



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

## Deliverable

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### D2.11 Policy Brief 2

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## 1. Introduction: purpose and structure of the Policy Brief

This second policy brief, developed in the framework of the CHILD-UP research Project, has the objective of providing information about the most important findings of the CHILD-UP research for policy makers at all institutional levels and decision makers at school level. These findings can inspire educational policies. The policy brief aims to describe the ways in which the CHILD-UP research findings can influence local policies and national/European guidelines for these policies.

It is important to note that, in several countries, the use of this policy brief at local and national levels requires translations in national languages.

## 2. Findings of the CHILD-UP research

The CHILD-UP research was planned to gain knowledge about the narratives and practices that concern migrant children's agency and their hybrid integration in the education system. Since knowledge of migrant children's school experience is extremely important, **the effort to collect data on local practices and to compare these data is important to produce effective sets of data at local, national and European levels.**

For this purpose, the CHILD-UP project has realised five research actions.

1. 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. Survey addressed to 3,958 children, 2,282 parents and 886 professionals (teachers, social workers, interpreters/mediators).
3. Individual and focus group interviews with 284 professionals (teachers and educators, social workers, interpreter/mediators) and 1305 children, investigating narratives of school experience and relations, with particular reference to inclusion of children with migrant background-
4. Recording of 207 school activities (second language and intercultural education; facilitation of dialogue and participatory activities based on teaching) and 18 activities of language mediation in teacher-parent meetings.
5. Focus group interviews and questionnaires involving 1601 children about their understanding and evaluation of these activities.

This section aims to show what CHILD-UP research findings can be useful to plan local policies and to implement national and European guidelines for these policies.

### Finding 1. Importance and meanings of children's school experience and agency

The review of national policies has shown some important barriers that hinder migrant children's hybrid integration in the education system, including: (1) delays in starting the school experience; (2) stereotyping and discrimination in the classroom; (3) placement in grade levels or programmes without consideration for personal experiences and needs; (4) lack of support of learning and mother tongues.

However, the survey has showed that most migrant children are quite positive about their school experience. **Migrant and non-migrant children tend to answer along similar lines**, with a few exceptions, regarding (1) migrant children's more frequent respect of hierarchical relations with teachers, (2) migrant children's perception of more difficulties in speaking about their feelings or preferences and (3) migrant children's more frequent feeling of being involved in decision-making and design of the classroom. The individual and focus group interviews confirm that migrant and non-migrant children share the value of school experience:

- Children value school as a meeting place, in particular a space for contact with friends.
- Children wish a school that is non-hierarchical, promotes a more relaxed atmosphere and good relations, reduces the distance between children and teachers, and includes children's personal narratives and feelings.
- Children value greatly their participation and responsibility in their own education, as partners in teaching and learning.
- Children expect more opportunities for co-determination in matters concerning them, as well as the possibility of disagreeing on certain tasks.
- Children express their support for methods of teaching open to children's needs and interests, which promote expressions of personal experiences and knowledge.

Against this background, the interviews also show that migrant children's agency means:

- Taking decisions about themselves
- Having a sense of influence on school activities
- Participating in social relationships according to their needs.
- Contesting rules that they find unfair or unnecessary
- Influencing the solution of their problems.

## **Finding 2. Importance and meanings of teachers' support of (migrant) children's agency**

The survey has shown that teachers' systematic support of children's agency is not frequent, above all for what concern support of creative ideas, dissent and children's initiatives. By contrast, the interviewed teachers have recognised the migrant and non-migrant children's need to express agency in school life:

- Teachers are in favour of open and safe atmosphere in the classroom and teaching methods based on dialogue.



- Teachers stress the importance of establishing personal relationships with children and recognizing children's capabilities.
- Teachers recognise the need to be welcoming and open-minded towards migrant children, responsive to their needs and ready to modify their teaching methods to fulfil these needs.
- Teachers claim that they undertake actions to help migrant children to overcome marginalization.

