Briefing
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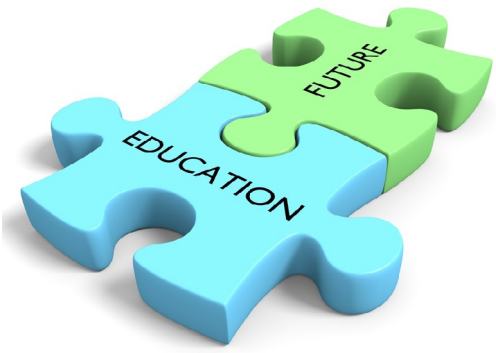
Integration of migrants: The education dimension

SUMMARY

Equipping immigrants with the necessary skills to achieve successful integration is a central preoccupation of policy-makers in the EU and beyond. The integration challenges of migrant students in formal educational systems tend to be essentially related to the three main components of education – access, participation and performance. While access to education is legally guaranteed, it remains difficult. Access to quality education is even more problematic. An additional concern for migrant students is staying at school. Indeed, young people with a migrant background are generally more at risk of dropping out without an upper secondary qualification.

Results from the OECD-led Programme for International Student Assessment indicate that, in most countries, first-generation immigrant students perform worse than national students, and second-generation immigrant students score somewhere between the two. Yet, the variation in performance across countries suggests that policy has an important role to play in reducing, if not eliminating entirely, the disadvantage that accompanies displacement. Some education systems have demonstrated that it is possible to secure strong learning outcomes through special early learning policies and additional language support.

To offer a long-term perspective for migrants through education, the EU follows a twofold approach, providing tools and schemes for their integration in EU countries, and offering support for refugees outside EU borders through specific funds. The former include various policy frameworks, such as increased access to early childhood education and care facilities, the validation of prior learning, and speeding up mechanisms for assessment of capacities and recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning of arriving migrants. An example of the latter is the Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis, aiming to help some 1.5 million refugees in neighbouring countries through the allocation of €140 million to education alone.



In this briefing:

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Background

In Europe, the year 2015 will arguably be remembered as the year of the 'refugee crisis.' More than 1 million people, among them over 100 000 children, have entered the European Union (EU) in search of safety and a better life, with over 136 000 reaching European coasts since the beginning of 2016. While transit and destination countries have been struggling to manage the refugee flows, EU countries have been debating how best to tackle the sources of forced displacement.

However, the presence of high numbers of students with immigrant backgrounds is not a new phenomenon in Europe. In 2012, the average share of 15-year-old students with an immigrant background across countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was 11%. Around 6% of them were second-generation immigrants (meaning that they were born in the host country to foreign-born parents), and 5% were first-generation immigrants (both they and their parents were born abroad). Teaching immigrant students is therefore a reality in an increasing number of EU countries. The integration of these students in European schools and society at large is thus of the essence, not least because it is an economic necessity and a pre-condition for democratic stability and social cohesion.

Experts insist that urgent measures need to be taken at national level, so that educational institutions are provided with sufficient financial resources to adapt to this reality and develop new kinds of services. The issue of how best to integrate (young) migrants is a central policy challenge throughout Europe and is one of the priority concerns of the EU. In November 2015, EU education ministers underlined in particular the need to recognise the competences of newly arrived migrants and to implement intensive language learning to help overcoming social inequalities.

Migrant students in the EU

A (difficult) definition

Who is a 'migrant' is often unclear in public debate. Data on migrants are often amalgamated with those on ethnic or religious minorities and asylum-seekers. Public discourse commonly uses such terms interchangeably. Migrants might be defined by foreign birth, by foreign citizenship, or by their movement into a new country to stay temporarily or to settle for longer. The existence of multiple definitions is a particular problem for consistency in public debate on the number and impact of migrants.

The EU's statistical office, Eurostat, and the OECD use similar definitions for migrants. Eurostat distinguishes between foreign citizens (i.e. people residing in a Member State but holding different citizenship) and first-generation migrants (i.e. people born outside their Member State of residence, who may or may not be citizens of that Member State). Regrettably, comparative information on second-generation migrants (i.e. native born with one or two foreign-born parents) is very limited and presents a serious data gap. Students with a migrant background include both first and second-generation migrant students.

