



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

Deliverable

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Contents

1. Introduction: purpose and structure of the Policy Brief	2
2. CHILD-UP: general objective, core research activities and connections with the present policy scenario.....	2
3. Short account of relevant research results.....	3
4. The impact of the unpredictable uprising of pandemic on educational and social interventions for migrant children and ways of facing it	6
4.1. CHILD-UP research: difficulties during the pandemic ...	Errore. Il segnalibro non è definito.
4.2. CHILD-UP research: reflections about possible resources in time of pandemic	Errore. Il segnalibro non è definito.
5. Preliminary suggestions for education, inclusion and research policies.....	8



1. Introduction: purpose and structure of the Policy Brief

This policy brief, developed in the framework of the CHILD-UP Project has two objectives:

Objective 1: Providing information at European level for what concerns activities and research in schools in the era of pandemic

Objective 2: Providing suggestions for a post-pandemic scenario for school activities and research methodology

The policy brief is addressed to local, national and European policy makers in the field of education. In principle. There are not differences between these actors, since the research results and suggestions for policies can be exploited at different levels. However, in several countries the use of this policy brief at local and national levels requires translations in national languages.

In particular, CHILD-UP serves as a tool of reaching the goal set forth in the Commission's priority aimed at promoting inclusive and child-friendly education systems. CHILD-UP also complements the European Child Guarantee - a key action to be carried out by the Commission, which recommends that EU Member States provide free, readily-available and effective access to key services for at-risk children. These services include, among the others, early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities.

The policy brief is organized in four sections, after this introduction: Section 2 introduces the purpose and approach of the CHILD-UP Project, Section 3 describes the relevant research which has been realized in the first phase, from 2019 to June 2021. Section 4 is about the challenges of the pandemic for the second phase of research. Section 5 includes some suggestions for the policies which have emerged from the project.

2. Presentation of CHILD-UP: general objective and core research activities

CHILD-UP is a research project that addresses the issue of children with migrant background in Europe through an innovative perspective, based on the concepts of children agency and hybrid cultural integration.

CHILD-UP proposes a view of cultural “combination”: the **hybrid cultural integration**. The concept of “hybrid” refers to the way of constructing the child’s identity as negotiated in situated interactions. The child exercises **agency** in these interactions, i.e. s/he can choose her/his ways of acting, thus influencing her/his social and cultural context and actively participating in the construction of her/his identity. Hybrid integration is the result of the combination of adults’ actions that enhance children’s agency and children’s actions that display their own agency: the child is supported by “competent” and “willing” school staff, families and community facilitators.

CHILD-UP studies what are the current practices at school and in the local contexts of seven EU countries (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom) with different migrant communities’ presence and profiles, and taking account of the possible differences based

on gender. CHILD-UP is largely based on a broad and intense involvement of stakeholders at the local and international level to discuss the analytical and operational approach, to support the multiplication of good practice elements across countries and to influence public policies.

CHILD-UP offers new evidence for current practices and policies, thus supporting both policy makers and civil society in establishing more effective inclusion policies, benefitting not only migrant children but the whole local contexts. It offers the school community first the opportunity to be actively involved in the research, and then a battery of tools to reflect and act for a successful inclusion of children with migrant background.

3. Lesson learnt from the first phase of the CHILD-UP research.

The **first phase of the CHILD-UP research** included; (1) a review of national legislations, policies and practices of integration of children with migrant background in education and social protection systems in seven European countries; (2) a survey involving children, parents, teachers, social workers and interpreters/mediators in the seven countries.

Policies and practices of integration. The CHILD-UP review shows that migrant children’s significant delays in starting school and their placement in a grade level or programme that is not necessarily commensurate with their experience and needs. While some schools may be overcrowded, in other cases, migrant children spend long time out of school. Moreover, schools face difficulty in supporting children when they have limited information on the educational background of pupils. As table 1 shows, in the seven European countries, there are different conditions and approaches about inclusion of migrant children.

TABLE 1: CONDITIONS OF MIGRANT CHILDREN INCLUSION INTO MAINSTREAM CLASSES.

Country	Overcrowded Schools	Concentration of migrant children	Time spent out of school	lack of information on child’s educational background	Access for undocumented children
Belgium		X		X	Explicitly allowed
Finland		X			Explicitly allowed
Germany	X	X	X	X	Explicitly allowed
Italy		X	X	X	Explicitly allowed
Poland		X			Implicitly allowed
Sweden		X			Explicitly allowed
UK	X	X		X	Explicitly allowed

The CHILD-UP review also supports the finding that when children are separated from the mainstream population for too long, it can begin to have a negative impact on children’s wellbeing, integration and school performance. Moreover, there are not enough qualified professionals who speak the mother tongue of migrant children and who are trained in intercultural competence. Other obstacles for migrant children include teachers’ lower expectations, negative stereotypes, parents not being well acquainted with school systems, lack of benefit from pre-school and kindergarten classes. Migrant children’s inclusion also varies depending on socioeconomic standing and the educational background of parents.