However, teachers frequently associate agency with educational needs, just paying attention to migrant children's interests that can motivate them to learn the language and to participate in school activities.

Moreover, migrant children's agency can be undermined by teaching in the following ways:

- Hierarchical relations with teachers.
- Teaching as more focused on evaluation than on dialogue and valorisation of migrant children's competences.
- Teachers' priority of obligations and rules above migrant children's needs.
- Teachers' indifference, labelling or even discrimination as inappropriate reactions to migrant children's problems.
- Teachers' insufficient consideration for migrant children's problems in the language of instruction.

Teachers' unfair treatment refrains migrant children from sharing their troubles with teachers to avoid any potential negative consequences. Thus, there are evident relations between migrant children's agency on the one hand, and collaboration and help from teachers on the other.

### **Finding 3. Importance and meanings of cultural differences and intercultural relations**

The review and the survey have shown that:

1. Several teachers are not trained in intercultural competence
2. A monolingual approach is widespread in schools
3. Language mediation and support of native language are rather infrequent
4. Teachers have problems in facing cultural stereotyping and discrimination, enhancing sensitivity on these topics, raising awareness for cultural differences and adapting to children's cultural diversity
5. Teachers show ambivalent representations mixing hybridization, celebration of cultural difference and observation of problematic intercultural differences.

However, interviews show that teachers are aware of several problematic issues concerning intercultural adaptation, in particular associated with language barriers, as it is shown by the following list of factors.



1. Migrant children's cultural background is important, especially at the beginning of their stay in new country.
2. The potential to express migrant children's agency is limited by lack of language skills.
3. Knowledge of languages in the country of immigration is important to attend schools, create relations with peers, avoiding marginalisation and segregation.
4. Activities that do not involve the extensive use of the second language can support migrant children's self-esteem.
5. Low expectations regarding academic performance, lack of resources, deficiencies in competent staff negatively influence migrant children's agency.

It can be noted that teachers associate problems with children's deficiencies rather than with limits of teaching, with the exception of factor 5.

Additionally, peer relations are considered very important by both children and professionals also to enhance migrant children's school experience and agency (in relation to factor 4 in the previous list). According to professionals, through peer contacts, migrant children gain more opportunities to develop their knowledge of the local language, better understand cultural norms and comply with school rules and regulations.

#### **Finding 4. Importance and involvement of migrant parents**

The survey has shown that: (1) parents' positive assessment of communication with teachers is much more frequent than teachers' positive assessment of communication with parents; (2) the teachers' perception of obstacles in the functioning of parent-teacher communication tends to undervalue migrant parents' language difficulties. However, the interviewed teachers recognise that language barriers are a crucial factor that influences the capacity of migrant parents to support their children's school experience. Moreover, they recognise that the voice of migrant parents can be hindered by teachers' defensive approach.

On the contrary, interviews with migrant children show that parents and family are a great source of support in the school context. However, children recognise that their parents are not always able to be a source of significant support in school matters. Thus, older siblings are frequently mentioned as family members who can help in school matters.

#### **Finding 5. Importance of practices supporting children's agency and hybrid integration**

The analysis of recordings has evidenced the different forms of classroom/group activities:

1. **Forms of facilitation.** These forms include a mix of: (a) questions that enhance participation; (b) formulations that summarise, explicates or develop the gist of children's narratives or contributions; (c) minimal responses that show active listening and attention for these narratives.



2. **Mixed forms of facilitation.** These forms include some facilitators' guidance. Facilitators provide comments or explanations that stress the relevant and positive narratives produced by the children.
3. **Directive forms of facilitation.** These forms include more frequent, sometimes systematic, facilitators' comments and explanations, and some normative recommendations.
4. **Forms of participated teaching.** These forms are based on facilitators' superior authority in producing knowledge and their aim to guide children's contributions, but avoiding negative evaluations. These forms tend to transform facilitation into traditional teaching.