For the purpose of this briefing the terms 'migrant students', 'migrant children' and 'migrant young people' will be considered synonymous with 'immigrant students' and 'children/students of migrant background'.

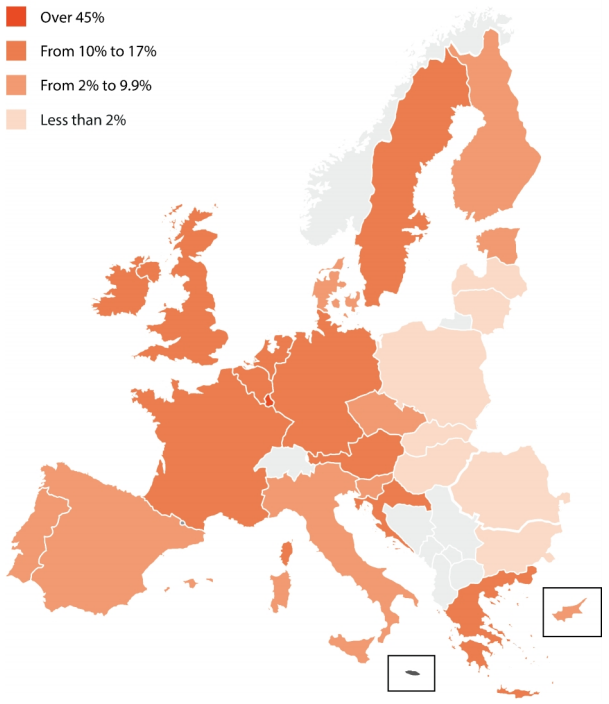
Some figures

Eurostat data show that, in January 2014, 33.5 million people born outside the EU resided in an EU Member State, and an additional 19.6 million citizens – representing

3.9% of the EU population – lived in a Member State different from their country of birth. The recent, substantial and continuous influx of refugees and asylum-seekers is likely to increase the number of students with migrant background in European classrooms, at least in the short to medium term. Between 2013 and 2015, asylum applications in the EU increased threefold, jumping from around 430 000 to over 1 255 000.

The proportion of students with a migrant background in the European education system varies significantly across EU countries (see Figure 1). The highest share of 15-year-old students with a migrant background can be found in Luxembourg (46.4%), followed by Austria (16.4%), Belgium (15.1%), France (14.8%), and Sweden (14.5%). In contrast, the share of 15-year-old learners with a migrant background is very low in countries in central and eastern Europe, such as Romania (0.2%) and Poland (0.2%).

Figure 1 – Share of students with an immigrant background in the EU, 15-year olds, 2012

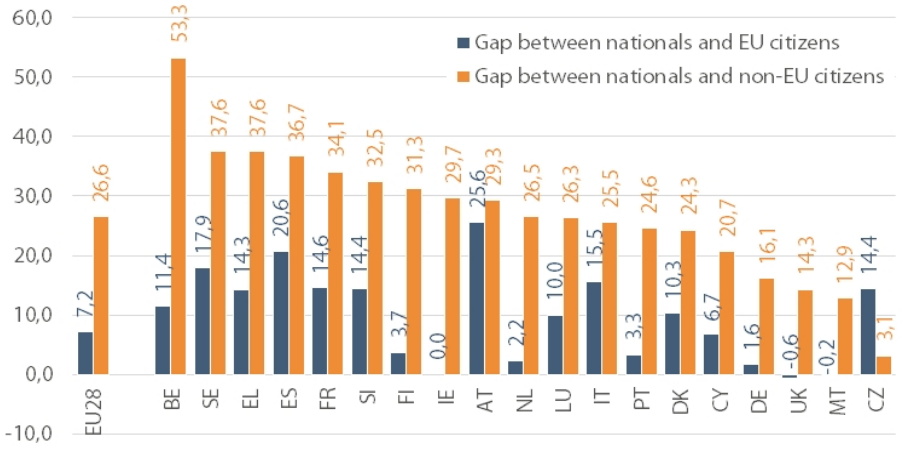


Source: ECORYCE, Diversity within the teaching profession with particular focus on migrant and/or minority background, 2015.

