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**Children Hybrid Integration: Learning Dialogue
as a way of Upgrading Policies of Participation**

Milestone 9

**Synthesis of Milestone 9: Obstacles and Opportunities in
the Integration of Migrant-Background Children in
Schools – CHILD UP Practice Analysis**

Milestone Responsible: University of Liège



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Executive Summary¹

This is the final background report for the H2020 project, Children Hybrid Integration: Learning Dialogue as a way of Upgrading Policies of Participation – CHILD-UP. CHILD-UP researches the social conditions of migrant children's integration through social participation, with the final aim of proposing innovative approaches to understanding and transforming their social conditions. This summary of the practice analysis offers an analysis of the school systems, obstacles, and opportunities that migrant children and their families encounter in local contexts in the countries involved in CHILD UP – Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom . It provides the background against which the qualitative research is being conducted and offers context to those findings by:

- Outlining where responsibility for education lies in each country;
- Explaining how migrant children are incorporated into the school system;
- Investigating the achievement gap that exists between migrant and non-migrant pupils;
- Detailing best practices and weaknesses in integrating migrant children into schools;
- Presenting how different educational systems approach language learning.

Across Europe, migrant children have lower educational outcomes than non-migrant children. This is a trajectory that can begin early in the school career and have long-term implications. Key components of migrant children's academic success and overall welfare include: monitoring children's wellbeing in school, as well as their academic performance; understanding how outside factors impact school integration and outcomes; and ensuring robust communication with parents. These are also areas in which partners have highlighted innovative programming and promising new measures. While there are various funding initiatives earmarked for supporting migrant children, the report finds that it is necessary that local actors have some level of flexibility in how to use these funds since they are the experts on what is needed in their specific context.

Each partner was asked to highlight best practices in terms of programming to support children in their integration in school. Many programmes have not been thoroughly evaluated. Additionally, many of these practices exist only at the local level, making it difficult to generalize. Nevertheless, common themes from the programmes were identified. Within in-school programming, best practices were identified as:

- Programmes that helped to combat discrimination;
- Training for teachers to work with migrant background children;
- One-to-one mentoring;
- Initiatives that encouraged cross-cultural understanding/sharing;
- Programmes and funding that targeted the achievement gap.

Programming outside of the school setting was also identified as being valuable for integration and wellbeing in school, highlighting the importance of a holistic approach. The programmes that were highlighted fell into the following categories:

- Extra-curricular/after school programming

¹ The full report is available on the project website: <http://www.child-up.eu/project-outcomes/>.

- Parental involvement in education
- Mentoring
- Early intervention

Methodology

This report draws on grey and scientific literature from the relevant European and local levels, and specific country data and information provided by all project partners. This information was gathered through a template, created by the main author, containing questions to guide the procurement of information. These templates were completed by partners and then reviewed to find key information that was then grouped by theme. What is contained in the report is based on both the main author's initial proposal for the report, but also what important material and ideas emerged during the research process. After the completion of the first draft, partners were invited to give their feedback which was subsequently reviewed and incorporated by the main author.

Definition of Migrant Background

it was necessary to agree on a common operational definition of 'migrant background'. There are numerous ways to define 'migrant' and 'migrant background' and each comes with its own implications, connotations, and pitfalls. Different definitions are used amongst different groups and for different aims. Amongst the partners, it was agreed to use the same definition of migrant that is used by the European Commission. That is, "A person who has: (a) migrated into their present country of residence; and/or (b) previously had a different nationality from their present country of residence; and/or (c) at least one of their parents previously entered their present country of residence as a migrant" (European Commission 2019).

Achievement gap

In all the partner countries, migrant children's school achievement is lower than that of their non-migrant peers, which is representative of the overall condition in Europe. This situation is dependent on many factors, however, making it highly variable. Some regions, and specific schools, have experience working with migrant populations and are therefore better prepared to support their needs and know what kind of resources and interventions they require. Some regions and schools, however, are encountering migrant populations for the first time and are in many ways starting from scratch in trying to accommodate them. There is also a problem of limited data on the achievement gap, as is the case in Poland and Finland due to their shorter histories of immigration.

What becomes clear from looking at each of the partner countries' situations, is that dispersal versus concentrations of migrant children in schools is not an obvious choice in terms of the wellbeing/education outcomes of migrant children. When populations of migrant children are dispersed they often have better chances to build social capital with the non-migrant population, and schools are less likely to be overtaxed in terms of providing the specific resources that are needed for this population. When migrant children are concentrated in

schools, however, they are able to benefit from support from other migrant background children and their schools/region(s) are more likely to have invested in the necessary resources, in addition to being able to provide support based on past experience.

