



TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS INTO
INCLUSIVEHUBS

POLICY PAPER

SCHOOLS AS INCLUSIVE HUBS

A brief upon previous policy initiatives regarding the social inclusion of migrant/refugee students in Finland, Portugal, Cyprus and Greece

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Project number: 2022-1-FI01-KA220-SCH-000086160



Co-funded by
the European Union





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This policy paper is a deliverable of the Erasmus+ project A whole school approach to transform schools into Inclusive Hubs, co-funded by the European Union during 2022–2024. This policy paper builds upon previous policy initiatives regarding the social inclusion of migrant/refugee students in Finland, Portugal, Cyprus and Greece. It also includes the key issues, gaps, and action calls that were mapped throughout the project’s implementation, including the variety of issues concerning migrants’ inclusion, significant findings based on the research conducted (WP2) with migrants, educators, and local actor recommended actions to ensure maximum inclusion of migrant families into schools and society in general.

The policy paper will be promoted and distributed towards key policymakers and actors, and representatives of key authorities that can have direct impact on the systems of inclusion in each partner country.

Why is this issue important?

Over the last few years, partner countries established laws to protect the right to education and adopted policies and practices to support the migrant/refugee students in schools. Despite these measures, which will be presented later on in this report, the desk and field research highlight challenges and urgent needs to be addressed in all partner- countries, justifying the need for the Inclusive Hubs project.





The main goal is to promote inclusion, well-being, resilience, and success of pupils with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in schools.

The specific objectives are:

- Develop an evidence-based whole school and community program to transform 4 schools into inclusive hubs.
- Build the capacity of school leaders, teachers, school staff, and local actors to better support migrant learners' inclusion in the education system and society.
- Develop the language skills, wellbeing, and resilience of migrant learners and their families.
- Build the capacity of migrant parents to act as cultural mediators and interpreters in local schools

What are the benefits of transforming schools into inclusive hubs?

BENEFITS FOR THE PUPIL

- Improved sense of belonging
- Improved literacy and numeracy skills
- Improved engagement and attendance in learning
- Positive behaviour
- Higher school completion rates
- Increased interaction with the community, promoting belonging and citizenship
- Access to support services

BENEFITS FOR THE SCHOOL

- Larger teams
- Improved completion and achievement rates
- Connections with local services and the community
- Relationships with staff, students, and families
- Increased use of local services by having them onsite

BENEFITS FOR THE FAMILIES

- Improved sense of belonging
- Improved relationships with the school
- Improved capacity to help children do better in school
- Parent self-esteem
- Increased access to community assets and networks
- Improved involvement in their child's education through decision-making and participation
- Links with community resources and services
- Increased access to support services
- Increased use of school facilities after school hours, helping reduce vandalism
- Strengthen school reputation
- Increased understanding of local needs

INTRODUCTION TO SCHOOLS AS INCLUSIVE HUBS



According to the European Commission, low proficiency and early school leaving can be a result of the struggle in learning and social exclusion, a phenomenon faced by many European areas. Several European Union (EU) countries have already developed national strategies to facilitate stronger communication between schools and local communities and provide measures to foster inclusion. Therefore, the project seeks to contribute to those efforts by developing materials and tools focused on wellbeing, inclusion, mental health, and personal development.

In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of migrants and refugees fleeing to Europe, reaching 1.14 million in 2021 (European Commission, 2021), resulting in a large number of migrant/ refugee students in schools.

Partner countries seem to host a large number of migrant or refugee students in national schools. In Portugal, during the school year 2020–2021, there were 150, 908 foreign students enrolled, mostly from Brazil, especially in the categories of primary education and lower secondary education (DGEEC, 2022). In Greece, no specific number is available, but the majority of the students enrolled in secondary education in 2021 originated from countries outside the European Union (EU) (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2022). In Finland, 8.5% of the population has a foreign background from Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and Northern Africa. In Cyprus, apart from economic migrants, there is a high number of asylum seekers and refugees from the Middle East. Statistics from 2020–2021 indicate 18,92% of migrant/refugee students in primary schools, 18,64% in gymnasiums, and 13,76% in lyceums, with the majority coming from Syria, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Greece (MOEC Annual Report, 2021).