Social status

Eurostat data show that immigrants are at much greater risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion than native-born citizens (see Figure 2). The greatest gaps between nationals and non-EU citizens were observed in Belgium (53.3%), Sweden and Greece (both 37.6%) and Spain (36.7%). Severe material deprivation is experienced by 18.9% of non-EU citizens and 18.2% of young non-EU-born adults, compared to the EU average of 8.8% for national citizen adults. Over one third (36.4%) of children (aged 0-17) with an immigrant background were growing up at risk of poverty in 2014, twice the level of exposure of children of national citizens across the EU (19%). Nearly half (49.3%) of non-

Figure 2 – Gaps in at risk of poverty or social exclusion rates between nationals, EU citizens and non-EU citizens, by country, 2014



Data source: Eurostat, 2014.

EU-born young adults (aged 16-29) in 2013 were starting off their adult life at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared to 28.1% of young people born in the country.

Factors affecting the integration of migrant students

Migrant students are a diverse group with large variation in educational needs and assets. Identifying different groups is important for policy development. However, the data collected are not always disaggregated for different generations of migrants. In countries where a distinction is made between first-generation and second-generation migrants, comparative research shows a gap in integration indicators between the two.

Experts argue that first-generation migrants face more difficulties (e.g. higher language barriers, culture shock) than their second-generation peers. On the other hand, some studies indicate that first-generation immigrants perform better because they are more motivated and have positive attitudes towards school. That being said, integration challenges linked to formal education systems tend to be essentially related to the three main components of education: access, participation and performance.

Access

Although children's rights are enshrined in a variety of treaties and international agreements – the Treaty on European Union, the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – implementation of the right to access to education is still problematic. In spite of the fact that all EU countries have laws on compulsory education implicitly including undocumented children, unclear legislation and practical challenges – such as lack of awareness, discrimination and poverty – restrict access to education. Evidence from research (2015) indicates that so far only ten EU countries – Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain and Sweden – have made explicit in their legislation the right of access to education for all children regardless of migration or residence status.

While access to education remains difficult, access to quality education seems even more problematic. Research suggests that early ability tracking – the selection of students according to their abilities – and school segregation are the main reasons for that. Ability tracking results in a concentration of brighter students in more prestigious tracks and may disadvantage immigrant children, especially if the identification of their abilities is based on the host country language. Expert analysis has shown that children of immigrants in Germany are less likely to receive a teacher recommendation for an academic track, and this cannot be attributed to differences in test scores or general intelligence alone.

Likewise, in countries where immigrant communities are over-represented in certain neighbourhoods and schools have a fixed catchment area, school segregation is likely to occur. The concentration of immigrant students at school is particularly high in Greece, Italy and Denmark. Moreover, migrant children are more likely to be labelled as having 'special needs', which results in them being placed in separate education institutions.

Another well documented phenomenon is 'white flight' or 'native flight' from local public schools. Practitioners argue that native parents are more likely to opt out of schools with a high concentration of migrants and choose more 'prestigious' schools instead, thus reinforcing spatial segregation. Likewise, specific groups of ethnic minorities found their own schools, for instance Islamic schools, leading to 'Islamic flight' as a form of 'voluntary segregation'. Evidence from research (OECD, 2015) demonstrates that 15-year-old students attending schools with a high concentration of

immigrants (i.e. where more than one in four students are immigrants) perform worse than students who attend schools with no immigrant students. But this difference also reflects the fact that the concentration of socioeconomic disadvantage in a school hinders student achievement.