Against this background, some effective practices in the seven countries involve:

- Creating parent groups and using mediators to improve the communication between parents and schools
- Supporting different languages.
- Cultural mentoring and sponsorship initiatives.
- Promotion of cultural awareness
- Cooperation of school and non-school actors.
- Teachers’ training.

Survey. Children were involved in the survey through schools, ranging from preschools to high secondary schools, and in some cases through reception centres. Respondents included 3,958 children, 2,282 parents and 886 professionals (teachers, social workers, interpreters/mediators).

1. Professionals show awareness that language barriers can impact on participation of migrant children and their parents in school. Critical aspects concern multilingualism, support of native languages, use of translation, L2 teaching and use of mediators/interpreters.

2. Most children are positive about their participation in education. However, migrant children meet more relevant difficulties in performing school tasks. Moreover, migrant children are more positive with obedience than with enhancement of agency. Weaknesses of children’s agency concern the possibility to speak freely about feelings, teacher’s support of children’s initiatives, creative ideas and dissent

3. Representations of cultural differences and intercultural relations show an ambivalence between observations of hybridization, the essentialist celebration of cultural difference, the observation of problems related to cultural difference, and, to a lesser extent, assimilation. There are rather relevant differences between the representations of teachers and those of parents, where the latter show a more assimilationist and problematic view of migration. Teachers’ training in intercultural issues can have positive effects on teachers’ ability to adapt to diversity, to reduce stereotypes and to increase awareness for diversity. Working with parents on intercultural communication is also important to reduce negative representations of diversity.

Table 2 shows how these results of the survey can be turned into indicators useful to evaluate the effectiveness of hybrid integration of children with migrant background **at local, national and European levels. These indicators should be collected following a bottom-up process, from the local to the European level.**

Table 2: Indicators for evaluating effectiveness of hybrid integration of children with migrant background

Language barriers
Level of use of host language
Implementation of multilingualism in the classroom



Support of native language
L2 teaching/learning
Use of translation
Use of mediators/interpreters
School experience
Level of appreciation of school
Reaction to school tasks
Closeness to classmates
Perception of teachers' care
Good communication with children's parents
Level of agency
Possibility of speaking freely about feelings
Participating in school decision
Participating in classroom design
Teacher's support of creative ideas
Teachers' support of dissent
Teachers' encouragement of initiatives
Challenges
Frequency of challenges at school
Level of collaboration with teachers in solving problems
Checking forms of intercultural communication
Teachers' involvement in training in intercultural issues
Teachers' adaptation to diversity
Teachers' awareness for diversity
Teachers' ability to reduce stereotypes
Teachers' preference for hybridity
Teachers' negative representation of diversity
Parents' preference for hybridity

4. Lesson learnt from the second phase of the CHILD-UP research: The impact of the pandemic on research and educational interventions

The second phase of the research

The **second phase** of CHILD-UP was planned to gain qualitative knowledge about the meaning of representations and practices concerning promotion of migrant children's agency and their inclusion in school and community. This phase included (1) interviews and focus groups with professionals and children attending the contacted schools, investigating representations of school experience and relations, with particular reference to inclusion of migrant children; (2) observations of school activities and children's understanding and reception of these activities to identify best practices or specific problems.

This second phase was foreseen in the months in which the pandemic afflicted the European countries, causing the lockdown of schools. The research activities were thus extended to the following school year (2020/21). However, the pandemic continued to affect the schools and the involvement of children in activities and research in all participating countries, including long periods of school's closure, difficulties in involving children, above all migrant children, and difficulties in admitting researchers in schools.

Interviews and focus groups with teachers, educators, social workers and interpreters/mediators could be done, above all remotely, while focus groups with children were delayed and sometimes transformed in individual interviews. Research on facilitative methods was also delayed but held, although with relevant differences among the countries. Since the pandemic did not make possible to complete reports in time for this policy brief, the consortium proposes a reflection on the impact of the pandemic on school activities and research with migrant children.

Preliminarily, it is interesting to note that the **experience of migrant children's learning** was different in the seven European countries.

- Sweden was the only country in which schools were never closed for students in ISCED1, and much less for students in ISCED2 than ISCED3.
- In the UK, there was no remote teaching, despite a long period of school closure. When open, schools were legally obliged to follow strict rules to minimise social contacts.
- In Finland, accessibility of individual support or native language learning increased to some degree; however, accessibility was linked to the availability of technical equipment in times of lockdown.
- In Poland, teachers claimed the unequal access to computer equipment among students, lack of preparation for online teaching, and overwork and responsibilities resulting from the new school situation.
- In Germany, equipment was not equally distributed among the students.

- In Belgium, some students reported that several teachers did not show up for online classes.
- In Italy, several school activities were adapted to the new conditions, using digital platforms.

Several researchers noted that decisions about closure and distance teaching/learning were taken top-down, often without previous notice, thus creating serious problems for both teachers and students. Thus, the CHILD-UP research confirmed the difficulty of involving children, in particular migrant children, to enhance their exercise of agency and hybrid integration.

