



immerse

INTEGRATION MAPPING OF REFUGEE
AND MIGRANT CHILDREN

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS PAPERS ON REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN'S INTEGRATION

GERMANY



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National recommendations paper – Germany: The socio-educational integration of refugee and migrant-background children in Germany: evidence and policy proposals from the IMMERSE project

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1. Executive summary

Against the backdrop of current national realities, this policy paper aims to analyse and put into context the results of the quantitative data arising from the IMMERSE survey and the qualitative fieldwork in Germany. Its primary objectives are to highlight the results and to provide country-specific policy recommendations for Germany to further improve the socio-educational integration and inclusion of refugee and migrant children and young people in schools and other educational environments.

2. The German context

In 2022, 23.8 million of the total 83.1 million inhabitants in Germany had a migration background (immigrants and their descendants) - this corresponds to a share of 28.7% of the total population. Of the 23.8 million people, 12.2 million were German citizens and 11.6 million were foreigners. The largest share of people with a migration background in 2022 were people from other European countries. The 31.8% came from one of the 26 other member states of the EU and the 29.8% from another European state. Most of the persons with a migrant background in 2022 came from Turkey (11.9%/2.8 million), followed by Poland (9.2%/2.2 million), Russia (5.7%/1.4 million), and Romania (4.6%/1.1 million). Kazakhstan and Syria are the most important non-European countries of origin, with shares of 5.6 and 5.1% (1.3 and 1.2 million, respectively) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023a).

According to the Federal Statistical Office (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023b), the Russo-Ukrainian war has caused a sharp increase in inflows from Ukraine compared to previous years. In 2022, about 1,098,000 arrivals of people from Ukraine were registered in Germany. After the beginning of the war, both the gender ratio and the age structure of the Ukrainian population in Germany has changed significantly compared to previous years. Among the Ukrainian refugees newly registered in Germany since the end of February 2022, children are disproportionately represented (34% under the age of 18) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023b).

The Federal Agency for Civic Education (2023) projects that the proportion of people with a migration background in Germany will continue to increase in the medium term. In fact, in 2022, 41.6% of all children under 5 already had a migration background.

Given this data, it is important to underscore that children from families with a migrant background are especially vulnerable to educational disadvantages. According to the findings of the Autorinnengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung (2022), the three risk factors for education – the risk of parents with low formal qualifications, the social risk factor, and the financial risk factor – affect some population groups in particular. As in previous years, children from families with a migration background are disproportionately affected by risk situations. 48% of them grow up under the burden of at least one risk situation, compared to only 16% of children without a migration background. Of all three risk situations, 8% of children with a migration background are affected, while only 1% of children without a migration background are affected.

What is more, 47,500 young people ended their school careers without a diploma in 2022, according to the latest education survey commissioned by the Bertelsmann Foundation. Another finding of the Gütersloh study is that this has not changed since 2011, which is as far back as the study extends. The two most



important risk factors have also always remained the same: migration background and poverty. Also, significant and unchanged is that boys are more at risk than girls (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2023).

Since 1945 Germany has produced migration and integration policies that are as complex as they are ambivalent. If we summarise the years from 1945 until now, we see an alternation of necessary openness and unnecessary strain on the part of politics. In 2007, the National Integration Plan was adopted at the second Integration Summit. The plan's declared aim was to place integration initiatives by the federal government, the states, local authorities, and civil society on a common footing for the first time (Bundeszentrale, 2007). It cannot be denied that there has been progress in the socio-educational inclusion of refugee and migrant children. However, to this day Germany displays a federal fragmentation of integration policy. What is more, the German school system has faced persistent and politically unanswered challenges over the past two decades, including a chronic shortage of teachers¹, inadequate infrastructure, particularly in terms of digital resources², and urban gentrification along with the concentration of social disadvantages in certain city areas (Deutsches Schulportal der Robert Bosch Stiftung, 2023; Müller-Lancé, 2023). According to Beierle et al. (2019), in such communities, the vertical social and ethnic stratification of the population becomes horizontally 'spatialized'. This process can lead to a concentration of social risks/problems in individual neighbourhoods. The schools located in these neighbourhoods are also problematic because they are also exposed to a spiral of segregation.