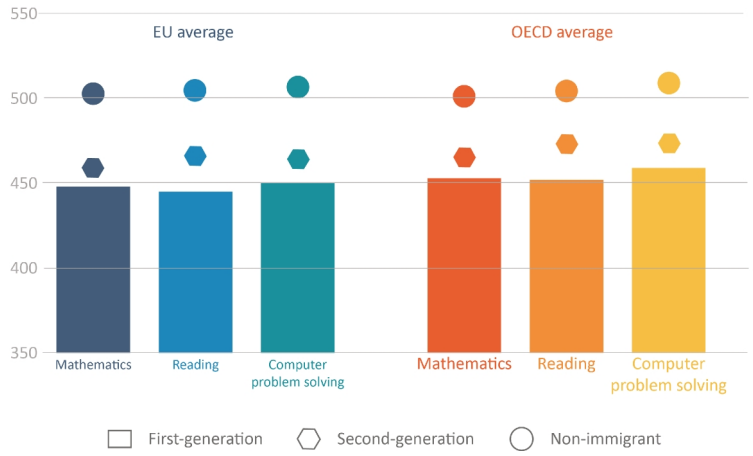
Participation

As already shown, access to quality education is essential. However, staying at school is equally important. Young people with a migrant background are generally more at risk of dropping out of education and training systems without having obtained an upper secondary qualification. Eurostat indicates that young migrants are more than twice as likely as nationals to be early school-leavers. In 2014, one in every four non-EU citizens (25.5%) aged 18-24 had left education or training prematurely, compared with 10.2% of nationals. Young non-EU citizens (aged 15-24) are also at greater risk of being both out of the education system and out of employment, known as NEETs. The rate is much higher for migrants (20.6%) than for nationals (12.0%). When gender is factored in, the rate for migrant women is significantly higher than that for migrant men (23.8% vs 17.6%). This trend is a cause for concern given that early school-leaving adds to the already high risk of exclusion faced by young people with a migrant background.

Performance and attainment

Results from the OECD-led Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that, in most countries, first-generation immigrant students perform less well than national students, and second-generation immigrant students score somewhere between the two (see Fig. 3).

Figure 3 – Immigrant students' performance in reading, mathematics and problem solving



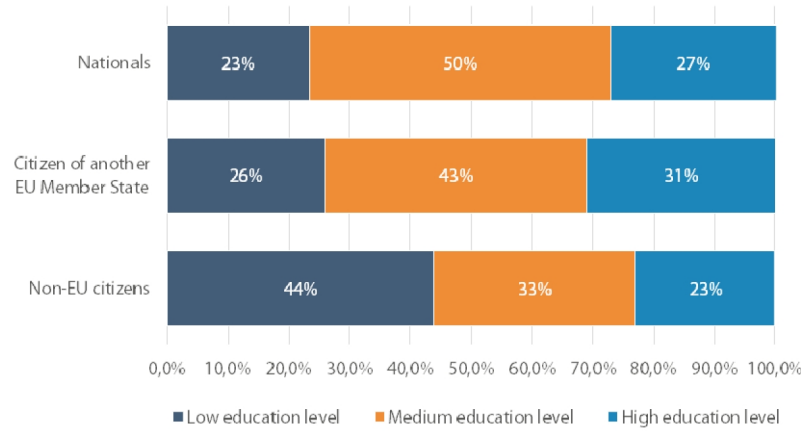
Source: OECD, Immigrant Students at School: Easing the Journey towards Integration, 2015.

The age of arrival matters too. In most OECD countries, immigrant students who arrived at the age of 12 or older, score worse in reading proficiency than children who arrived at younger ages. This phenomenon is known as the 'late-arrival penalty'. Not only is learning a second language more difficult for older children, but also the school curriculum tends to become more demanding as students progress from primary to lower secondary school. The performance gap tends to be wider in reading than in mathematics, which suggests that language barriers may account for this discrepancy. Nevertheless, narrowing the gap between immigrant and non-immigrant students is possible. Across OECD countries, the performance difference in mathematics decreased by the equivalent of a semester of school attendance between 2003 and 2012. The improvement was even more substantial in Germany and Portugal, while in France and Sweden the gap increased.

The variation in performance across countries suggests that policy has an important role to play in reducing, if not eliminating entirely, the disadvantage that accompanies displacement. Education systems also differ in the way they address performance gaps.

One traditional approach is grade repetition. Evidence from the OECD shows that immigrant students are over three times more likely than non-immigrant students to repeat a year. This negative correlation is particularly significant in countries hosting high percentages of humanitarian migrants, such as Finland and Sweden.

Figure 4 – Distribution of the EU population by educational attainment level, 2014 (% of population aged 18-64)



Source: Eurostat, Migrant integration – education indicators in 2014, August 2015.

Despite the various challenges they face, many immigrant students do succeed in school. PISA data demonstrate that in Australia, Israel and the United States, the share of socio-economically disadvantaged students who perform among the top quarter of all students is larger among immigrant students than among non-immigrant students.

