Policy brief

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European Parents' Association**
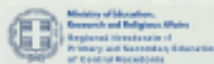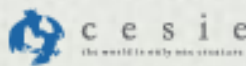
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How to better include Third Country National Children in national education systems –

Mainstreaming an IntegratED approach

The question of how to better include all children in their national education systems and foster the development of their full potential has been a concern to most governments in Europe ever since the first international tests (TIMSS - 1995, PISA - 2000, PIRLS - 2001) showed huge discrepancies among countries. A closer look at the results also revealed differences on the regional and local level and regarding pupils from different backgrounds. The specific focus on Third Country National Children (TCN) has increased in the aftermath of their increased arrival in 2015/16 especially in Greece, Italy and Spain but also in Germany, Austria and Sweden to name but the most affected countries by the number of refugees and/or migrants.

Based upon the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child – ratified by all European states – which states the right of each child to education[1], schools are obliged to provide all children including TCN with the competences and skills necessary to shape and master their own future, develop their full potential[2] and become happy and active citizens. Ministries of education, regional and local governments – where applicable – and other responsible authorities have set up educational policies for immigrant children in order to provide the necessary support to single schools. Not all of these policies have however proved to reach their goal. In fact statistics show that in many cases the considerable gap in achievement between TCN and native-born pupils remains even taking into consideration that also native children from a low socio-economic background are lacking behind their economically better off peers.

Furthermore the study "Educational support models – the current policy responses in Europe" carried out for the European Commission shows that the education support models in the three main target countries (Greece, Italy and Spain) provide mainly linguistic support to newly arrived migrant children and don't take the other three essential components, that have been identified - academic support, outreach and cooperation as well as intercultural education – sufficiently into account.

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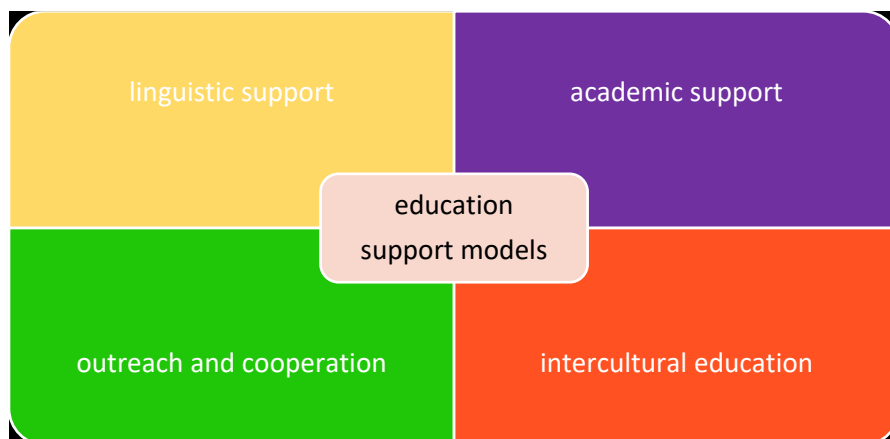
[1] Convention on the Rights of the Child Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49, Article 28, 29

[2] Idem Article 29 a, d

The consortium of the project IntegratED has based its work on these requirements and has established an educational support model which consists of three pillars:

Academic support	Parental involvement	Intercultural education
• mentoring programme • homework club	• relevant information provided in different home languages • f2f meetings supported by cultural mediators, translators • use of social media platforms • inclusion in PA/PTAs	• development of school diversity policies • training seminars for teachers and other school staff • provision for mother tongue and home culture education

1)   Academic support is provided

α)   through a mentoring programme which offers individual support and guidance to TCN secondary/high school pupils by seniors or university students

β)   through an online homework club where (retired) teachers and /or university students help children in need of additional tutoring

1a) Mentoring programme

The concept of mentoring is said to go back to Homer's epic poem "The Odyssey" in which Ulysses upon leaving to fight in the Trojan war asks his friend Mentor to take care of and provide guidance for his son Telemachus until his return. Legend further has it that the goddess Athena herself disguised as Mentor to take on this role.

On this basis different models of mentoring have been developed as successful strategies in various contexts: education, employment and career preparation, drug rehabilitation, sports, and mental health. In most cases an experienced adult will take care of a young/er person and provide support in the field. These relationships can be formal or informal and one-to-one or group mentoring.

