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INTEGRATION MAPPING OF REFUGEE  
AND MIGRANT CHILDREN

# A Systemic Approach To Immigrant And Refugee Children Integration

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Policy Brief #1



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This paper is the first of a series of policy briefs. The main aim of these documents is to link the progresses and findings of the IMMERSE project to specific policy recommendations. This paper has been issued at a very early stage of IMMERSE, for this reason, we are offering an overview of migrant and refugee children current situation in the EU to propose, according to the objectives of the project, some incipient policy implications.

## 1 Background

Between 2013 and 2017, almost 2 million non-EU citizens took up residence in the EU-28 on a yearly basis (EUROSTAT, 2019). Among them, 20% approximately are children, many of whom are unaccompanied or separated from their families. One of the **most fundamental challenges** lying ahead for the EU consists of the **successful integration** of these recent arrivals, as well as of longer-established migrant populations, and their descendants.

In total, more than 38 million people born in non-EU28 countries are currently living in the European Union, representing **7.5% of the population in Europe**. In addition, 21.8 million, 4.25% of the population, had been born in a different EU Member State. In countries such as France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Spain migrants and their descendants already made up to **15% of the population** (EUROSTAT, 2019). In 2015, almost one in four 15-year-old students in EU countries was either foreign-born or had at least one foreign-born parent (OECD, 2018).

According to the European Commission (2005) **integration** should be understood as a **two-way process** based on mutual rights and corresponding obligations of resident third country nationals and the host society which provides for full participation of the immigrant.



**Host society** must ensure that immigrants have the possibility of participating in economic, social, cultural, and civil life.

**Immigrants** must respect the fundamental norms and values of the host society and participate actively in the integration process, without having to relinquish their own identity.

This perception, however, is too general and does not consider the specific needs and obstacles faced by concrete groups of immigrants. In the case of **children in immigration contexts**, there are a series of **specific barriers** and difficulties that need to be dealt with, such as cumulative losses as a result of migration, acculturation processes, dynamics of discrimination, social exclusion.... (Hamilton, Anderson, Frater-Mathieson, Loewen, & Moore, 2000; Penninx & Spencer, 2016) requiring **specific policies to promote an accurate integration of this population**.

In fact, the increased and diversified flows of recent years are putting national and regional administrations under pressure and have exposed **gaps and shortcomings** in the **protection and support** of all categories of migrant children. National education systems are the most impacted by this situation since they need to embrace growing cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, and ethnic diversity but there is no clear guidance on how to deal with it. The growing number of children arriving in recent years is leading to a **re-examination of how to best integrate them successfully**. This is not only a necessary step for the fulfilment of international obligations, but also particularly important considering that most of these young migrants will likely settle permanently in their country of destination.

## 2 A systemic approach to integration

Historically, **schools** have been the “**great equalizer**”, enabling students from diverse backgrounds, neighbourhoods, income levels and national origins to have the opportunity for success (Clauss-Ehlers, Serpell, & Weist, 2013). The introduction of inclusive educational models at the beginning of the 21st century has allowed the educational systems to provide a context-specific response to diversity that takes into account the rights of all children (Ainscow, 2005; Arroyo, 2013). In this respect, **Intercultural education** has been highlighted both as a point of reference and a goal to achieve by modern school systems as it brings together in practice the principles of **interculturalism** and **inclusive schools** in order to

develop the full potential of all students, including migrant and native children (UNESCO, 2018).

**Intercultural Education** aims to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of mutual understanding, respect and dialogue between the different cultural groups (UNESCO, 2006, 2010).

#### The principles of intercultural education (UNESCO, 2006)

- (1) Respecting the cultural background of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all
- (2) Providing every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society
- (3) Providing cultural knowledge and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural, and religious groups and nations.

While the objective of intercultural education is to attain a full integration for each group composing the diversity of modern societies, it must be highlighted that achieving this goal is a **complex task as there is no single definition and way to measure integration** (Penninx, Spencer & Van Hear, 2008). The above-mentioned EC definition of integration is vague and not enforced by specific policy instruments, like Directives, aiming at coordinating an European strategy to comprehensibly integrate migrant children into our societies. Furthermore, at present, the application of intercultural education is left to States, Local Governments or even, at the end, schools themselves, with **no precise guide and means** to implement it.