Despite this variation, the research uncovered several commonalities that appear to influence the achievement gap. These include issues such as:

- Teachers having lower expectations of migrant children;
- Migrant children being subjected to negative stereotypes;
- Migrant children having large gaps in their education;
- Poor communication between schools and migrant parents;
- Migrant children being less likely to be enrolled in pre-school and kindergarten;
- Parents having an insecure migratory status in the country of residence;
- Lack of qualified teachers;
- Uneven distribution of qualified teachers – cited in Belgium, Poland and Finland.

In order to tackle the achievement gap, it would be useful to have more robust data collection. The research and reporting of the achievement gap should consider the diversity of migrant background children and incorporate factors such as socio-economic standing and parents' level of education. This would give a more accurate overview of their school performance and what targeted interventions could help to improve it.

With the available information, however, a few issues presented themselves as clear ways to improve the achievement gap. In general, the age of arrival has a significant impact on children's school performance, typically the younger the better because language acquisition tends to be easier for younger children (Cahan et al 2001). Early school performance is even more crucial in educational systems with tracking, such as in Germany, Belgium, and Italy. Migrant children should have access to early education, regardless of migratory status or income and the availability of resources to support migrant-background children should be more clearly communicated to migrant families. It is also ideal if migrant children can build social capital/networks with both non-migrant and migrant peers as these relationships offer different types of benefits. Finally, the situation could be improved by the addition of more qualified and more even distribution of qualified teachers in schools.

Incorporation into schools and systems of school governance

In the partner countries, the responsibility for the education system rests with different levels of government, ranging from mostly centralised national responsibility, to increasingly significant local responsibility and autonomy. Which level of government or with which authorities the responsibility lies can have an impact on how much delay migrant children experience before entering school, how the system of school incorporation works, and what practices targeting migrant children's integration are implemented. These differences lead to varying degrees of bureaucratic hurdles, waiting lists, and school segregation. In Finland, for example, the National Board of Education is responsible for the national core curriculum that provides a common direction and basis for school education, such as objectives, hour distribution and required subjects. The system, however, is also characterised

by a high degree of local-level autonomy. Municipalities are the main provider of basic education and individual teachers are able to choose their own teaching methods and materials. In Italy and Germany, on the other hand, the main decision-making power lies with regional authorities (states in Germany), and in the rest of the partner countries there is a great deal of local responsibility and autonomy.

Delays in starting school are common for migrant children, but especially for asylum-seeking, refugee and undocumented migrants. According to the EU directive, access to school must be granted no later than three months after an asylum application has been filed (EU Directive 2013/33/EU). “Longer breaks may hit the most disadvantaged migrant students hardest” (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019:76). Despite this directive, longer delays do occur.

In addition to delays in starting school, a further delay may impact migrant children. This is an educational delay involving the *level* at which migrant children start school. There are different approaches to the placement of migrant children including: placing them with other children of the same age, placing them in a lower grade level in order to allow them time to ‘catch up’², the use of bridging or transitional programmes to allow them to learn the host country language in a dedicated setting, or some mix of these practices. In other cases, however, there is little in the way of common practices and these issues are handled on a case-by-case basis at the level of the school. Those making decisions about migrant children’s grade-level placement may not be experts on assessing such matters, and availability of teachers qualified in language teaching and who have intercultural competences is highly variable.³ Recent research tells us that while separate classes for migrant children “may provide more time and space for the teaching and learning of the language of instruction than full integration into mainstream education right from the start (Koehler, 2017)” (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019), these may also hamper integration if children spend too long separated from non-migrant children.

Highlighted approaches to supporting migrant children’s integration in schools

Combatting Discrimination and Bullying

Migrant children are subjected to bullying and discrimination, but due to underreporting, it’s often impossible to say to what extent. While it’s clear that institutional level discrimination has a negative impact on migrant children’s opportunities, such as remaining on school waiting lists or not receiving the proper educational support, the impact on migrant children at the personal/individual level must also be addressed. Despite growing

² In this report this term is used to mean placing children in mainstream classes at the level that their age would dictate and then expecting them to catch up to their classmates.