In the education support model proposed by the IntegratED project a peer-to-peer model has been developed that targets specifically TCN children as mentees who are carefully matched with mentors who are either higher-grade pupils from the same school or university students. These mentors undergo a detailed selection process and receive specific training via an online course available on the project's platform. They also have regular meetings with their supervisor in the framework of the

project to develop their reflective practice, give and get feedback and receive guidance and support whenever necessary.

Such a programme can be set up by any school following the subsequent steps:

   I.   planning the programme
   II.   setting up a supervising process
   III.   identifying the students and preparing them
   IV.   informing the parents and gaining consent
   V.   recruiting mentors and training them
   VI.   matching students and mentors
   VII.   starting the mentoring process and monitor the development
   VIII.   getting feedback
   IX.   evaluating the programme

1b) The homework club

The online homework club accessible through the IntegratED project platform at this link https://ecourse.integrated-project.eu/homework-support/ has been established to provide pupils with the possibility to get external help with their assignments. Retired subject teachers as well as university students have been recruited in the three countries targeted – Greece, Italy and Spain – to assist TCN children with their tasks online during certain times that vary according to the different countries. Assignments can be uploaded for feedback, questions on specific exercises asked and possible solutions put up for discussion.

This feature should be seen as an additional offer to other measures taken by the school to actively integrate TCN pupils and help them to cope with the curriculum. It's meant to support pupils on an individual basis to solve specific issues that may turn up while trying to accomplish the tasks given by the subject teachers who often haven't got the time for repeated explanations or don't consider it their role to provide more detailed feedback to TCN kids.

2) Parental involvement

Many studies show that parental involvement in their children's learning can be very beneficial for the pupils' performance at school and that strengthening the home-school relation generally leads to the development of more resilient students.

This is specifically true for TCN kids whose parents might struggle themselves to adapt to a new environment, find their way in the bureaucracy of the host country and build a new life for their families.[3]

Schools are however faced with a number of obstacles – sometimes in combination – when attempting to reach out to these parents like for instance:

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[3] Nusche, D. (2009), "What Works in Migrant Education?: A Review of Evidence and Policy Options", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 22, OECD Publishing, Paris (p:33-34)

- Communication problems
- Lack of resources (personnel and financial)
- Lack of time
- No support system

The project therefore proposes a number of easy to implement measures that can help schools to achieve their goal of involving all parents in the learning of their kids which are:

2a) Providing relevant information in the home languages of the different groups of migrants:

Understanding the way the education system of their new home country works, getting reliable information on registration requirements (where, when and how, what documents are necessary and how to obtain them, …) on curricula and content offered by different schools, exam and homework procedures, expectations of the school/teachers towards the family and vice-versa can avoid misunderstandings and/or misinterpretation on both sides and smoothen the collaboration between the school and the home.

In the framework of the project relevant general information material has been produced that can serve as a base for all institutions but has to be extended by the offer and conditions at each single school taking into account the languages of the present migrant population.

2b) Face-to-face meetings supported by cultural mediators and translators

Parents are generally interested in their children's performance at school and their well-being in the school community. This is no different for TCN parents and their descendants. Due to communication issues in terms of language barriers or different cultural habits it might however be difficult for them to participate in meetings and voice their concerns or raise their questions. This may lead to frustration on both sides and the impression of disregard by the school's side towards the family on the one hand and of disinterest by the family for the school on the other. It's therefore advisable to plan these meetings carefully (especially the first ones in order not to shy people away but to build trust and confidence) and to include translators for the different languages as well as cultural mediators if possible to signify that the school is mindful of people's needs and takes its positive approach to diversity seriously.

Translators and cultural mediators can be found in the migrant community of the respective countries, in NGOs dealing with migrants and refugees, within the school community itself (other parents and /or teachers) or at the university or other institutions.

In an ideal case the authorities (on national, regional or local level) should provide these services as for example in Portugal where service centers in a One-stop-shop system have been established throughout the country where schools can apply for translators and/or cultural mediators to be sent to their meetings or to provide translation by phone where personal presence is not possible. In Ireland schools with a high level of children from vulnerable families (DEIS schools) have a home-school-community-liaison-officer (HSCL), who is a teacher from the school's team specifically trained and solely appointed for that role for five years who is not only concerned with the educational context but also takes care of supporting families in housing and health care issues and helps with the integration of parents into the labor market where applicable.

