Inclusion of migrants in formal education

Statistics show that students with a migrant background are not as integrated in formal education as other students. Yet the term ‘students with a migrant background’ catches many different individuals. Some of those students may have been born in the country in which they are studying, with their parents or grandparents being the ones to have moved states. Some of the new arrivals are asylum-seekers or refugees, who may have experienced chronic stress and severe trauma. Some students have chosen to study abroad but, though they come from a different country, they are not considered migrants. This infographic looks at the complex picture behind the statistics, and at how authorities in Member States address the inclusion of migrant students through their policies.

Inclusion in early childhood education

Policy-makers recognise early childhood education and care (ECEC) as an essential part of lifelong learning and most child care centres have an educational goal. Moreover, attendance at pre-school education seems to be the most cost-effective way to improve the performance of migrant students, who generally do less well at school later on. The ‘Programme for International Student Assessment’ (PISA), run by the ‘Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’ (OECD) indicates that 15 year olds who had attended early childhood education scored better in science tests than their peers who had not attended, or had attended for less than a year. Despite clear benefits, the rate of participation in early childhood education was on average 13 % lower in the EU, for children from migrant families; and in some Member States the rate was more than 20 % lower. Figure 1 shows both the difference in the scores of students who had attended pre-primary for more than three years and the difference in attendance rates. Other variables such as socio-economic background, gender and student motivation also have an impact on scores, and the positive effects diminish somewhat over time. Yet even if early childhood education cannot compensate completely for the impact of other factors on low achievement in education, the fact that toddlers from migrant families are less likely to attend compounds their initial disadvantage.

This infographic is one in a series on Lifelong Learning. You can access our animated infographic with additional information by scanning this QR code.

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Once students move into compulsory education, how well do schools nurture their talents? The bars in Figure 2 show the percentage of resilient students, while the dots indicate the variance in scores between students with native and migrant backgrounds. Resilience refers to the percentage of disadvantaged students who achieve high scores on the PISA test. This is an indication of an education system's degree of equity. The percentage of resilient students in the EU as a whole is 27%. There is a variance of 18 points in favour of native students on the science score calculated at EU level. The PISA 2015 report notes that, while there is a link between migrant status and the scores achieved by students, the uneven results between Member States indicate that other factors also have an impact. Equally, the high or low performance of educational systems on the PISA scale does not automatically translate into high or low resilience among migrant students. This leads to the conclusion that resilience is also linked to how well an education system nurtures the talents of these students.

For its 2019 report, the EU's Eurydice network that studies European education systems, looked at the challenges which top-level authorities identify in providing good quality schooling to children and young people from migrant backgrounds. Figure 3 presents four of these challenges, including the most and least frequently identified ones. The top challenge relates to language issues. In some countries, teachers are not trained to work with students who are not yet fluent in the language of instruction. In Finland, on the other hand, the issue is how to implement the new curricular approach of ‘language awareness’, which considers the languages of newcomers as a resource that can benefit the whole school. About a third of policy-makers focused on issues related to appropriate funding and guidance to migrant families on education and training opportunities. On the other hand, few authorities identified school segregation as a concern, despite the fact that, in a number of Member States, refugee children tend to concentrate in schools close to reception centres or in disadvantaged areas where their families settle. The German-speaking Community of Belgium reacted to this imbalance by requiring all schools to provide places and support for newcomers.
What support do schools receive to provide quality education? Figure 4 shows that migrant status is one of the most commonly used criteria to give schools additional support. In 18 Member States, authorities organise training and networking opportunities for school heads, or provide them with guidance materials. Sweden stands out for raising awareness of the social, emotional and mental health needs of students who have suffered chronic stress and traumatic experiences, and the impact these have on school outcomes. In fact, some of the newly arrived migrant students may have very specific needs for support. This may be why 16 Member States distinguish between newly arrived migrants and second or third generation students. Few of the Member States offer financial incentives to teachers, though many have difficulties in recruiting teachers with the right skills. Those that do, take a targeted approach. Where other incentives exist, like working in smaller class groups or offering faster promotions, they also exist to incentivise working with other categories of students.

Inclusion in tertiary education

In 2017, 51.5% of first-time asylum applicants were between 18 and 34 years of age. This means that at least some of them can be integrated in tertiary education programmes. Some of the Member States adopt large-scale measures, as presented in Figure 5 to facilitate this process. One of the more popular measures is to offer grants or scholarships. Language training does not always target those who want to study at this level. Even so, the availability of language courses is still useful for prospective students. On the other hand, Member States are less likely to provide training for staff who work with refugees and asylum-seekers in tertiary level institutions. They often do not offer additional support for higher education institutions, or waive fees.
Statistics for 2018, presented in Figure 6, reveal that native-born students are more likely to graduate from upper-secondary and post-secondary levels than foreign-born students are, but the trend is weaker for graduates at tertiary level. These statistics focus on persons who were not born in a given country. This definition excludes second-generation individuals, but includes students who go to another country specifically to study, and are therefore likely to be highly committed. The 2015 Bologna process report indicates that when these success rates are read alongside statistics on early school leaving, it becomes clear that migrant students in most Member States suffer a disadvantage. Even so, this still does not shed light on the situation of second-generation students.

Figure 6: Differences in percentage rates of foreign-born and native-born students in completing non-tertiary and tertiary level education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISCED 3 - 4</th>
<th>Foreign born</th>
<th>Native born</th>
<th>ISCED 5 - 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Sources: Figure 1 - Key data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe, European Commission, 2014 ed. p.74, PISA 2015 Results (Vol.II), Table II.6.52. Figure 2 - PISA 2015 Results Vol.I, Excellence and equity in education, OECD, 2016, Figure I.1.3. Figure 3, 4 - Integrating students from migrant backgrounds into schools in Europe, pp. 19, 25, 54, 55, 117. Figure 4 - Structural indicators on achievement in basic skills in Europe 2016, Eurydice, 2017, p. 18. Figure 5 - Integrating asylum seekers and refugees into higher education in Europe, p.16. Figure 6 - Eurostat, [edat_lfs_9912].

Notes: Figure 3 - BE: language training and appropriate funding, not in Flemish Community; French-speaking Community, guidance for families; UK: Language training, not in England; Wales, appropriate funding; England, combatting school segregation. Figure 4 - BE: German-speaking Community provides programmes to support integration; UK: Scotland and Northern Ireland provide programmes to support integration; Scotland and Wales do not identify newly arrived migrants by specific categories. Figure 5 - BE: Flemish-speaking community provides fee exemption; UK: Wales ensures supporting measures.

Country codes: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Cyprus (CY), Czechia (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Malta (MT), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), United Kingdom (UK).

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