

Education for inclusion: strategies to reduce immigrant marginalisation in Europe and the U.S.

Policy Dialogue – 28 June 2011

Summary

Children with a migrant background generally perform less well in education than native populations across Europe, participants heard at an EPC Policy Dialogue co-organised with the United States Mission to the European Union, and offering such children a better chance of educational success can reduce marginalisation, exclusion and alienation. Countries with longer histories of immigration both in Europe and North America have found that targeted policy measures and initiatives have led to improved results in the integration of such children. Teacher expectations are key to improving performance, but parental attitudes and involvement are also an important element. Integration issues need to be a basic component of teacher training and there needs to be much better monitoring of different migrant groups to target resources accurately.

Full Report

Alistair Ross, Emeritus Professor, London Metropolitan University, presented the recent results of the Migration Policy Index (www.mipex.eu), which assessed educational policies towards migrants in 31 states in Europe and North America. Led by the British Council and the Migration Policy Group, the MIPEX initiative is co-financed by the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. The education strand of the MIPEX III concentrated on evaluating four broad policy areas of each of the 31 countries: access to educational provision; policies targeting specific needs of migrants to promote equality of outcome; policies giving new opportunities supporting migrants in the wider community; policies directed at, and to affect, the population as a whole. Each of the measures produced very different results across Europe. The overall results indicate that the most engaged in education for migrants are Portugal, Belgium and the Nordic countries. There is substantial variation between countries. Most countries were found to have unfavourable education policies directed at children with a migrant background. Professor Ross said that there is a need to ensure that migrant children are not treated with inequity, whether these children are newcomers themselves from other EU or non-EU countries or they belong to second/third generation communities.

Margie McHugh, Co-Director of the Migration Policy Institute's National Centre on Immigrant Integration Policy, based in Washington D.C., said that the question of how to integrate immigrants is still a big issue in the U.S. High levels of immigration led to the foreign-born population more than tripling in only 30 years. In 2004, the foreign-born population reached 34 million - an all-time high. Looking ahead a decade, the foreign-born population is projected to rise to more than 40 million, representing more than 13% of the total population. In this context, English language learning (ELL) initiatives for the children of this foreign-born population are no longer just important for the major immigrant-receiving states like New York, California and Texas. Indeed, there are now 40 states that must focus on building capacity in this area.

The rise in immigrants has paralleled the debate about education reform. Key elements of such reform are crucial to the children who do not speak English as their first language in all subjects. These children, also known as ELL students, are showing a downward trend and questions are being raised as to why this is so. Is the teaching rigorous enough?

Ms McHugh highlighted some of the pivotal areas of reform: improving teacher training in combining language and content instruction; leadership and engagement programmes for parents; challenging curriculum and differentiated instruction; and the testing and accountability for ELL students. With regard to teacher quality, many states have created licensing rules that require training for all teachers in combining practice and content strategies. In terms of parental engagement in schools, there have been developments in translation and interpretation systems, family literacy and report cards. Essentially, critical information must be provided in a language parents can understand.

In the area of curriculum and instruction, there has already been a move to create national curriculum standards and aligning it with states. There are numerous state efforts to align ELL and mainstream curricula. Good practice is found in the San Francisco Unified School District, which has differentiated instruction for recently arrived and long-term migrant children. Another excellent practice is the International Network of Public Schools that has mixed grouping and intensive literacy model.

With regard to longitudinal data systems to enable the status and performance of the children to be tracked, funds have been made available for incentives but, in practice, at the federal level there are problems with states' intransigence. Ms McHugh underlined the importance of tracking migrant children as a subgroup for accountability purposes in order to have access to funds. The subgroup must make progress or sanctions can be initiated against schools.

Mark Levy, Project Manager of the British Council's Inclusion and Diversity in Education (INDIE) project, talked about the INDIE project, which operated in schools in nine EU Member States and cooperated with education partners at national, regional and local levels. The project began as a response to teachers in Spain who were concerned about the changing nature of classrooms with increasing numbers of children from different backgrounds.

The objectives of the project were to: raise academic standards and positively affect the dropout level; develop guidelines and sharing of good practice; and including young people in the decision making process. Indeed, young people were a central part of the project from the beginning. The three-tier approach had policymakers, schools, and young people explicitly integrated in a whole school approach.