PROJECT RESULTS

The main target groups of the project include trainers and experts, schools, migrants and other stakeholders. The primary outcomes of the project are:

1

A state-of-art report, as a research and needs analysis framework, which will guide the development of the material.

2

A Curriculum and toolkit for trainers, experts, schools, and local actors with key thematic modules and practical guidance to support migrants' inclusion.

3

A capacity building and implementation program to transform schools into inclusive hubs in all partner countries.

More specifically, this report focuses on the challenges and needs, the existing policies and best practices regarding the inclusion of migrant/refugee students and concludes with key recommendations.

NATIONAL POLICIES

CYPRUS

- New action plan of Ministry and CPI for inclusion
- Language support classes during school hours
- Supportive material to teachers by UNHCR and CIP
- Assessment of language needs and progress by CERE (2018)
- In-service training in Primary Education & School networks (2020)
- "School and Social Inclusion Actions", DRASE project (2015)"
- Anti-Racism Code of Conduct by Ministry (2014)

GREECE

- Intercultural education (1990s) 26 intercultural schools with special programmes
- Reception classes of Greek language
- Reception Structures for Refugee Children Education (2015) near refugee centres for courses outside school hours
- Refugee Education Coordinators in refugee camps, as intermediaries between school and parents.

FINLAND

- Acts of Finnish legislation for inclusion
- Preparatory Education
- Governmental Programme:
 - a) Finland's Right to Learn Programme;
 - b) Subproject "Strengthening the basic skills and language of instruction of pupils".

PORTUGAL

- Inclusive Education Laws
- School clusters system
- EMAIE Multidisciplinary teams
- National and European Funding Programmes

You can find more detailed information here
<https://inclusivehubs.eu/reports/>



CHALLENGES

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language barriers can hinder communication with teachers and peers. Many migrant students have had no school experience before moving to the host countries. The different pronunciation across languages as a barrier, resulting in the need for speech therapy.

LOW ENGAGEMENT & PERFORMANCE

These issues can lead to difficulty in following the class, reading and writing issues in the new language and low performance. . In some cases, students are unable to work independently at home and misplacement in classes, might demotivate students. some students are not ready in a year to enter mainstream classes and lack support after their transition.

POOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Students admit, this is happening mostly at the beginning, due to their inability to communicate. Students, especially older ones, tend to spend time with other peers of the same ethnicity during breaks, making integration harder. The interaction between migrant and local students is limited inside the school due to cultural differences .

DISCRIMINATION/ SOCIAL EXCLUSION

This issue usually appears in secondary education, depending of course on the location of the school and the number of migrant students attending rural schools or schools where migrants are a minority among locals might have higher cases of discrimination
bullying and racism seem to be a prominent problem at all levels of education
Migrant students are considered outsiders, thieves or responsible for issues associated with the economic crisis and are mistreated.

You can find more detailed information here
<https://inclusivehubs.eu/reports/>

NEEDS

INITIAL AND CONTINUOUS LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT

The introduction or expansion of preparatory education, before entering the mainstream class, as well as support after the transition is a step in the right direction. Students need more support in language learning and specific subjects, such as History, Maths, English or other foreign languages. This way they will be more confident to work independently at home.

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Students and parents propose mentorship with local students, and extracurricular activities (such as art, sports, and dance) to support interaction and language practice. Fun activities in breaks (such as board games and football) and activities of cultural exchange can promote more interaction and support clubs can serve as a safe environment. Emotional support is required to make the integration smoother and the school environment safer: counselling services, and social workers.

CONTINUOUS SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Teachers ask for high-quality material translated into students' mother tongue and a translator, mediator or teaching assistant, who can help in class. Practical, continuous and mandatory training on differentiated learning, language acquisition and multicultural education is also crucial. More collaboration between colleagues and good reception and transition procedures will really support educators.

MORE IN-SERVICE TIME

Time would be useful to adjust the teaching material, collaborate more, participate in training and be able to use fun activities in class, offer individual support and try out new methods of teaching.