Against this background, the CHILD-UP research encouraged teachers to re-socialise children to agency. The CHILD-UP research experience made the new conditions of life in and out of school evident in two ways:

1. Encouraging the teachers and children's narratives
2. Supporting the inclusion of children's agency in new ways of experiencing schooling.

Teachers and children's narratives

The CHILD-UP research offers some interesting reflections about children's experiences in schools. Students and teachers were eager to talk about the impact of the pandemic on their lives.

Interviews and focus groups with teachers and other professionals evidenced the most important problems for migrant children (and socially disadvantaged children in general):

- Oblivion
- Widening of the gap between living conditions and participation opportunities
- Tendencies of segregation
- Lack of peer relationships
- Lack of after-school activities for informal networking and opportunities to practice second language learning
- Lack of access to technology

Several children mentioned sense of isolation as an important dimension of the remote functioning of schools. Above all disadvantaged students became more isolated and less engaged, with a significant impact on migrant students. Lack of contact with peers was very acute. The impact on family life was controversial, although sometimes it was seen positively.

The research also showed that in terms of teaching methodology and tools, there was little adjustment to the way of conducting classes and teaching.

Inclusion of children's agency in new ways of experiencing schooling.

The following reflections are mainly based on the experience in Italy, where several activities were successfully completed remotely and the research provided an opportunity to reintroduce in schools children's agency and to support flexibility in the education system, through the innovative use of digital platforms, thus enhancing children's agency despite the pandemic.

A massive use of digital platforms for teaching has negative effects on children's agency. However, it is useful to explore how and with which limitations digital platforms allow participation based on

personal needs and interests, and facilitation of children's agency, in conditions in which classroom interaction is not possible or allowed in schools.

First, the use of digital platforms for focus groups became an important opportunity to enhance children's agency during the school closures, providing children with a chance to become again active in the production of personal points of view concerning their social life during the pandemic.

Second, digital platforms allowed facilitation of agency respecting physical distance and lack of access to the classroom. Facilitators could encourage children's personal expressions through several remote activities.

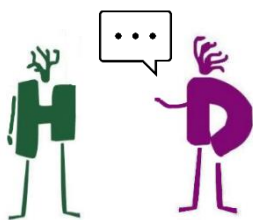
Third, involvement of children's parents in mediated interactions was also facilitated through the use of digital platforms.

Finally, for what concerns research, video-recordings on digital platform was more discreet compared to a camera in front of children in the classroom and enhanced rich personal expressions.

Clearly, adaptation and flexibility presented limitations, for instance the lack of eye contact to create a relationship with the children or the frequent choice of children to switch camera off, lack of activities including children's use of body as a way of self-expressions.

5. Recommendations for education, inclusion and research policies

What follows is a list of recommendations based on the CHILD-UP research experience during the pandemic, concerning possible policies for the education system. These recommendations can be immediately applied at local level, and even in the single school, but the recommended practices need the political framework and support at national level. In this sense, these recommendations can be used to orient national policies for migrant children's hybrid integration, and more generally for inclusive education, since the pandemic has shown that inclusive measures are useful for all risky conditions.



1. The creation of spaces for dialogic exchange of narratives related to native and migrant children's experiences is an opportunity for reflection on experiences based on children's personal expression. The role of the teacher/facilitator as a coordinator supporting children's agency is pivotal.

2. It is important to strengthen the digital skills and competence for all participants, in particular an integrated technology use, even when remote teaching is not necessary. Policies should be sensitive to migrant children / families opportunities to participate in digital learning, including the availability of sufficient technical resources and terminal devices.





3. It is necessary to adjust school requirements and differentiate measures of school success, particularly for migrant children who struggle with the language of instruction.

4. The school system should develop a better coordination with a variety of external professionals, e.g. educators, mediators and social workers. In particular, it is necessary to increase intercultural competences and exchange opportunities for teachers, (migrant) children and other professionals working with schools. It is useful to provide all external professionals with stable employment and good working conditions.

5. It is important to increase the active participation of migrant children's parents and families in the educational process. If the parents have a trusting connection to teachers and the institution of school, migrant children can better cope with challenges that they are facing during the pandemic and within daily school life.



6. Research projects require flexibility to grab the unexpected and ability to deal with its effect on social life. These projects can have the important chance to pave the way to the opening of public space for (migrant) children's agency, thus facilitating their reflection on changes which deeply affect their lives and the inclusion from the beginning of their agency in school life.



7. The recovery of (migrant) children's personal responsibility requires public spaces in which children's views and ways to deal with the unexpected and change are intertwined with adults' constructions of meanings and give valuable contributions to the understanding of a historical condition that can include a sudden outbreak of unpredictable events. CHILD-UP shows that European research projects can support the construction of these spaces, highlighting the importance of a collective engagement of adults and children as agents of change and enhancing

flexibility in the education system.

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