IMMERSE proposes to tackle this problem in its different steps. We conceive integration as a two-way process where stakeholders and key actors should contribute to define integration **as well as migrants themselves –including refugees and children–**. Through a combination of structural and micro-individual perspectives, IMMERSE aims at co-creating a set of indicators conceptualizing the **different dimensions** or domains that are part of the integration process by mixing the perspectives of macro (EU, States, Multi-level Governments...), meso (schools, education centres, NGO's...) and micro (migrant and refugee children and their families) actors to measure the degree of individual's integration in host societies and to develop a dashboard of integration indicators for immigrant children.

The use of this **systemic approach**:

- Responds to a **child-centred perspective** in terms of levels of proximity to the child
- Identifies the **relevant levels of intervention** regarding
  - Relevant stakeholders
  - Policy recommendations
- Allows **applicability and comparability** among countries

Main goals of IMMERSE indicators framework:

- 1 That migrant (and other) children reach their full potential in the most relevant **outcomes**.
- 2 That migrant (and other) children, as well as their families, become an accepted part of society with **fully recognized membership** at the formal and informal levels.
- 3 The **responsibility** for integration goals rests **with all actors involved**: migrants themselves, the host government and institutions, and native communities.

Children integration involves five types of **outcomes**:

**LEGAL STATUS:** The satisfaction of basic needs, as well as the margin for vital possibilities and personal development depend, in the first place, on the degree of recognition and guarantee of their legal status and of the social rights attached to it (García Cívico, 2010).

**LANGUAGE:** As the medium of communication in any human society, the capacity to communicate in the national language of the receiving society is a precondition for full participation in society and full development of the person's potential.

**PSYCHO-SOCIAL WELL-BEING AND HEALTH:** Health and psychosocial well-being are primary outcomes that determine cognitive and behavioural capacities, and are particularly determinant during childhood and adolescence (Barnett & Belfiel, 2006). Mental health in immigrants is determined by factors related to (1) the society of origin (2) the migration process, and (3) host society (WHO, 2004).

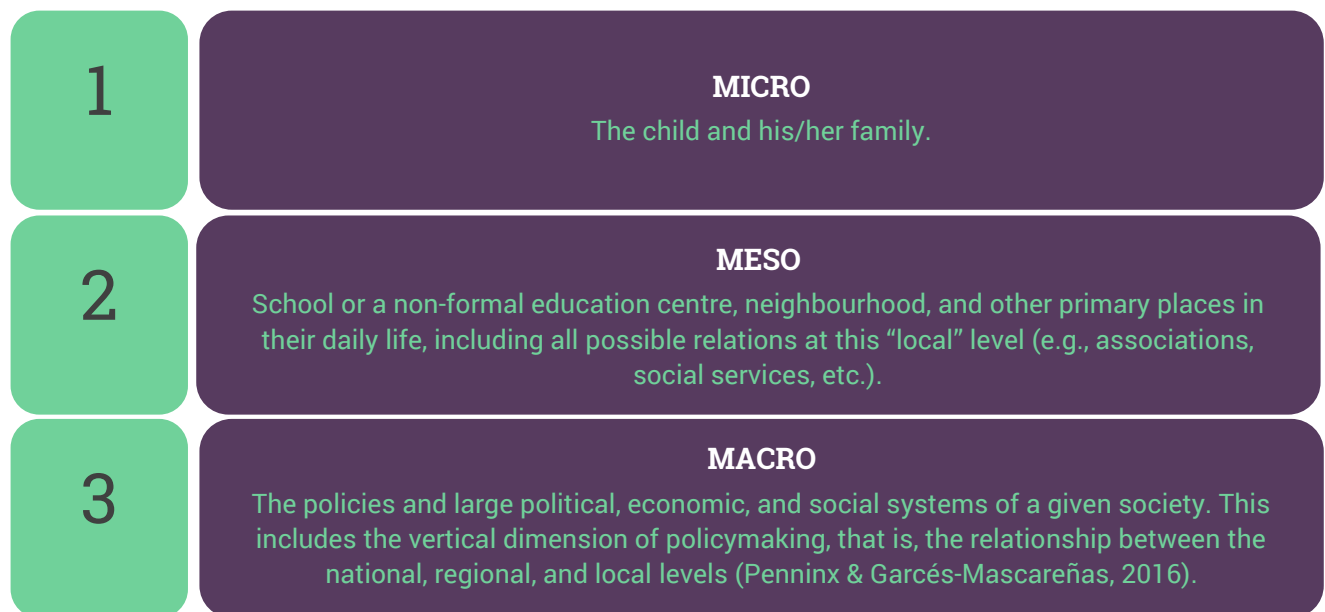
**SOCIAL RELATIONS:** Social networks consist of the structural connections—the presence or absence of links—among individuals or groups. Social networks are very important in promoting migrants' integration. They provide practical support –assistance in accessing rights and services– but also material and emotional support (Spicer, 2008).

**EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT:** Educational achievements foster the further employability and economic growth not just in the benefit of the migrant family but also

of broad communities and society. Thus, the provision of quality education for migrant children with successful results translates in an increase of social and economic cohesion in addition to social development in host countries (Ager & Strang, 2004).

All outcomes are highly interconnected and interrelated, moreover, there are **individual and situational factors** that affect their realization (**barriers and facilitators**).

Barriers and facilitators can be observed at **different settings** within the social system.



By considering all these dimensions and co-involving all the relevant actors participating in these social processes, **IMMERSE will construct a set of tools aiming at contributing to understand this complex social issue and so, it will potentially lead to design effective legal instruments for a comprehensive promotion of migrant and refugee children integration at EU level.**

### 3 Recommended actions

The early stage of the IMMERSE project reduces the possibilities of implementing its systemic approach for designing specific and comprehensive integration policies at the EU level. However, based on the criteria outlined above and on the preliminary findings of the project, the following recommendations are made to the European Commission:



EU migration policies should include an **integral vision of the migratory process**: from entry and stay to integration in destination countries. This implies also designing specific education policies targeting migrant and refugee children integration, following the criteria of **intercultural education**.



A deep **revision** of EU migration directives should be done to **transversally** include objectives of integration with specific mentions to children.



A specific **Directive on the integration of foreigners** in the EU context should be **discussed**. As migration is multifaceted, the Directive should contain concrete provisions adapted to the needs of the different types of migrants, including migrant and refugee children.



Migrant and refugee children are the most vulnerable kind of migrants so EU legislation should progress to **ensure their full protection** as well as provide **instruments** for their full integration in host societies.



**Structural EU funds** should look at financing the **cohesion of education systems** all over the EU to ensure that schools, but also non-formal education centers, have the means to promote a systemic integration of migrant and refugee children following the principles of intercultural education.



To ensure the most accurate strategies and tools to tackle the structural problems that the integration of immigrant and refugee children face in the EU, we encourage the European Commission to design the previously mentioned policy instruments applying **co-creation methodologies** involving the maximum number of actors affected by these dynamics.



All the political actions should be accompanied by **campaigns** in schools but also in the mass media promoting a general **social awareness** of the relevance that a proper integration of migrant and refugee children has for EU societies.

## 4 Conclusions

One of the **biggest challenges** currently facing the EU is the **successful integration** of 2 million non-EU citizens, 20% of whom are children. In the case of **children in immigration contexts**, there are a series of specific barriers and difficulties that are leading to **revisit successful parameters** of integration.

Historically, schools have enabled students from diverse economic, social or ethnic backgrounds to have the opportunity for success. In this respect, **intercultural education** turns out to be the successful paradigm when aiming to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies.

Nevertheless, integration is a complex process that is conceptualized through different dimensions. Indeed, **children integration** involves **five types of outcomes**: (1) Legal status (2) Language (3) Psycho-social well-being and health (4) Social relations and (5) Educational achievement.

All outcomes are interconnected and interrelated and, in turn, influenced by **individual and situational factors** that can be split into three levels: (1) Micro, the child and his/her family (2) Meso, school, neighbourhood and other primary places and (3) Macro, the policies and large political, economic and social systems.

In terms of **policy implications**, the recommendations extracted from the early phases of the research can be synthesised as follows:

- To strengthen the definition of an **appropriate and uniform model of integration** in European countries, without making standardisation prevail over flexibility and adherence to local needs.
- To **connect and align all institutions/stakeholders** involved in reception and integration systems.
- To **systematize the specific measures** for distinct target groups expressing differentiated needs, (such as UAMs, second and third generation migrants, minors from mixed families etc).



To **align integration policies** with social, educational, urban and economic policies at the national level.

To promote measures **strengthening** the social **participation of children and young people**.

To raise **social awareness** on the importance of these issues.

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