

MIGRATION AND MOBILITY:

Challenges and opportunities for EU education systems

BRUSSELS, 20 OCTOBER 2009



Conference conclusions

The conference formally closed the consultation process initiated in July 2008 through a Commission Green Paper focusing on the question how education policies may better address the challenges posed by immigration and internal EU mobility flows.

General conclusions:

- Participants welcomed the debate launched by the Commission and confirmed the importance of developing policies for **improving the educational achievement of pupils from a migrant background** in Europe's education systems. They also strongly supported the idea of further exchanges of experience at EU level on policies and measures with this aim.
- The conference underlined the **positive contribution and great potential of children from a migrant background** for European education systems and societies. Nevertheless, there is a need to ensure that these systems offer them possibilities to develop to their full potential.
 - The integration of migrant children requires **sustained commitment** from a number of actors: schools and school leaders, teachers, students themselves and also from parents and the community. These efforts are currently constrained by budgetary pressure, tight curricular frameworks, staff availability and limited time available for additional activities.
 - This commitment needs to be supported by **interdepartmental policy coordination**, as the integration of children from a migrant background often crosses across competencies of several departments and sectors at national, regional and local level.
 - **Whole school engagement**, explicitly supported by the school leadership, is necessary for the successful inclusion of pupils from diverse backgrounds. **Parents are key actors**: the active involvement of both migrant and native parents is essential for the success of migrant children in schools.
 - **Informal and non-formal education** organised by migrant communities, youth organisations or other non-governmental organisations make an important contribution to improving the educational achievements of migrant pupils, but such efforts often face problems of sustainability.
 - The **diversity of pupils from a migrant background** requires a deep rethink of pedagogical approaches and also of the entire philosophy underlying the school system. School systems remain strongly anchored in cultural and linguistic traditions, but there is an increasing need for **individualised provision** adapted

to the needs and the cultural and educational assets of pupils from a migrant background.

- Measures supporting pupils from a migrant background benefit all pupils. **Integration and multiculturalism can go hand in hand** and opening up schools to different cultures and languages is a way to ensure that all pupils gain the social, cultural and intercultural competences that they will need for future success in a multicultural society. The education of the Roma was a concern for many participants, who emphasized the potential for joint development of policies for Roma and migrants.

Policies for newly arrived migrants

- There are **no “one size fits all” measures**, as especially first generation migrants are an academically diverse group, with a large variation of needs and assets.
- The conference revealed that there is **a wide variety of approaches** in the education of newly arrived migrant pupils: while some countries focus on direct induction in mainstream classes with additional support, others offer bridge classes for language learning, while others organise separate classes for the newly arrived.
- Countries should establish **flexible systems for welcoming newly arrived migrants**. The inflows of migrants tend to be difficult to predict, which makes it difficult to establish and continue appropriate support programmes, thus undermining the sustainability of the measures.
- Support programmes for newly arrived migrant pupils should provide **access based on the needs** of pupils, not on the origin, citizenship or legal status of the migrants.
- The provision of a challenging learning environment, with high expectations for all pupils, is an important factor in supporting newly arrived migrants, but **the particular challenges they pose need to be matched by adequate support**.
- The central **development of diagnosis and assessment tools** for validating prior learning across the curriculum is important for helping schools identify the needs as well as the strengths of newly arrived pupils.
- Language competences in the mother tongue should also be assessed in order to **adapt the teaching of the language of instruction to the level of literacy of the pupils**, especially for pupils arriving during secondary education.
- **Bilingual teaching assistants and school mediators** have an important role in facilitating inclusion in mainstream classes, contributing to assessment of prior learning, but also in communication and guidance for migrant parents. Inclusion in mainstream classes is also facilitated by school-based induction periods, teaching in small mixed groups or lower teacher-student ratios.
- Migrant children and youth arriving late during their school years face significant challenges and need additional support. **Guidance at key transition points** is one of the main tools to support this group.
- **Creativity** is essential for schools with a high intake of migrant pupils. Schools should create occasions for pupils to express their identity, to show their cultural assets and to value these assets positively. Artistic expression, sports and handicraft are important for newly arrived pupils, in particular before they master the language of instruction, and should be given a bigger place in the school curriculum. The involvement of parents in informal education activities is an important way of valuing their cultural assets.