Migrants' educational attainment broadly reflects their academic performance. In 2014 in the EU, nearly 44% of migrants aged 18-64 had a low education level, while this proportion was around 25% for nationals. The gap was however lower for the population with higher education: 23% for migrants vs 27.3% for nationals (see Fig. 4). Statistical analysis shows that low educational attainment is directly correlated to unemployment and the risk of poverty or social exclusion. Early leavers from education and training and young people with a low level of education face significant problems in the labour market, which in the case of migrants risks hindering their further integration.

The impact of immigration policies on performance gaps

OECD research shows that performance gaps between non-immigrants and immigrant students are linked to the socio-economic status of immigrant populations, which, in turn, is shaped by immigration policies. Indeed, experts argue that on average, the performance difference between socio-economically advantaged students and their disadvantaged peers is equivalent to more than two years of schooling. Data for OECD countries confirms that the element of socio-economic status that carries most weight in explaining these differences is the educational attainment of the parents. Concretely, students with highly educated parents outscore students with low-educated parents, by an entire PISA proficiency level.

This is where the differences in national approaches to immigration come in. While some countries receive large numbers of applicants with little or no screening, others have a more selective approach (i.e. systems rating candidates based on their academic background and research or business experience, among other factors). However, some migration flows may not be restricted because of international treaties. As a result, the profiles of immigrant populations across OECD countries differ widely:

- In Australia, Canada, Israel, and New Zealand, immigration is considered part of the national heritage. An average of 50% of migrants have a tertiary degree. That is partly linked to immigration policies favouring the highly skilled.
- The situation is similar in Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States where immigrants tend to be highly educated and driven mainly by employment.

- By contrast, in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and the Netherlands, immigration is largely shaped by flows of workers with low levels of education in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by large inflows of family migrants, also with low levels of education.
- In Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, humanitarian immigrants have accounted for much of the influx and are represented at both ends of the education spectrum.
- Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain were destinations for large numbers of labour migrants who came to fill low-skilled jobs in the first half of the 2000s.
- Cyprus, Iceland, Ireland, and Malta have seen large numbers of migrants arrive in the last 10-15 years, but in contrast to the previous group, they are highly educated.

These differences point to the fact that the policies required to foster the integration of immigrants have to be adjusted to reflect the various national situations.

Raising opportunities for migrant students

While the educational investment of first generation migrants is usually completed, at least in part, in their country of origin, investment in human capital for the integration of migrants who arrive at an early age is typically undertaken in the host country. This accounts for the fundamental role that falls to European educational institutions in bridging the gap in educational attainment between native and immigrant populations, especially in light of the fact that digitisation is expected to lead to a sharp decline in employment in low-skilled categories.

Practitioners agree widely that migrant children and youth need targeted support as they enter the school system, such as through intensive language and general induction programmes to allow them to participate in mainstream classes as soon as possible. This also includes ensuring that students are not segmented in schools on socio-economic grounds, promoting early childhood development and education programmes, making their parents part of the education process, and equipping teachers with the tools to provide support to students with multiple disadvantages. Most importantly, students must feel welcome at school. Today, that is not the case everywhere in Europe: while in Spain, Finland or the Netherlands more than 80% of first-generation immigrant students reported that they belong at school, 60% did so in Belgium, and less than 50% in France.

Language and integration

Education as a core element of integration happens largely through and thanks to language. Experts assert that the proxy for the integration of the adult migrant population is economic stability, whereas for the child migrant population the appropriate proxy is language proficiency. Moreover, insufficient language proficiency is the main cause of poor academic performance.

Strikingly, across OECD countries, on average, 64% of first-generation immigrant students and 41% of second-generation immigrant students do not speak the language of instruction at home.