3. IMMERSE project: evidence-based considerations and critical issues

IMMERSE³ is a European project with the goal of assessing the effectiveness of the integration of refugee children and of migrant origin within the educational systems of six countries: Belgium, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Spain. The project carried out a comprehensive analysis of available information sources and conducted an extensive survey using key indicators, which were initially developed and made accessible through the IMMERSE dashboard. This survey aimed to investigate various aspects of the lives of children and adolescents in these countries. Workshops, focus groups, and interviews were employed to tap into the direct experiences of these stakeholders, ensuring a meaningful and holistic definition of integration.

IMMERSE Dashboard of indicators

The development of the IMMERSE dashboard followed a co-creation process, involving the insights and perspectives of migrant and refugee children, their families, as well as individuals closely connected to them within schools, NGOs, and policymaking circles. The Dashboard serves as a comprehensive repository of key parameters collected and analysed concerning the socio-educational integration of migrant children across the six European host countries participating in the project. Its purpose is to make this information accessible to all stakeholders and to establish a cross-cultural framework for the examination of integration policies for migrant children within educational contexts across different countries.

The indicators⁴ within the Dashboard encompass critical aspects at three distinct levels of integration: the micro level (children and their families), the meso level (educational institutions, educational communities, and neighbourhoods), and the macro level (broader civil society and its institutions).

The final version of the IMMERSE Dashboard comprises 30 indicators, specifically 14 related to integration outcomes and 16 associated with promoting and hindering factors for integration. The outcomes are categorised into five dimensions, including access to rights, language and culture, well-being, social connections, and educational achievement. The determinants influencing integration outcomes are linked to areas such as leadership in politics, school segregation, learning support, mental health services, negative attitudes, school organisation, and teachers.

¹ Deutsches Schulportal der Robert Bosch Stiftung [German School Dashboard of the Robert Bosch Foundation]. 2023

² Müller-Lancé. 2023.

³ <https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/>

⁴ <https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/selection-and-creation-of-dashboard-of-socio-educational-integration-indicators/>



Data collection results for Germany

Integration outcomes

Most migrant-background children in Germany (67%) claim a high level of German proficiency, though it falls below the average for countries participating in the study. First-generation migrants have a lower proficiency compared to second-generation and non-migrant children (58%, 84%, and 90%, respectively), with proficiency increasing as children grow older.

A majority of migrant-background children in Germany (58%) feel close to both their cultures of origin and other groups, the highest percentage across participating countries. Conversely, around one third (32%) do not feel close to their cultures of origin, while a smaller group (10%) feels close exclusively to their cultures of origin. This pattern is consistent among both first- and second-generation migrant children. Around 43% of migrant-background children express a high sense of school belonging, which is slightly below the average for participating countries. While most of these children (76%) describe themselves as quite or very happy, a significant proportion (24%) also express not feeling very happy.

Migrant-background children in Germany indicate a high level of support from friends and peers (60%), slightly above the average for participating countries (54%). Second-generation migrant children receive the highest level of support from friends and peers (68%), followed by non-migrant children (58%) and first-generation migrant children (55%). Support from teachers is also reported, with half of the children (51%) reporting a high level of support, although it decreases with age among migrant-background children.

In Germany, trust in teachers and schools is expressed by slightly more than half of migrant-background children (56%), which is below the average for participating countries (66%). Distrust in teachers and schools is relatively high (17%). Trust levels vary between first-generation and second-generation migrant children, with differences by gender and age. Doctors and hospitals are the most trusted institutions among migrant-background children in Germany (69%), although this trust level is below the average for participating countries (76%). Trust in doctors and hospitals varies by gender and decreases with age. Trust in the police and the justice system is also reported (55%), though it falls below the average for participating countries and decreases with age.