CULTURAL AWARENESS & MEASURES

Teachers need cultural awareness. Knowing students' cultural backgrounds to make references and connections with local culture and fostering respect and acceptance between students can tackle discrimination and conflicts.

WHAT ASPECTS NEED TO BE CHANGED?



Knowing current policies and practices, challenges, and needs, what aspects need to be changed?

1. More intense and targeted language and cultural courses;
2. Personalized academic support: the individual needs and learning abilities of each student should be taken into account during language instruction planning and implementation;
3. Introduction of a reception class during the first year of arrival (with interpreters and cultural mediators, initial assessment, flexible curriculum, monitoring, and evaluation of the progress). When the student is ready, he/she can enter the mainstream class.
4. More interaction among local and migrant students (teamwork activities, team projects, a mentoring scheme where the local is mentor to a migrant, participation in youth and sports clubs, intercultural events)
5. Targeted ongoing training and support for teachers (assignment of special teaching assistants or mediators in class, access to ready-to-use bilingual and culturally sensitive material)
6. Database for regular monitoring of enrolment, attendance, and the provided learning support to help the schools track needs.
7. Systemic and improved initial, formative, and summative assessment tests to diagnose needs and track progress (not only in Greek but also in other basic subjects).
8. Targeted support mechanisms for families (orientation programs, covering transportation and school costs, offering translation or cultural mediation services during instruction or parent meetings or counselling services).
9. Parental involvement: Parents of migrant students face language and cultural barriers that limit their involvement in their children's education. There is a need for linguistic courses for parents and orientation programs to familiarize them with the school system.
10. Support for psychological well-being: Migrant students, especially refugees, often face trauma and psychological stress. Schools should provide psychological support and counseling services to address these needs.
11. Staffing and infrastructure: Schools are understaffed, making it difficult to provide individual attention to migrant students. Teachers suggest assigning a teaching assistant per class and ensuring there are enough teachers to accommodate smaller class sizes.

WHAT ASPECTS NEED TO BE CHANGED?



Why are current policies and practices inadequate?

Despite the considerable efforts, there is still room for more targeted actions, which of course need resources and funding. A holistic approach where all parties collaborate (policymakers, ministry, educational bodies, teachers, parents) will definitely improve the situation.

Inadequacy in current policies can be explained through the following reasons:

a) Lack of tailored educational support:

There is insufficient provision of personalized learning support for migrant students. Migrant students often fall behind academically due to the lack of targeted academic support beyond language lessons.

b) Inadequate teacher training:

Teachers lack sufficient training on intercultural education and how to handle the specific needs of migrant students. Training provided is inconsistent and not tailored to the challenges posed by diverse classrooms.

The educational material is not adequately adapted to the needs of migrant students, and teachers are often left to modify or create materials on their own.

c) Insufficient resources and staffing:

Schools are understaffed, leading to overcrowded classrooms and limited individual attention for migrant students.

There is a lack of teaching assistants and translators to help bridge communication gaps between teachers, students, and parents.

d) Insufficient Policies

Implementation of policies, for example the right to home language can be challenging depending on the population structure and density of an area.

Municipalities manage education budgets and resource allocation towards integration support is not always prioritised. There need to be more funds stipulated for professional development and services for immigrant learners

GOOD PRACTICES



You can find a collection of 14 current and past best practices implemented in Cyprus, Finland, Greece and Portugal in the website of the project

<https://inclusivehubs.eu/reports/>

These practices, aiming at the inclusion of migrant and refugee students in national schools, can serve as an inspiration for transforming your school into an inclusive hub and to promote the wellbeing and success of your pupils.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the desk and field research results, partners have developed their national action plans. While the national realities often differ regarding the political environment, education policy, and available resources, the challenges and needs remain mostly the same. Therefore, their recommendations are summarized below in the Inclusive Hubs Action Plan with four areas of action:

LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Better reception and transition procedures, as well as a targeted language and academic support scheme, are required for students to cope with the new school system:

- a. Introduction or expansion of the reception classes with a flexible curriculum to offer more personalized support and preparation for entering the mainstream classes.
- b. Flexible transition to mainstream classes. Assessment of students' abilities before proceeding to transition and provision of continued support after the transition.
- c. Expansion of the available language courses during school hours. Obligatory summer or afternoon classes for those with low language capacity by the end of the existing language support scheme.
- d. Provision of extra support. Afternoon classes for students who need support in other subjects or their homework (in their mother tongue).
- e. Systemic and improved initial, formative and summative assessment to diagnose needs and track the progress in language and other basic subjects.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Promoting acceptance, interaction and social integration in the school environment is crucial for students' wellbeing:

- a. Peer support and mentorship. Support club for migrant students, providing a safe space to share their experiences and offer mutual help. Pairing migrant students with locals, who will be their mentors to help them navigate the school environment, build friendships, and develop a sense of belonging.
- b. Anti-bullying measures to ensure that consequences for discriminatory behaviours are well-defined and enforced. Group meetings where students can openly discuss bullying and inappropriate behaviour to foster a culture of shared responsibility.
- c. Cultural awareness events for students, school staff and parents to highlight the diversity and celebrate the richness of all cultures being present at school.
- d. Inclusive extracurricular activities. Clubs of sports, music and arts, which can bring students together regardless of any language or cultural barriers and foster a sense of belonging.
- e. Provision of psychological support or counselling to students and their families

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

TEACHER SUPPORT

Supporting teachers is crucial to ensure migrant students' school success.

- a. Continuous, practical, and compulsory training to all school staff on multicultural education, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive teaching strategies.
- b. Educational material that is up-to-date, translated into students' mother tongue, reflecting different cultures and perspectives.
- c. Provision of teaching assistants who know students' mother tongue and translators/mediators, especially in schools with a high number of migrant students to support everyday instruction, communication, and teacher-parent meetings.
- d. Provision of good and reliable digital translation programs and apps.
- e. Staffing and improved infrastructure to reduce the number of students per class
- f. Specialized and stable language learning staff
- g. In-service time to collaborate, practice interdisciplinary approach, and use interactive teaching methods and audio-visual material to enhance understanding and engagement for students from diverse backgrounds.

PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Involving parents and the community in the learning process and school activities is also important.

- a. Orientation programs to inform parents about the new curriculum, school expectations and requirements, documentation policies for admissions, certification, academic concerns, and school liaison systems.
- b. Provision of classes to migrant parents, who wish to learn the official language of the host country to better support their children at home and effectively communicate with the school.
- c. Workshops and events for parents to help them get a better understanding of the educational system, support their children's learning, familiarize them with the new cultural norms or share their traditions and culture with local parents.
- d. Active participation of parents in parent-teacher associations.
- e. Collaboration with local community organizations to provide additional support and resources for families with migrant backgrounds.

TO SUMMARISE...



In summary, the Inclusive Hubs project recommends the continuous investment in inclusive education and cultural mediation to reduce barriers faced by migrant students. It's also very important to implement continuous professional development and training for educators to enhance their skills in managing diversity and cultural integration and to strengthen policies that encourage active community participation in educational and integration processes. It's relevant to invite local stakeholders (e.g., school authorities) in the decision-making process to enhance their ownership over the plans and maximise the impact of the implementation of any plans prepared.

Some practical steps:

- To implement more robust cultural mediation strategies to support migrant students and their families. Schools with support from local governments, should take the lead in this area.
- To engage local communities in supporting migrant families through events and integration activities. Community organizations should collaborate with schools to foster a sense of belonging for these families.
- To equip educators with intercultural skills and inclusive education training, so they can better support migrant students. This responsibility lies with educational authorities and training providers
- Educators should receive more specialized training in handling the needs of migrant students and developing intercultural competencies. This could be done by educational authorities in collaboration with local training providers.
- Communities need to be more actively engaged in the inclusion process, especially in providing support to migrant students. Local governments and community organizations should facilitate this by organizing events and creating support networks
- Schools should continue to offer long-term programs that focus on emotional management, resilience, and cultural mediation. School administrators and educational ministries would need to implement these programs and secure funding
- Awareness of transportation and logistics, centrally located services and events increase access for migrant families.



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