In general, students with a poorer knowledge of the host language are either downgraded to a lower level or sent to a special-needs school. Teachers assert that if a high percentage of students with language difficulties are

Language support

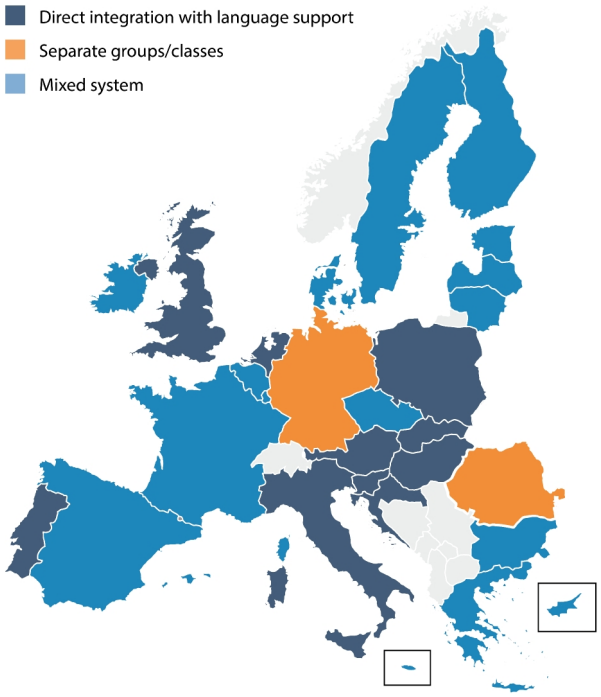
The organisation of language training for immigrant students is a complex task, depending mainly on the number of different language minorities present in a country.

For example, in Germany, 66% of migrant students speak Polish, Russian or Turkish at home. Putting in place specific language training in countries with few 'heritage' languages is relatively easy. However, this is not the case in countries with larger numbers of heritage languages, like Denmark where 60% of students who do not use Danish at home speak one of a dozen different languages.

placed together, that would have a negative impact not only on those who could actually achieve more, but also on migrant students who are struggling to integrate.

In the EU, support for learning the language of instruction is provided in all countries. Two main models exist, direct integration of students within the class corresponding to their age group, where they receive additional language support, or instruction in a separate group for a limited period of time (see Figure 5 and box). Although predominant at both primary and secondary levels, direct integration is slightly more common in the former.

Figure 5 – Models of provision of language instruction, 2010-2011



Data source: Eurydice, Key data of teaching languages at school, 2012.

The importance of early learning

While offering specific support to immigrants of all age brackets matters, directing immigrant children to the school system from the earliest age is arguably the most efficient way to facilitate integration. Experts assert that early childhood programmes are most effective when they start during the first five years of life and continue into primary school. Likewise, evidence from PISA shows that 15-year-old immigrant students who had attended pre-primary education score significantly higher in reading assessment, than those who had not participated in such programmes.

However, participation in pre-primary education programmes among immigrant students remains low. On average, they are 21% less likely than students with no immigrant background to have attended pre-primary education. Experts ascribe the resistance to these types of programmes among immigrant parents to their lack of experience with similar schemes, and more broadly to the differences in socio-economic status between immigrant and non-immigrant parents.

The role of the teacher

Dealing with students and parents from a wide range of cultural, socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds takes a complex set of skills that many teachers may not have acquired through formal training. Often, students not only have different levels of knowledge and skills, but they are also used to different educational approaches. Handling such discrepancies in a single class is difficult and, unsurprisingly, many teachers feel ill-prepared to teach ethnically diverse classes.

While hiring teachers with an immigrant background will not solve the problem, there has been some evidence that minority and immigrant teachers can be positive role models, and increasing their numbers may ultimately have a positive influence on immigrant students' learning outcomes. However, the recruitment of such profiles proves difficult. Some countries, for instance, restrict the employment of refugee teachers.

In recent years, there have been efforts on the part of educational institutions to offset the disparity between an increasingly diverse student population and a largely homogeneous teacher workforce, through initiatives aimed at hiring more teachers from ethnic minority or immigrant backgrounds. These initiatives are in general based on the belief that such profiles may serve as role models for immigrant students, enhancing their motivation and leading to improved education outcomes. However, within the education literature, the impact of matching student and teacher ethnicity is still much debated. Some authors suggest that it improves student performance, others, in contrast, find that the empirical evidence to support this positive effect is tentative at best.

Individual support

Given the diversity of immigrant student populations across countries, designing education policies to address those students' specific needs is not an easy task. National education systems attempt to fill these gaps through individual support schemes.

The integration of immigrant students has proven particularly successful through transitional classes. This form of support is mainly structured around language learning, but gradually other subjects are introduced as well, the final goal being to join a regular class as soon as possible. However, the transition to a mainstream class is often difficult and many immigrant students still need additional support. Such structures are usually provided within the school, including through learning and homework centres.

