasising their foreign identity or by behaving aggressively. Others try to ignore any evidence of stigmatisation or attempt to assimilate, possibly straining relationships with their family and community, who in turn may feel shunned. The studies suggest that combinations of these tensions contribute to lower educational achievement and increase the number of early school leavers.

However, [best practices](#) exist in all systems, and some features of education provision favour success. These include the control and assessment of the quality of what is taught; good initial and in-service teacher training on intercultural education; qualified early childhood education with support for learning both the



native and host country language; avoidance of early selection; [inclusive](#), cooperative and individualised teaching methods which avoid singling out; and research dissemination and dialogue with policy-makers. The availability of sustainable support in terms of information, guidance and counselling, study skills, peer networks, service-provider teams and finances favour completion through to the [tertiary level](#). The [recognition](#) of existent knowledge, informal and [non-formal learning](#), and access to apprenticeships, vocational education, dual systems, lifelong learning [paths](#) and permeability between systems all widen opportunities to gain skills needed on the labour market.

European-level tools

Although the education of migrants is the responsibility of Member States, the EU has a number of tools in place which make it possible to coordinate and support Member States' activities. In 2008, a [Commission communication](#) already pointed out the importance of identifying the skill sets of immigrants and the need for training to fill in skills gaps, while the [Council conclusions](#) of 2009 on the education of children with a migrant background focused on policy responses to bolster educational achievement. The Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training ([ET 2020](#)) identified two priorities, the teaching of the host country language, and mutual learning based on best practices in the education of migrants. The draft [2015 joint report](#) on the implementation of ET 2020 prioritises access to good quality mainstream education and training for migrants, tackling discrimination, racism, segregation, bullying, violence and stereotypes, while facilitating language acquisition. Likewise the [implementation report](#) on the EU Youth Strategy draws attention to the accumulation of disadvantage by young people with a migrant background. This situation of young migrants is studied in detail in the [accompanying document](#) and the [Youth Monitor](#), while the relative [Council Work Plan](#) specifies that an expert group is to define the role of youth work, informal and non-formal education to help redress the situation.

EU efforts aimed at improving education for active citizenship, intercultural understanding and the integration of young migrants were reinvigorated following the [Paris Declaration](#) (March 2015). The Commission has set up a European [Policy Network](#) on the education of children and young people with a migrant background, and set up a [website on Integration](#). [Erasmus+](#) prioritises these issues in its calls for projects, and [Horizon 2020](#) funds research in the area. Yet a [study](#) published by the Parliament indicates that Country Specific Recommendations do not pay sufficient attention to sub-national realities and vulnerable groups such as migrants, while at the same time policies are evaluated in terms of cost-effectiveness and sustainability rather than merit and long-term impact. This does not provide a strong incentive for political commitment to push forward policy reforms to bring changes in line with political declarations.

European Parliament

In January 2016, the EP adopted a resolution on [intercultural dialogue](#), cultural diversity and education pointing out the importance of teaching intercultural dialogue which is an essential tool of conflict management and to develop a deeper sense of belonging. It identifies teachers, parents, NGOs and human rights organisations as key players and calls on the Commission and Council to adopt intercultural dialogue as a strong political objective. This position is reiterated in a report on [learning EU at school](#) adopted by the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT), and due to be discussed in the April plenary session.

In 2011, the EP drew attention to the fact that [early school leaving](#) is particularly pronounced among children from migrant families, and proposed that they should be offered linguistic support. These concerns echo a [resolution](#) of 2009 in which the EP encouraged policies supporting multilingualism, and pointed out that migrant children need to learn the language of the host country. It stressed that measures for integration needed to avoid the creation of ghetto-type schools, by coordinating them with policies on the provision of childcare, housing, employment and health. Teachers need support in the form of specialist training, and schools with a high proportion of immigrant children have to be given the necessary resources. Counselling services can help youngsters deal with cultural differences while non-formal education and youth work are good tools to raise awareness of human rights and personal freedoms.

The CULT committee is currently discussing a [draft report](#) on the follow-up of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) in which it dedicates a chapter to the education of migrants. It suggests that education ministries and the Commission's Education and Culture DG designate dedicated contact persons; it also calls for other measures that support teachers, facilitate integration, prevent radicalisation and validate qualifications.