Another means of support in communication are the rapidly developing online translation programmes. These are offered by various providers and differ enormously in quality and accuracy and should therefore only be used as a last resort for resolving immediate, small and non-decisive problems of understanding due to lack of linguistic comprehension. As most of these services can't take the context of the conversation into consideration the danger of misunderstandings in complex situations is rather high and should be avoided.

2c) Use of social media platforms:

The same as for the online translation services the offer of social media platforms evolves constantly and there is a huge variety of messenger services available. Even though they present a fast and easily accessible means of communication between the home and the school as well as among parents or pupils or teachers and pupils the data scandals in recent years have also demonstrated that their use is not always safe. With the implementation of the GDPR many schools have had to change their policies towards a free choice of communication platforms and now insist on the use of media approved or especially established by their respective ministries/authorities.

Depending on the country but also on the local context, parents have different preferences for these communication services, which should be taken into account when implementing such a service for the school community. Parents of TCN children very often have extensive experience with such channels as they have often passed through different countries on their flight and use these means also to stay in touch with their family in the country of origin. They might however need instruction on how to make the most of the specific platform used by their child's school, especially if no foreign language feature is available. Schools and/or authorities should therefore strive to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the digital world to include at least an English version or also other languages frequently spoken by families or have at least a connection to an automatic translation service (with all its reservation as mentioned in 2b).

2d) Inclusion in PA/PTAs:

Parents' associations and in some countries Parent-teacher-associations can play a decisive role in the inclusion of TCN families in the community as a whole. Depending on the country and the structure of the education system their role varies however enormously. In some contexts they're solely seen as fundraisers to compensate a lack of budget provided by the government. In others they practically "run" the school, taking actively part in the administration, choice of teachers, offer of extracurricular activities, etc.

The European Parents' Association advocates for meaningful parental involvement in all matters concerning the teaching and learning of their children, their mental health and well-being and their development as responsible participants in their communities. A close co-operation between the school (teachers, principals, non-teaching personnel, etc.) and the parents is therefore essential to guarantee that each child can reach its full potential.

Well-established PAs and PTAs will reach out to all parents and promote their engagement at school and their involvement in their children's learning by inviting them to their meetings, facilitating their taking part in decision-making processes, providing information and guidance for successful parenting especially on difficult topics (drug and alcohol abuse, addiction to online games, sexuality,

(cyber)bullying, grooming, sexting, etc.) through conferences, workshops, webinars, peer-support,…
Taking into account the diversity among families the same measures need to be applied as described
under 2b) to ensure that all parents feel welcome and accepted and are given the possibility to interact
in an appropriate way.

3) Intercultural education

The education support model propagated by the IntegratED project puts a focus on intercultural
education as the basis of mutual understanding and respect as studies reveal that even though many
countries have made efforts to include intercultural perspectives into their textbooks and teaching
materials the curricula implemented on local level scarcely take these aspects into account.[4] The
following measures are therefore proposed to achieve this goal:

3a) Development of school diversity policies

The fact that there are no monolingual and monocultural classes but that each group is composed of
various individuals with different needs, backgrounds and talents has been known for quite some time.
The consequence however that these differences need to be taken into account is still not widely
spread. It is therefore necessary to raise awareness among all stakeholders (teachers, principals, other
school staff, parents and students) that curricula but also rules and regulations for the daily functioning
of the school community need to be inclusive for all.

The development of a school diversity policy to which all stakeholders contribute is a first step to
recognition of this diversity which should lead to a better acceptance by all partners involved in the
process. The policy should not only be a framework but also include actions that need to be taken by
the different stakeholders, state the responsibilities of each group and individual and also contain
concrete measures of how to implement the commonly agreed goals and indicate the consequences
for not complying with rules and regulations that have been established together.

Once established the policy needs to be clearly communicated to everybody, regularly updated and
disseminated also among new students, parents, teachers, etc. Like for all other information about the
school – curricula, schedules, activities and so on (see 2a) – a translation into various languages might
be advisable as well as an introduction/repetition during teacher conferences and parents' meetings.
In order for all students to be familiar with the school's approach to diversity and internalize its policy
it's essential that not only activities focusing on intercultural aspects take place but that especially the
adults give an example by living the attitude.