Other measures focus on support outside the school. Such programmes are often implemented by municipalities, NGOs, welfare and migrant organisations, and individual volunteers. Activities usually take place after school, and often include not only academic, but also cultural or sports activities.

Mentoring or ethnic mentoring is yet another form of individual support. It aims to improve the school performance of migrant/disadvantaged children and is undertaken by private individuals, welfare organisations, NGOs, and social workers. Ethnic mentoring is provided in particular by individuals who have successfully completed their studies in the education system of the host country.

Germany: higher education programmes for refugees

Germany continues to be the largest single recipient of new asylum claims in the EU. In 2015, 1.1 million refugees were registered, with nearly 55% of them being under 25 years old.

In response, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research committed to back German higher education institutions with €100 million until 2019. The various measures and projects will be managed by the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst).

The most emblematic examples are the 'Integra programme' offering 2 400 new places for foundation courses and language instruction, and the 'Welcome programme', providing mentoring services for migrant students.

In addition, 221 individual scholarships for Syrian refugees were put in place by the German Federal Foreign Office in 2015.

Support programmes are primarily focused on underperforming students. Other types of programmes, however, aim to encourage talented migrant students. Many such foundations are active in the United States.

The Hertie Foundation (in Germany) can be cited as an example of a European initiative. Its 'Start' programme supports the professional development of talented students with a migrant background. The foundation also offers scholarships for teachers with a migrant background.

Chinese immigrants: a success story

Chinese students in the United States are often represented among those immigrant groups with above-average achievement in school. Indeed, research shows that Asian Americans are the highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing ethnic group in the country. This is mainly ascribed to two factors, the socio-economic origins of most Chinese immigrants and the institutionalisation of supplementary education. Researchers argue that the specific character of US immigration law – favouring highly educated, highly skilled immigrants – accounts for the academic performance of Asian Americans. These elite groups of immigrants are among the most highly educated people in their countries of origin and are often better educated than the general US population. For example, in 2012, 49% of Asian Americans had a bachelor's degree or higher as compared to 28% of adults in the United States. Upon arrival, these communities build 'ethnic capital', which includes among other things after-school tutoring programmes and academies for Chinese children.

This supplementary schooling system is an example of mobilising resources within an immigrant community. Rather than Chinese, these schools teach mainly English, mathematics and provide guidance about the host education system. They are usually organised as non-profit organisations with affordable tuition fees. The system also offers professional careers for educators from the immigrant communities.

The same is true concerning the achievement of pupils of Chinese origin in the United Kingdom. Research shows not only that British Chinese students are the highest-performing ethnic group at secondary level in England, but also that the performance gap, between those from the poorest families and the rest, is very narrow. Tentative evidence suggests that along with supplementary schooling, the main factor for success resides in a particularly strong family commitment to education.

Last but not least, evidence from PISA indicates that 15-year-old Chinese from Shanghai and Hong Kong outperform students from the rest of the world. However, some criticism has been voiced concerning the fact that the PISA samples for China include only the two highest-income cities, thus comparing cities with countries, while school attendance rates in rural areas can be as low as 40%. Worryingly, a survey by the China Association for Science and Technology showed that just above 3% of Chinese have basic scientific literacy, a level 20 years behind developed countries.

EU tools supporting successful integration through education

The EU's migration policy can only succeed if underpinned by effective integration policies, providing a long-term perspective for migrants. To this end, the EU follows a twofold approach, providing tools and schemes for the integration of migrants in EU countries, and offering support for refugees outside the EU borders through specific funds.

Education support for migrants in the EU

Although education is a national competence, the EU has a number of tools in place to support activities in the Member States. In 2008, the Commission opened a debate on how school education policies may better address the challenges posed by immigration, and highlighted the need to support the development of specific integration programmes for newly arrived immigrants. The Council followed up in 2009 by inviting EU countries to develop an integrated policy approach providing for fair and equal opportunities in the education of migrant children.

The same year, the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) a forum for exchanges, advice and support for policy reforms, was set up. It acts as an overarching agenda by identifying common objectives to address challenges in EU education up to 2020. It set up two strategic objectives, the provision of opportunities for migrants to learn the language of the host country, and cooperation

in the development of best practices in the education of learners with a migrant background.