During the project, schools were selected by regional education authorities that had a percentage of migrant children representative of the nation as a whole. Ten young people were elected or selected in schools as motivators and they underwent training in confidence building, self-awareness, understanding different identities, and conflict resolution. After all, young people knew things that the 'professionals' did not. There was considerable success in training young people and teachers in mentoring, making room for young people to be involved, and acting on what they said.

Each school developed a Charter on diversity, from which a national charter was developed, and eventually an EU charter. Projects in the schools were very varied - ranging from initiatives on valuing diversity and communities and sharing personal stories to developing a strong student voice in schools, mentoring, and conflict resolution. In some cases the aim was to create an inclusive school - a vision rather than a project.

Overall, the project indicated that many challenges are common across different contexts so responses can be shared. The induction process was important - migrant parents had the opportunity to become involved. Finally, Mr. Levy emphasised the crucial importance of school leadership, and in particular the Head teachers, in the success in building a positive culture of diversity in schools. The project identified best practice and produced guidelines that are now being disseminated.

Fidele Mutwarasibo, Integration Manager at the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI), focused in his presentation on the importance of encouraging migrant parents to be involved in the education of their children, as is the focus of the ICI's 'Pathways to Parental Leadership' initiative. The initiative involved five Dublin-based schools and assessed the level of involvement of parents in each school. The schools involved varied in size and the proportion of migrant children. In one school, the proportion of migrant children was approximately 10% reflecting the proportion of foreign-born

people in the national population. In another school, however, 80% of the pupils had a migrant background, and a large proportion of those were Nigerian, a proportion which is probably not conducive to integration. Mr Mutwarasibo indicated that such imbalance may have something to do with structural aspects of the education system in Ireland, namely that most schools are run in some part by the Catholic church.

The 'Pathways to Parental Leadership' initiative involved qualitative interviews with parents. It found that language proficiency had a strong bearing on whether or not parents were involved in the school life of their children. The longer migrants had been in the country, the more involved they were. Educational achievement was also relevant - the more highly educated migrants were more involved in their children's education. Ideas that were especially successful were providing translation services for parents and running English language programmes for them.

The experience of the 'Pathways to Parental Leadership' project led to the development of a toolkit on initiatives that could be used by schools in promoting migrant parents' involvement in the school life of their children. Schools can pick and choose which tool is appropriate for their circumstances. The toolkit has elements that include a welcoming process including welcoming materials; facilitating family and school partnership; improving home and school communications; looking at the school as a social outlet in the community; building sustainable partnerships; and involving parents in the decision making. The 'Pathways to Parental Leadership' initiative was supported by the European Programme on Integration and Migration (EPIM). Mr Mutwarasibo ended by saying that education is a legacy and it is the key to integration.

Discussion

Asked about the reality of the economic downturn and how austerity measures could affect investment in migrant education, Margie McHugh said that cuts in the funding of integration education are inevitable - early childhood education is particularly vulnerable to cuts, despite evidence of its effectiveness. There is potential for investigating synergy between the EU and US for doing more work in moving issues of immigration education forward. Alistair Ross agreed that cuts will be affect non-statutory education and austerity programmes generally will raise levels of xenophobia and demonise migrants further. Fidele Mutwarasibo explained how cuts had already affected the number of English language support teachers.

In response to comments about teacher quality and parental involvement, Margie McHugh said that teacher quality is the linchpin to improving performance. It is important to embed issues about immigrant education into mainstream policies. Parent involvement is rich area of engagement in the US with a focus on parent literacy and parent engagement. However, major funding for many projects has been cancelled, and the focus now is parent involvement through family literacy. Alastair Ross said that parental involvement was important for raising parent expectations of the education system and provides role models. Many migrants have low expectations - some communities do not expect to achieve. Where the expectations of parents and teachers are challenged, performance does rise. Teachers from migrant communities are important throughout the system - having a diverse teaching force gives an important message about a diverse society.

Asked about the EU role in migrant education, Mark Levy said that the INDIE project highlighted the importance of teacher training and good role models. Integration issues need to be a basic component of teacher training, and more migrants are needed as teachers - teacher diversity should reflect the community. Alastair Ross added that there needs to be much better monitoring of different migrant groups to target resources accurately. The different cultures, origins and behaviour enable resources and programmes to be focused better on different groups and issues. There is also a need for better objective evaluation of projects and interventions addressing inequality. It is also important to set up standards about inequality.