

Education and Migration

lessons from research for policy and practice

A smooth integration of migrants in European societies is a key challenge for the EU. Education can play a vital role in this process.

EDUCATION AND MIGRATION
strategies for integrating migrant children
in European schools and societies

A synthesis of research findings for policy-makers



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A European Commission staff development seminar on this topic was held in the Madou Auditorium on 25/04/08. Professor Friedrich Heckmann from the University of Bamberg was joined by Dr. Mikael Luciak from the University of Vienna to discuss policies and measures that contribute to the successful integration of migrant children in European schools and societies.

The seminar also launched a [new report for policy makers](#) that summarises key conclusions from research on this topic and their implications for policy.

The seminar started with the video "[The Integration Show -Holland](#)" (19 mins) which presented a variety of perspectives on the topic.

Strategies for the successful integration of migrant children in European schools and societies



In his presentation, [professor Heckmann](#) named several education policies and measures that are shown by European and international research to contribute to the successful integration of migrant children in European schools and societies. His main messages were:

At the macro (national policy) level:

1. Children of migration background are disadvantaged in terms of enrolment in type of school, duration of attending school, indicators of achievement, drop-out rates and types of school diploma reached.

2. The degree to which migrant student achievement is related to socio-economic origin depends much on the specific national education system and context.
3. The educational attainment of migrant students is comparatively higher in countries with lower levels of economic inequality, high investments in child care and a well-developed system of pre-school education.
4. Investing in quality early childhood education and care is crucial, as it is at this stage that the foundations are laid for subsequent learning and achievements, and also because it is shown by research to contribute significantly to breaking the cycle of disadvantage.
5. The educational attainment of migrant students is better in comprehensive systems with late selection of students to different ability tracks and worse in systems of high selectivity.

At the meso-level:

(a) at the level of the school:

6. Integration into the culture of the immigration country is a major function of schools in immigration countries. Therefore, the relative absence or distorted presentation of migrants in the school curriculum, in textbooks and in other materials and in school life, harms the self-image and self-esteem of minority group children and youth and negatively affects their chances of school success.
7. The single school matters. Quality of school research supports the hypothesis that schools of good general quality are also good for migrant children and their educational opportunities.
8. Peers have a substantial influence on the achievement of migrant children. Concentration of migrant children in schools hinders their academic performance. Minority children exposed to classmates with better performance and higher educational aspirations tend to increase their own.
9. There is an over-representation of migrant children in schools for children with special needs.
10. Discrimination is often a major factor affecting the achievement of migrant students. Research shows that denied support is the most significant form of discrimination in the education of migrant children.
11. Strengthening the support function of schools with large numbers of migrant students requires extra financial resources.

(b) in terms of the teacher-student relationship:

12. Low teachers' expectations towards minority students generally have a negative influence on their performance.

13. Teachers of a migrant and minority background have a positive influence on migrant achievement in schools.

14. Parent involvement is positively associated with achievement of children in school. Immigrant parents generally do not seek contact with schools.

15. Mentoring in different forms and by different actors can substantially improve school attainment.

(c) at the micro-family and home-level:

16. Weak family resources and activities for the socialization of children in migrant and low income families can be somewhat compensated by different kinds of early childhood programmes which support general development and learning the language of the immigration country. Many programmes have been scientifically evaluated and proven effective.

17. Apart from compensatory policies and programmes diversity policies and "soft" forms of affirmative action can contribute to raising educational opportunities of migrant children.

18. Language issues are a core part of educational policies and integration processes in immigration societies. They should be discussed differently for migrant minorities who are in an integration process, and national or autochthonous minorities who have the right for cultural autonomy. Immigrants, particularly their children, need a full command of the lingua franca of the immigration country for full integration. There is no compelling research evidence regarding the interdependence of learning first (family language) and second (lingua franca) languages and for the assumed effects of bilingual education. There is evidence for a critical period of learning the second language more easily before puberty.

19. Foundations and other civil society actors have begun to create programmes for very talented and engaged migrant students. This will contribute to upward social mobility of migrants, create role models and help to change the image of migrants as primarily a problem group.

A fully articulated presentation of these conclusions and the research evidence supporting them can be found in the relevant [NESSE report](#) mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Why so many migrant students in schools for children with special needs?



In the second part of the seminar, [Dr. Luciak](#) discussed the overrepresentation of migrant and ethnic minority children in schools for children with special needs -a widespread phenomenon in several EU countries. The expert explained

that despite the lack of comparability in the data available, a number of safe conclusions can be reached. His key messages, backed with evidence from research, were that:

1. Socially disadvantaged students from families with low socio-economic status as well as male students are more likely to be sent to special needs schools or to receive special needs education in inclusive school settings.
2. After controlling for these factors, certain national or ethnic groups are still more likely to be “diagnosed” with disabilities or learning difficulties.
3. In general, overrepresentation of migrant and ethnic minority students is highest among students with acquired learning difficulties as well as behavioural and emotional difficulties. In some cases, specific migrant and ethnic minority groups are also more likely to have physical, sensory, or mental disabilities for reasons such as

consanguinity, poverty-related health issues, or war.