In addition, various policy frameworks have been developed for the different educational environments and fields (schools, higher education, adult education, etc.). These include specific policies for migrants, or that make reference to migrants as a target group under broader policies. For example, the Commission encourages EU countries to widen access to early childhood education and care facilities for migrants and increase their affordability.

Likewise, it encourages EU countries to promote the validation of prior learning for migrants in order to facilitate their integration. This includes, for instance, speeding up mechanisms for the assessment of skills and the recognition of formal (school, university), non-formal (courses) and informal (family) learning of arriving migrants. The recognition of qualifications held by displaced persons and refugees is coordinated at EU level by the network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (ENIC/NARIC).

The Commission has also published lists of existing initiatives to facilitate the integration of refugees in European schools and universities, meeting their basic needs, and recognising their skills.

Apart from policy frameworks and coordination, financial allocations are available through various funds. The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived play a major role in the first stages of the integration process. They can contribute to language training and preparatory actions facilitating access to the labour market.

Two other funds, the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, can support the integration process of asylum-seekers and refugees. While the former contribute to language courses, counselling, and vocational training, the latter can finance actions to reduce the spatial and educational isolation of legal migrants but is more focused on health, housing and childcare infrastructures. Given the rising numbers of immigrants, coordination between the various funds is crucial in order to reinforce synergies.

European Parliament contribution

In its various resolutions, the European Parliament has consistently backed up the provision of quality linguistic support as a prerequisite for a successful integration. In 2011, the Parliament stressed the need for a personalised approach and the importance of diverse educational pathways, combining general and vocational training, to avoid early school leaving, particularly frequent among children with a migrant background. In 2009, the Parliament recalled that the successful integration of migrant students cannot be achieved without the provision of adequate training for teachers and the allocation of the necessary resources to educational institutions.

These concerns echo an opinion on social inclusion and integration of refugees into the labour market adopted in 2016 by the committee on Culture and Education (CULT) for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, which stresses the need for specialised teaching staff and advanced training for teachers. The CULT committee draft report (2016) on the follow-up of the ET 2020, dedicates a specific section to the education of migrants. In view of the increasing number of migrant students, the committee stresses the need to designate contact persons for migrant and refugee education within EU countries' education ministries. Other suggested measures include simplification of high education enrolments for migrant students, support for non-profit institutions providing assistance to migrant academics, and the development of validation and accreditation mechanisms for migrants. Most recently, the assembly approved a directive clarifying and improving the rules of entry and residence for school pupils, trainees, students and researchers.

Erasmus + helping refugees

In the wake of the current migration crisis, supporting the efforts of EU countries to integrate refugees in their national education systems is an urgent task. The European Commission is therefore bringing added value to the existing national initiatives by offering support through its programmes. In this framework, 100 000 Erasmus+ online linguistic support licences for language assessments, and the same number of licences for online language courses, will be available to refugees over a period of three years, starting from summer 2016. Another initiative – Science4refugees – matches refugees and asylum-seekers who have a scientific background with positions in universities and research institutions that are 'refugee-welcoming organisations'.

External action

In December 2015, the EU reinforced by an additional €350 million the Regional Trust Fund to respond to the Syrian crisis, established one year earlier. Including other contributions from the EU budget already planned and under way, the fund has reached a total volume of €730 million. Its aim is to help some 1.5 million refugees and their host communities in particular in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq.

The biggest share of the fund – €165 million – is earmarked for support to the Ministries of Education in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan to enable them to enrol an additional 172 000 refugee children in school, while also providing for accelerated learning programmes, non-formal and early childhood education and child protection activities. Together, the various actions composing the programme target some 587 000 children and adolescents currently out of school. The overarching aim of the fund is to close the remaining gap in the framework of the 'No Lost Generation' initiative to provide education to 1 million Syrian refugee children. In addition, various projects under the fund provide access to higher, vocational and distance education in the field of engineering, economics, health care, sciences, social sciences, education and teacher training.

A similar Trust Fund contributing towards tackling the root causes of migration has been set up for the Horn of Africa to promote education, and economic and security development.

Main references

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