The analysis shows that migrant children's agency decreases from forms of facilitation (1) to forms of participated teaching (4). Thus, forms of facilitation, based on a variety of actions, can enhance and support children's agency and dialogic interlacements of narratives of (migrant) children's personal cultural trajectories.

Moreover, the analysis shows that facilitation can be applied in all schools, from early childhood to adolescence. In early childhood, however, mixed and directive forms of facilitation are more frequent, probably because children show less language fluency in conversation and less ability in dialogue; thus, they can be seen in need of guidance.

Language **fluency** has also an important impact on facilitation. When migrant children are not fluent, it is more difficult to support their agency and to enhance dialogue. An important corrective factor is the mode of facilitating second language learning based on communication in the classroom context, since it encourages the production of migrant children's narratives.

The analysis shows that children's autonomous work group is also potentially important, but it is based on the tasks that are assigned by facilitators, which can enhance or underestimate migrant children's agency and dialogue.

Finally, the analysis shows that successful facilitation of migrant children's agency and narratives is shown by the following four factors:

1. Children choose ways of narrating and contents of narratives, in particular about their personal experiences.
2. Children elicit or tell narratives autonomously.
3. Children show interest in the facilitated narratives.
4. Interlacements between children's narratives are fluid.

### **Finding 6. Importance of language mediation in parent-teacher interactions**

In some Italian schools, the analysis has shown several difficulties in mediated parent-teacher communication, sometimes with children's participation:

1. Teachers provide long monologues, without asking parents to comment or explain their children's behaviours, nor proposing any form of collaboration with them. Teachers'





assessments are negative and focus on: (a) the poor Italian language competence of the children, and (b) the lack of parental support.

2. Parents give minimal feedback when reported about teachers' negative assessments about their children's performance, but they react defensively when accused of giving little support to their children.

In these conditions, language mediation requires an exceptional effort:

1. Mediators mitigate teachers' assessments both by highlighting positive aspects in their renditions and by explaining to parents how the system functions and what they can do with it.
2. Mediators try to include the parents in the interaction by providing support and suggestions to the parents.

When teachers provide positive assessments of children and of their parents' support and involve the parents, mediation is much easier.

When children participate in mediated interactions, complexity and difficulties can increase, since:

1. Frequently, teachers talk about children indirectly.
2. When children are addressed by teachers or through mediators' initiatives, children hesitate to respond or only provide minimal feedback.
3. Children's autonomous initiatives, are not supported.

Mediators' attempts to involve children are difficult when they are harnessed in the teacher-parent - or parent-child - interaction. Thus, children's agency is not empowered even despite language mediation.

### **Finding 7. Importance of children's evaluation of activities**

A large majority of children (69%) appreciated facilitation while only 7.5% did not appreciate it. It is interesting that almost no one gave a negative evaluation in secondary schools. Migrant children considered these activities enjoyable and effective, above all since they focused on dialogue and children's participation. The importance of dialogue and support of personal expressions was confirmed and emphasised by the focus group interviews with children. Equal observation and evaluation of activities among migrant and non-migrant children means that hybrid integration has been effective.

### **Finding 8. Importance of gender differences**

Gender is marginally relevant to explain the quantitative data, it is rarely considered in interviews with children and it is not relevant as for participation in classroom interactions. Moreover, gender is not relevant in the evaluation of facilitation, with the only exception that boys more mocked others and were more frequently bored and annoyed. However, gender is considered relevant by

professionals, above all to explain differences between boys and girls in migrant families, since gendered family expectations influence careers and education.

Summing up, the way of supporting of agency and hybrid integration can be seen from different points of view, according to the ways of collecting the data.

- **Quantitative analysis** shows important weaknesses regarding teachers' (and other professionals') training, support of agency and narratives of intercultural relations.
- **Analysis of interviews** shows that teachers (and other professionals) are interested in agency and dialogue, although several respondents share an essentialist view of cultural differences.
- **Analysis of recordings of activities** shows possibilities (and limits) of facilitation of migrant children's agency and hybrid integration in specific classrooms/groups.