3b) Training seminars for teachers and other school staff:

In order for the teachers and other school staff to fulfil the demand mentioned at the end of point 3a)
(online) training seminars on interculturality and multilingualism should be included in initial teacher

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[4] Nusche, D. (2009), "What Works in Migrant Education?: A Review of Evidence and Policy Options", OECD
Education Working Papers, No. 22, OECD Publishing, Paris (p:30)

training as well as offered as CPD (Continuous Professional Development) courses for all staff engaged at school. [5]

The education support model developed through the IntegratED project offers specific modules for teachers which can be used for these purposes. Their advantage is that they can be completed by participants individually at their own pace and time at home or at any other place convenient for them but still be evaluated and receive feedback and/or advice after their completion.

Schools or other institutions responsible for pre- and in-service training should however consider to also organize joint parent-teacher trainings and/or to include parents as trainers especially TCN family members who can support the development of intercultural skills by bringing in their perspectives and traditions and work together on mutual understanding and respect for diversity.

3c) Provision for mother tongue and home culture education:

In many countries the idea of total assimilation to the cultural and linguistic context of the host country is still widely spread and considered the only "right" way of integration for TCN children. Practical experience has however shown that cutting children off their culture and language of origin produces a number of negative effects and can at worst lead to extremism and radicalization. The concept of semilingualism brought up by John Cummins in the 1970s stating that TCN children won't be able to speak either language well (neither their mother tongue nor the majority language of the host country) without having passed a necessary threshold has been strongly disputed among the scientific community and various studies come to controversial conclusions.[6] Despite that fact parents of children with a different mother tongue from the language of instruction are still told by many teachers that they should not use their language of origin at home if they want to foster their children's progress at school which in certain cases leads to a situation of non-communication at home as parents don't speak the language of the receiving country yet or pass on their own mistakes to their children which are then difficult to compensate at school.

Linguists therefore recommend today that parents should enhance the development of the linguistic competences of their children in their first language and that they should be supported in their efforts by the offer of mother tongue courses by the school authorities. Sweden for example provides language courses in 24 languages to their TCN pupils to help them acquire the necessary knowledge in terms of grammar, syntax, text production and literature in their home language in addition to the communicative skills usually brought in from home. This enables the teacher(s) of other subjects but especially of the language of instruction to build on this knowledge and skills and facilitate the learning and improving of the language of instruction. These courses should also include a cultural component teaching and valuing essential elements of the home culture in order to maintain the connection and make pupils familiar with it thus making children resilient to the misinterpretation and misuse by certain groups outside of the school context.

The organisation of these courses might not always be easy especially as there are sometimes very few children of a particular language in one school. Cooperation between schools and organizational help

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[5] Nusche, D. (2009), "What Works in Migrant Education?: A Review of Evidence and Policy Options", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 22, OECD Publishing, Paris (p:31-32)
[6] Idem (p:28-29)

by the responsible authorities are therefore key to the implementation of these measures that are also crucial to show the respect of the hosting community towards TCN families.

In addition, mother tongue and home culture education are a great opportunity to involve TCN parents in their children's learning at school and in fostering exchange with the school's staff and other parents. Courses can be opened to other students interested in learning the language of their friends and classmates and cultural events can be celebrated together sharing practices from different backgrounds.
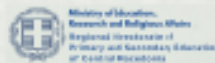
Conclusion

Linguistic support is definitely an important factor as all studies show that proficiency in the language of schooling plays an essential role in achieving positive/improving education outcomes. It is however not sufficient to reach a satisfactory inclusion of migrant pupils into the education system of the receiving country let alone to prepare them for successful further integration into society and the labour market. The tools developed by the IntegratED project namely the mentoring programme and the homework club for academic support, the measures proposed to enhance parental involvement and the activities for intercultural education, that have been effectively piloted in different schools in the three mainly targeted countries present easy to implement elements that can be used to achieve the goal of better integration of TCN children also promoted by the OECD and the European Commission. They are based upon the methodology in Successful Educational Actions for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe developed by Ramón Flecha at al. in the Includ-ED project[7] and follow the concept of a holistic approach which takes into consideration the entire environment of TCN students: families, educational institutions (schools, kindergartens, etc.) and the surrounding community (neighborhood, sports clubs, etc.). Research conducted by Ramón Flecha et al.[8] as well as by the consortium of the IntegratED project show that cooperation between all these actors is one of the key factors of efficient integration of TCN children fostering academic achievement and social cohesion.

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[7] https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/files/esl/downloads/13_INCLUD-ED_Book_on_SEA.pdf consulted 05.09.2019

[8] Idem p 4-5