4. The research suggests that wrongful assessments may lead to overrepresentation or underrepresentation of second-language learners. While on the one hand a lack of competence in the language of instruction is often misinterpreted as lower cognitive development or low intellectual ability, this very lack of language competence may on the other hand mask learning disabilities and lead to an underestimation of the students’ learning needs.
5. Male students are overrepresented among students with learning difficulties, behavioural and emotional difficulties –and this across all groups, including the majority population. The gap between male and female students appears to differ within the various ethnic groups.
6. In school systems with separate mainstream and special education systems, there appears to be a correlation between the number of migrants among students receiving special needs education and the extent of differentiation of the special education system. Countries with a highly differentiated special education system that includes segregated settings such as special schools and classes for students with learning, behavioral and emotional difficulties tend to place more minority students in special education schools and classes.
7. In general, countries with a high percentage of SEN students do not necessarily have a lot of migrant and ethnic minority students. Finland, for example, a country with a rather low ratio of migrant students in the school system, has the highest percentage of SEN students (17,8%).
8. Also, a high percentage of migrant and ethnic minority students in special schools and classes is not necessarily a sign of overrepresentation. In

some cities more than half of the student population has migrant background and the proportion of migrant and minority students in special schools borders 50%, while the same or even a greater proportion of these students attend mainstream schools.

9. Whether overrepresentation of migrant and ethnic minorities among SEN students is a sign of discrimination and unequal treatment or a sign that the needs of these students (who frequently are socially disadvantaged) are adequately met, has to be assessed by looking at all context factors.
10. Regionally differentiated data suggests that, in areas with a rather high percentage of migrant and minority students, the likelihood of overrepresentation of these groups in special education decreases. This may be due to systemic factors. The absence of overrepresentation does not necessarily mean that the special needs of migrants and minorities are fully met.
11. The literature also suggests that prejudice and differential treatment by teachers and education experts who are responsible for student assessments and referral processes may increase the risk that migrant and minority students are wrongfully assigned to segregated special education settings.
12. **Research indicates that integrative or inclusive educational settings yield better learning progress and social development of students with learning difficulties.** Therefore, the current practice of disproportionate assignment of migrant and minority students to segregated special schools and classes needs to be challenged.

Dr. Luciak suggested that policies should be geared towards:

1. Guiding schools and teachers through the development of more inclusive educational settings that serve the needs of a diverse student population (with supplementary staff, sufficient equipment and financial resources)
2. Fostering early education/pre-school programmes with culturally and linguistically diverse staff (free of charge)
3. Strengthening after-school/supplementary education programmes (free of charge)
4. Developing unbiased assessment procedures of individual needs and barriers to learning
5. Recurrent and transparent evaluation and documentation of students' progress (in teams)
6. Teacher pre-service and in-service training for teaching in inclusive, heterogeneous classrooms
7. A community-based approach (such as outreach programmes, home visiting programmes, liaisons, and ethnic mentoring)
8. Improving and evaluating first and second language programmes in schools
9. Developing intercultural curricula and teaching
10. Creating a more diverse teaching force and developing partnerships between different professionals (main classroom teachers, language teachers, special education teachers, etc.)
11. Developing anti-discrimination and diversity policies
12. Ethnic monitoring and reporting

Selected readings recommended by the speakers:

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Kornmann, Reimer (2003b) Migrantenkinder in der Sonderschule - Sonderfälle? Impulsreferat zur entsprechenden AG bei der Tagung "Migrantenkinder in NRW - Sozialer Aufstieg oder Verelendung?" am 02. Dezember 2003 in Wuppertal-Barmen
<http://www.ph-heidelberg.de/wp/kornmann/veroeffentlichungen/2.pdf>

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Lindsay, Geoff; Pather, Sulochini and Strand, Steve (2006) Special Educational Needs and Ethnicity: Issues of Over- and Under-Representation. Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research. Institute of Education. University of Warwick

Luciak, Mikael (2004) Roma in Sonderschulen – eine Herausforderung für die Heilpädagogik Mittel- und Osteuropas. In: Biewer, G./Luciak, M./Schwinge, M. (Hg.) Begegnung und Differenz. Menschen – Länder – Kulturen. Bad Heilbrunn

Luciak, Mikael and Binder, Susanne (2005) National Strategies for Minority Schooling: A comparative analysis. Report submitted on behalf of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). Vienna
http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/RAXEN/4/edu/CC/Educ.%20CS_EDU_CC.pdf

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