³ This was clear in the data from work package 4 which gathered information from questionnaires distributed to teachers, parents, children, social workers, mediators and interpreters. The objectives of work package 4 were to come to a more nuanced understanding of the circumstances of migrant background children, to see if and how children’s agency is encouraged in school settings, and to study how the school and social protection systems support migrant-background children in their integration. The full report can be found here: <http://www.child-up.eu/project-outcomes/>.

awareness and understanding of the immediate and long-term impacts, the identification and reporting of bullying and discrimination remain a problem. It's also the case that children of migrant backgrounds can be bullied for their migrant or ethnic background *in addition to* other kinds of bullying and discrimination - such for one's socio-economic class, sexual orientation, or various disabilities - making them doubly vulnerable (D'Hondt et al. 2015). Further adding to the difficulty of measuring discrimination is that its effects may not be noticed until long after the discriminatory act has been experienced (Perrot 2006), and this may be why we do not see such a strong correlation between discrimination towards migrant background children and the 'lower' educational outcomes that are often recorded in Europe (OECD 2012).

While it was reported by all partners that bullying is a problem for children in their respective countries, and migrant children in particular, there is often little available evidence on this topic (such as in Poland) and bullying and discrimination remain difficult to measure. In some cases, there are laws and national-level policies, while in other cases the approach is less centralised. Often, a great deal of responsibility rests with teachers who are the school personnel most likely to witness bullying and who are best positioned to respond and create a culture of 'non-acceptance' of bullying behaviour. This is, however, a sensitive and complicated issue and requires particular training. This training should be supported and offered in some way by the various actors involved in the educational system: the local school, the school network, the local govt. etc. More detailed and rigorous data gathering and research in this area is also needed to support targeted measures to counter discriminatory behaviour and bullying.

Teacher training and support

All the partners cited teacher training as an area for improvement and something that had the potential to greatly enhance integration outcomes for migrant students. Teachers are often in closer and more consistent contact with migrant children than any other service providers (such as social workers, healthcare workers, interpreters, etc.) and they have to work with diverse groups of students. A great deal is expected of teachers with regard to supporting the integration of migrant children and working with migrant families. The support and training for teachers in this domain, however, is often limited. In general, teacher training initiatives are typically a local or regional responsibility.

While this area was highlighted as one with deficits, there are various initiatives to train and support teachers.

- In the UK, there is a goal of hiring a more diverse workforce;
- In Poland, several NGOs and local authorities offer programmes aimed at educating teachers in methods for working with migrant children;
- In Belgium, since 2000, intercultural education has been included in teacher training (OECD 2018);
- Several institutions in Finland offer continuing education for teachers who teach migrant students;
- In Italy, there is an emphasis on training programmes on how to work in multicultural and multi-lingual settings, but it still appears that there is little sensitivity toward multicultural issues (Bellino et al. n.d.);
- In Germany, Sweden, and Italy local initiatives focus mostly on language teaching.

Cultural Programming

Cultural programming is seen as a strength in Germany, Sweden, and Finland, and it is built directly into the curriculum. In other contexts, however, there is a greater need for programming targeted at building intercultural

awareness and the valuing of cultural diversity. Incorporating the valuing of cultural diversity and intercultural understanding into the mainstream curriculum benefits both migrant and non-migrant students. In an increasingly diverse world, intercultural awareness should become the norm, and schools are an ideal place for this to begin. All school subjects can benefit from the offerings of cultural diversity. Incorporating it into the school curriculum also promotes the philosophy that integration is a two-way process with adjustment and learning being necessary on both sides.

Mentoring

Pairing migrants with non-migrant counterparts in order to promote cultural exchange and to allow both parties to build diverse cultural capital and has been proven to support integration and have benefits for young people and for adults in the labour market (Dubois et al. 2002; Månsson and Delander 2017). This practice has become increasingly popular in schools, and these types of mentoring programmes often reach beyond the classroom. This is the case in Sweden and Germany where student mentorship programmes provide mediators who promote communication between school personnel, students and families and provide holistic support. The potential benefits of mentorship programmes are only just beginning to come to light and are certainly worth further investigation, investment and implementation.

Programming Outside of School

Who offers this programming?

Country	Schools	Outside organisations
Belgium	x	x
Finland	x	x
Germany	x	x
Italy		x
Poland		x
Sweden	x	x
United Kingdom	x	x

Support for migrant children does not end with the end of the school day. In fact, after-school programming can be a key resource in migrant children’s integration. These programmes often take place on school grounds and may be run by school staff, thus being an extension of the school experience. Others, however, are provided by NGOs and social cooperatives. Again, the efficacy of these programmes are hard to measure, both in terms of reaching the target population and in terms of integration outcomes. They do, however, provide an important opportunity where integration in schools can be positively impacted. Typically, the aim of these programmes is to

support children academically, but there is also programming directly targeting integration or other aspects of children's wellbeing.