Integration barriers and facilitators

A significant minority (43%) of migrant-background children in Germany have experienced bullying, which exceeds the IMMERSE average (38%). Bullying experiences slightly decrease with migrant background: from 49% among native children to 45% for second-generation migrant children and 42% for first-generation children. Among migrant-background children, boys (39%) report slightly less bullying than girls (45%). However, children who define their gender in another way have been significantly more bullied (78%). Bullying experiences among migrant-background children notably decrease with age: from 50% among small children to 38% among late adolescents.

Around 43% of children avoid certain places due to fear of mistreatment, ranking above the IMMERSE average (40%). Nearly half of migrant-background children (49%) avoid places due to fear of mistreatment, which decreases slightly among non-migrant children (41%) and notably among second-generation migrant children (34%). The tendency to avoid places due to fear of mistreatment slightly decreases with age among migrant-background children: from 46% among small children to 39% among late adolescents.

The use of supplemental language or learning support services increases with migrant background, with significant differences: from 24% among native children and 40% among second-generation migrant children, up to 58% among first-generation children. Among migrant-background children, the use of these services notably decreases with age: from 64% among small children to 40% among late adolescents. Participation in extracurricular activities among migrant-background children decreases with age: from 71% among small children to 57% among late adolescents. Over two-thirds of migrant-background children in Germany (67%) participate in extracurricular activities, surpassing the average (61%) and ranking the highest among IMMERSE countries.



4. Policy implications and recommendations

Based on the qualitative research evidence, the consultation with young people, and survey data, the following policy recommendations addressed to policy makers and the educational sector have been elaborated, emphasising the importance of proactive measures to create an inclusive, respectful, and secure school environment for all students.

1. Allocating More Resources for German Language Learning

To facilitate language acquisition, we recommend Federal and state governments to provide schools with increased resources for teaching German. This includes additional qualified teachers, language support programs, and materials tailored to the diverse needs of students with varying language proficiencies. Adequate resources are vital for ensuring that students can effectively integrate into the German education system.

2. Promoting Native Languages

The Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the federal state ministries should recognize and promote the role of native languages within the school system. Providing support for students to maintain and develop their native languages alongside learning German is crucial for their overall linguistic development. This support can include offering language classes, cultural activities, and materials in students' native languages. Schools should consider integrating non-European languages into their curricula. This not only enriches the educational experience but also promotes cultural diversity and a more comprehensive understanding of the world.

3. Diversity and Representation

Schools should actively recognize, celebrate, and foster diversity within their student body and staff. This includes acknowledging and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. Anchoring diverse cultural calendars in the school year can provide opportunities for cultural exchange and understanding. Additionally, promoting the teaching profession to both migrant and non-migrant populations can help create a more diverse and representative teaching workforce.

4. Enhancing Parental Involvement

Schools should actively involve parents in the language acquisition process of their children. This can be achieved through regular communication, parent-teacher conferences, and workshops that provide parents with strategies to support their children's language development at home. Creating avenues for parents to engage in their children's progress fosters a sense of partnership and community within the school.

5. Curriculum Changes for Inclusivity

The Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the federal state ministries should initiate assessments and clear changes to the curriculum, including textbooks, to present perspectives beyond the white European experience. This involves adopting an approach to education reflecting a more inclusive history and culture. Ensuring that students are exposed to a variety of perspectives is essential for their well-rounded education and understanding of the world.

6. Fostering a Respectful School Culture

Principals, teachers, and school staff should actively work towards cultivating a respectful school culture that values language, sensitivities, equality, and respect. This involves regular awareness programs and workshops for both students and staff to promote understanding and empathy. Schools should encourage open dialogue and empower students to speak up about any issues they encounter.

7. Gender-Sensitive and Age-Appropriate Approaches:

Teachers and school staff should be provided with guidelines by federal ministries and training by state institutes for teacher qualification to implement gender-sensitive and age-appropriate approaches in their interactions with students. These guidelines should promote inclusive practices that respect



the diversity of students' backgrounds and identities, fostering an environment where everyone feels valued and understood.

8. Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Bullying Policies:

Federal ministries of education should establish comprehensive anti-discrimination, anti-bullying, and anti-racism policies and enable the school system in its entirety to implement them. They should be applied consistently across all levels of the education system, ensuring that every student is protected and feels safe. Schools should adopt zero-tolerance policies in all sensitive areas, such as discrimination, bullying, and racism. Additionally, considering the establishment of a comprehensive code of conduct that outlines expected behaviours and consequences for breaches can provide a structured framework for maintaining a safe and inclusive school environment.

9. Community-based Safe Space for All:

Schools should prioritise their role as safe spaces for all students. To achieve this, investment in teacher training and professional development is essential. Educators should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to address discrimination and related issues effectively. Collaborative efforts with community organisations and the community itself can further enhance safety and promote a sense of belonging among students. (Porter and Cook, 2023)

Children's recommendations for inclusive schools and societies

Within the IMMERSE project, DOZ conducted policy consultations with migrant- and non-migrant-background young people in a secondary school in Leipzig¹ which had previously participated in the IMMERSE quantitative data collection. The following are the young peoples recommendations for a more inclusive school and society:

- **Zero-Tolerance Policy:** Implement a clear and comprehensive zero-tolerance policy against discrimination, racism, and bullying in schools. This policy should outline specific actions that will not be tolerated, including hate speech, harassment, and physical aggression.
- **Accountability Measures:** Develop a system for holding individuals, including teachers and principals, accountable for addressing discrimination and bullying incidents. Ensure that they are trained in recognizing and addressing such issues promptly.
- **Respect-Centred Culture:** Develop and promote a school-wide culture centred around respect as a core value. Emphasise that respect should be the foundation of all interactions, both among students and between students and teachers.
- **Fair Assessment and Feedback:** Train teachers to provide fair assessments and feedback, recognizing that poor performance may be influenced by various factors. Encourage teachers to adopt an approach that supports and motivates students to improve rather than blame them.
- **Confidence-Building Sessions:** Implement regular confidence-building sessions between students and their class teachers. These sessions should provide a safe space for students to voice concerns, seek guidance, and build trust through open communication.
- **Increased Dialogue:** Promote increased dialogue within the school community. Encourage students, teachers, and administrators to engage in open discussions about school culture, values, and issues that may affect it.
- **Racial Profiling Eradication:** Develop and enforce policies that explicitly prohibit racial profiling by law enforcement agencies. Provide training to officers on recognizing and avoiding biases in their interactions with the public.
- **Accountability Measures:** Implement robust accountability measures within police departments. This includes regular internal reviews of officer conduct, transparent reporting of incidents, and consequences for misconduct.



5. Conclusions

Over the course of the IMMERSE project both qualitative and quantitative research shed light on a number of problematic realities for refugee and migrant children. The main issues identified are racism, bullying, other forms of discrimination, a lack of respect and trust, and a fair number of problems with the police. The data clearly indicates a strong necessity to formulate national strategies for making the German education system inclusive on all levels. However, this undertaking requires a firm political commitment and dedicated funding. To create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment, it is imperative to implement comprehensive anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies. These policies should be enforced rigorously to ensure the safety and well-being of all students. Simultaneously, fostering a respectful school culture should be a priority, where diversity is celebrated, and differences are embraced.

Furthermore, a critical aspect of inclusivity is the adoption of gender-sensitive and age-appropriate approaches in curriculum and classroom practices. Establishing community-based safe spaces for all students can also be instrumental in creating a supportive environment. Additionally, there should be a focus on promoting native languages and increasing resources for German language learning, which can help students from diverse backgrounds integrate more effectively. Lastly, enhancing parental involvement and increasing diversity and representation among educators and decision-makers will contribute to a more inclusive and equitable education system in Germany. These policies and practices collectively aim to ensure that every student feels valued, respected, and empowered in the educational setting.



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