The role of intercultural education

- An essential part of any intercultural education strategy should be **teacher education and training for diversity**, reinforcing their intercultural competences, conflict resolution skills and education for intercultural understanding. All teachers, including early childhood education and care personnel, should be supported in acquiring intercultural competencies.
- One of the main challenges identified in the debates is the difficulty of influencing **the content of teacher education curricula**. While the institutional setup of teacher training is very different across countries, a successful approach for influencing the content of teacher training curricula in several countries is the support of excellence centres, acting as resource centres for other teacher training institutions. An important factor facilitating the mainstreaming of intercultural education in teacher training is supporting intercultural competencies among teacher educators, who are key multipliers for intercultural understanding.
- The **mobility of teachers** and of students in teacher education programmes has been highlighted as a key factor for promoting intercultural approaches. European networks and partnerships among educational actors have a very important role in promoting intercultural education.
- **Local partnerships** between schools, parents and communities were considered key to successful intercultural education strategies. Reaching out to parents and local communities is an important step towards transforming schools into learning communities, allowing them to profit from the cultural resources of migrant pupils and parents.
- **Mentorship programmes** developed across EU countries proved to have a positive impact on the educational achievements of migrant pupils. Both programmes involving mentors from a migrant background and native mentors have proven to be effective in supporting migrant children in schools.
- Concrete tools for advancing intercultural education mentioned during the debates are the use of ICT and multimedia for expressing the identity of learners from a migrant background, the involvement of parents - for instance through mother groups linking teachers and migrant parents - and the use of mentors for migrant pupils. Sports and arts should play an important role in diverse communities and schools for supporting mutual respect and understanding and for preventing conflicts.
- Policies in the area of the education of migrants should aim to improve the school environment. **Addressing violence** in schools should be an important part of intercultural education initiatives, as creating a safe environment for dialogue between schools, parents and communities is an essential prerequisite for the success of initiatives.
- Participants stressed the importance of **democracy within schools** from the early years onwards for creating a supportive environment for experiential learning of democratic values and for fighting stereotypes and promoting the respect of diversity.
- While work on the education of migrants tends to produce results in the medium and long term,, many excellent projects face **problems of sustainability**. Measures can be made more durable through secure funding streams and integration into the organisation of schools and of teacher training programmes. Central financial support should be directed towards local

authorities in order to strengthen local ownership of intercultural education initiatives.

The role of languages

- Language acquisition is a vital factor for the success of learning in general and there is a need to **further strengthen policies for language development**. Schools should continue to adapt to multilingualism, better recognising both the needs and assets of multilingual pupils.
- **Participation in early childhood education and care** is particularly important for children from a migrant background, supporting the acquisition of the language of instruction, and should be further strengthened through more teacher training and the development of language development tools for early childhood education and care.
- Participants stressed the importance of **continued support throughout education for the language of instruction**. While the acquisition of the communicative language is best achieved through immersion in early childhood education and care, the acquisition of the academic language requires more targeted, long term support.
- Assessment systems are generally designed for unilingual pupils and should adapt to multilingual situations. Teaching materials should also be adapted to the needs of migrant pupils, eliminating the existing implicit barriers to access to the curriculum.
- A key factor for facilitating proficiency in the language of instruction is an adequate number of **qualified teachers for the language of instruction as second language**. These teachers should cooperate more with subject teachers on issues of language development. As all teachers are language teachers, it is important to provide **training on language acquisition for all teachers**.
- The **cost effectiveness of supporting the mother tongue** in compulsory education was a subject for debate. While some participants emphasized that in the context of diversified migratory inflows such policies can be very cost intensive, other participants stressed the pedagogical and emotional value of supporting the mother tongue, as well as the economic gains of supporting multilingualism as key skill for the labour market. Providing a recognised qualification of proficiency in the mother tongue can act as an incentive for language development.
- Participants stressed the importance of **innovative approaches to mother tongue teaching**, underlining that there is scope for increases in efficiency in the design of mother tongue support programmes. Examples of such initiatives include networks for the joint development of teaching materials, use of content and language integrated learning, use of dual language resources, or joint support for literacy in the host and origin language for pupils and their parents. Bilateral agreements between host countries and countries of origin provide a way for avoiding disproportionate costs for the host country.
- Participants called for more **use of linguistic research for informing policy on languages**, arguing the fact that in a highly politicised environment with a multiplicity of stakeholders it is often challenging to develop balanced evidence-based policy. There is a need to broaden the evidence base on the effectiveness of bilingual approaches, for informing future policy.