Parental involvement

Research shows that parental involvement is key to children's academic success and their wellbeing in schools (OECD 2012; Anthony-Newman 2019) and it has evolved significantly in the Western world since the 1970s (Dom and Verhoeven 2006). The importance of parental involvement is so well understood that it is also often laid down in legislation and/or policy, but it is often hampered by the lack of clear expectations and structures that guide parental involvement, a lack of communication channels that allow for two-way communication (so the parents can also express their desires and concerns to schools), and a lack of clear structures for the inclusion of migrant families. This leads to a disconnect between schools' expectations of parents and how parents actually participate. Additionally, there is a common tendency to regard the immigrant family as a problem rather than a resource, and schools often fail to cooperate with and sufficiently include parents (Bouakaz 2007; Lundahl & Lindblad 2018). The creations of parents' associations/councils is one way that schools have tried to support communication with parents, but these councils face complex challenges and involve power dynamics and direct and indirect discrimination making it hard for migrant parents to have their voices heard.

Early intervention

Offering support to children and their families before children begin formal primary education is part of a holistic approach that can aide in improving children's long-term school performance. There is evidence that preschool education is a key element in reducing inequalities in children's educational attainment, and that the importance of this early intervention is even greater for children whose parents are less involved in their education (Cebolla-Boado et al. 2016). This is even more significant for migrant children whose parents are, for example, undocumented or asylum seekers spending a great deal of time fighting legal battles, or whose parents are newcomers and still struggling to become acquainted with the life and the systems in the host country. This is why it is very positive that various countries offer early education interventions with little restriction.

Support of Home and Host Country Languages

Local language acquisition is key to academic success and integration, but the valuing of home languages is also important for migrant children's wellbeing in school and has been linked to overall linguistic proficiency. The OECD found that countries where the achievement gap between non-migrant and migrant students is smaller, and that have a reduced achievement gap between second generation migrants and non-migrant students, are those with robust language programming. These programmes have clear sets of standards and well-articulated goals and help to create the stable foundation on which future academic success can be built (OECD 2006:11).

In terms of local language acquisition, every partner country offers some form of targeted support in language acquisition to newcomers. The length of this targeted supported varies by country, as well as whether or not students are separated from mainstream classes for instruction. Separating children from the mainstream classroom has mixed outcomes. While separation may allow more targeted language instruction, the time spent outside the mainstream classroom limits the possibility of building relationships and communication in the local language with non-migrant peers.

Conclusion

Children with a migrant background face numerous challenges in school. Clear data on the outcomes of programming designed to help them overcome these challenges is limited, but the objectives of these programmes are still enlightening. They can show us what governments, organisations and schools/educators think are crucial skills and the most important ingredients for migrant children's school success and overall wellbeing. The challenges facing migrant children in school often begin before children even enter schools. In addition to significant delays in starting school (even more problematic for undocumented and asylum-seeking children), a significant issue is that children may not be placed in a grade level or programme that is commensurate with their experience and needs.

The challenges for migrant children continue once they are incorporated into the mainstream school system. Across Europe, migrant children have lower school performance outcomes than non-migrant children and it's a trajectory that can begin early in the school career and continue throughout a child's education and then impact their labour market opportunities. Some of the common factors across partner countries that contribute to the achievement gap include:

- Teachers having lower expectations of migrant children;
- Migrant children being subjected to negative stereotypes;
- Migrant children having significant gaps in their education;
- Migrant parents not being well acquainted with school systems and the resources that are available;
- Migrant children have the opportunity to enrol in pre-school and kindergarten classes.

When looking at the achievement gap, it is important to be aware that 'migrant' is not a homogenous category. Achievement outcomes of migrant background children vary depending on factors such as socio-economic standing and the educational background of parents.

The common thread running through most of these issues, is teachers – the lack of them, their preparedness, their intercultural competence, and their overall needs in terms of training. Teachers are expected to counter bullying, promote integration, be culturally aware, and support language learning and home language retention. The lack of teachers trained in 'intercultural competence', qualified in language teaching, and trained in teaching speakers of other languages, was an obstacle cited by every partner country. Fortunately, some of the best practices and innovative programming highlighted by partners were teacher training programmes. This is also an area in which

CHILD UP will be well equipped to offer support. While it is not possible to offer training for every teacher, the ‘best dialogic’ teaching practices highlighted by CHILD UP will be available to all teachers. Therefore, CHILD UP will have the chance to diminish the multi-faceted challenges faced by migrant children and their teachers.