### 3. Impact of the CHILD-UP research findings on local policies and national and European political guidelines

The CHILD-UP research findings can enhance **local policies** regarding conditions, risks and difficulties of promoting children's agency and hybrid integration in the education system.

For this purpose, it is preliminarily important to recognise that, although legislation and political climate of children's migration are certainly important to understand constraint for migrant children's agency and hybrid integration, **these factors cannot explain the complexity of migrant children's lived experience of interactions with adults and peers**. Thus, the CHILD-UP findings suggest that migrant children's lived experience can guide **local policies**, in the way that are listed below.



While agency is only partially expressed in schools, for migrant children expression of agency seems to be less problematic than learning. **It is important to support children's agency in classroom communication.**

Despite teachers' recognition of the importance of migrant children's agency, teachers do not seem at ease with important expressions of agency, although in interviews teachers are frequently positive with agency. **It is important to guide and train teachers to enhance and support (migrant) children's agency.**



Several teachers are not trained in intercultural issues and declare difficulties in dealing with these issues, although most of them recognise the importance of hybrid integration. **It is important to guide and train teachers to enhance and support hybrid integration.**

Problems with migrant parents' participation concern both their difficulties in communicating with teachers and their participation in the general parental narrative that underscores the importance of hybrid integration. **Local policies need to be more attentive and supportive with regard to communication between migrant parents and teachers.**



Both children and teachers recognise the importance of dialogue and non-hierarchical relations, but teachers frequently associate dialogue with learning rather than with agency. **It is important to guide and train teachers to enhance and support dialogue as condition for migrant children's agency.**



The analysis of classroom activities shows that facilitation can promote dialogue, but also that facilitation is not always and not easily realised in schools. **It is important to guide and train teachers to enhance and support facilitation of (migrant) children's agency.**



The analysis of practices shows difficulties in language mediation with parents and above all with children. **It is important to organise joint discussions and training involving both teachers and interpreters or mediators (according to the local use of these professionals).**

Children's evaluation of classroom interactions confirm the difference among the forms of these interactions. **It is important to involve children in monitoring of facilitation.**



Hybrid integration requires space for expression of all children's personal cultural trajectories and facilitation of interlacement of narratives of these trajectories. **It is important to promote facilitative activities aiming to enhance and support interlacement among personal cultural trajectories, in particular involving migrant children as tellers.**

Hybrid integration does not only concern migrant children, but the whole classroom. **It is important to organise activities for the whole classroom, avoiding isolation of migrant children.**



Facilitation requires attention to agency and hybrid integration, rather than to cultural differences or "intercultural relations". **It is important to guide and train teachers to avoid essentialism, which consists in giving primary value to cultural diversity rather than personal cultural trajectories.**

Facilitation of migrant children's agency and hybrid integration are negatively influenced by stereotypical and ethnocentric communication about cultural differences, including parents' assimilationist and ethnocentric positioning. **It is important to guide and train teachers to observe possible forms of ethnocentrism and to discuss them with parents.**



While gender differences cannot be evident in several research findings, taking children's agency seriously allows an understanding of possible gender differences. **It is important to guide and train teachers to pay systematic attention to gender to understand if differences either are or are not relevant and take action correspondingly.**

Finally, the implementation of these local policies should be guided by **national and European guidelines that recognise the following principles.**

- Migrant children's agency is extremely important to achieve hybrid integration since it means active contribution to dialogue.
- Facilitation can support migrant children's agency, but hybrid integration is based on all children's agency in schools and classrooms.
- Professionals, above all teachers, can enhance and support migrant children's (and their parents') agency by using specific types of facilitative actions.
- Hybrid integration is based on the interlacement of narratives of personal cultural trajectories
- Hybrid integration can oppose to essentialist views of cultural difference and assimilation.
- It is important to pay great attention to the specific conditions of facilitation in different teaching contexts.
- It is important to pay great attention to the ways in which mediators can facilitate dialogic communication between migrants and teachers or other institutional representatives.