



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

OECD High-Level Policy Forum on Migration 2014
“Mobilizing Migrants’ Skills for Economic Success”

IOM intervention in the parallel session on 2 December, 10:45 – 12:15

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“Developing skills: *How to promote language skills integration and successful integration of migrants’ children into the school system?*”

Thank you for this opportunity to participate on behalf of IOM in this very relevant and timely discussion. Unfortunately, the Director General could not participate in this forum but asked me to convey his appreciation and support to this dialogue.

I. To start with and before getting into the specific question of language skills and successful integration of migrant children, allow me to highlight some overall migration and demographic trends in Europe to provide context to our discussion.

- At current labour participation rates and low levels of inward migration, Western and Central Europe labour force would decline by **over 50 million by 2050** (23 million during the period 2005-2025 and by another 43 million during the period 2025-2050). (Eurostat). With current rates of inward migration, the decline would still be over 30 million.
- The demands for the labour market are in the **higher and lower skilled sectors**.
- As educational attainment of EU citizens is expected to increase further, lower-skilled positions will likely become less and less appealing to EU nationals, thus foreign low-skilled workers will be needed

to fill such structural gaps. This is particularly true for the service, agriculture and construction sectors, where most job vacancies are estimated to be by 2020.

II. What is the best response to this growing demand linked to demographic decline and the demands of the labour market for highly specialised skills as well as in the lower-skilled areas in the OECD countries?

- Some policy actions relate to management of home affairs:
 - increase the age of retirement;
 - increased labour participation amongst women (in particular through the design of family-friendly labour policies);
 - targeted training for the unemployed, in skills needed for employment in sectors demanded by the labour market.
- But the fact remains – Europe needs foreign manpower to meet its labour demands and ensure sustainable economic growth. Migrants have to be part of the policy mix addressing the medium and long-term labour market challenges of Europe.
- Similarly, in the OECD countries, current national immigration models seem to focus on attracting highly skilled workers for eventual permanent settlement, and tend to regard low-skilled migration as a temporary phenomenon only. This gives rise to increased irregular migration, and in turn, fewer opportunities for social or economic integration of these migrants.

III. Turning now to the topic of our discussion – in the context of making migration a success for both migrants and their societies – and focusing on language skills of migrant children, here are some findings, suggestions and recommendations:

Facts and findings

- It is a proven fact that skills in the language of the destination country significantly affect the economic integration of migrants and their children
- Language skills also have an impact on how well immigrants integrate socially in their workplaces and communities

- Lack of proficiency in language combined with inadequate access to cultural knowledge can lead to limited opportunities for migrant children to fully participate in their host societies.

Suggestions and recommendations

1. Promote specific language and cultural training for migrant children in their schools. In other words: does the school provide greater attention to migrant children to allow them to adapt to the new environment? Does the school engage with the parents of the migrant children to encourage social and cultural interaction? Research shows that such initiatives have a greater impact on not only language but overall education outcomes of migrant children compared to their peers of higher socioeconomic status or ethnic majority background.
2. Equip the teachers to work with migrant children, especially in diversity training – IOM is doing this in a number of countries including the Czech Republic, Austria, etc. Transitional schools such as those in Sweden for primary and secondary school-aged migrant children allow for them to study in both native language and the host country’s language – this provides a structured and staged period of adaptation and acculturation into the new system.
3. Expand eligibility for language training to be funded by the government and increasing the focus on oral language ability; expanding informal dialogue and networking possibilities by involving immigrant parents in school activities to promote social integration; sharing lessons from successful social integration activities and developing awareness-raising activities for native-born children who may hesitate to engage in conversation with migrant children.
4. Focus on increasing the participation of migrant children in the classroom– this can be fostered through opportunities given to children (and families) to share their cultural heritage, cultural icons, and traditions – through creative means of celebrating diversity through cultural fairs, food fairs, and through inculcating a multicultural learning environment.
5. Recognizing youth as powerful agents of social change in a world often characterized by intolerance, and cultural and religious divisions, PLURAL+ invites youth to address key challenges related to migrant integration, inclusiveness, identity, diversity, human rights and social cohesiveness, both at local and global levels. Young people aged 9 to 25 years old are invited to submit short videos of five minutes maximum in length. (Awards are given to 3 separate age groups). A training guide is being developed which can be used in the classrooms, for various age groups, and through discussions, greater focus can be given to these issues.

Conclusion

- **Language training for migrants and their children – before departure and after their arrival - empowers migrant children to adapt more rapidly and successfully in the day-to-day demands of their new environment and to utilize their competencies not just at an economic level but also socially and culturally.**
- **The impact of language training should not be underestimated on successful integration as it is a powerful enabler for migrants and their children to develop to their full potential, ultimately reducing their social exclusion and vulnerability, and helping them to contribute more effectively to both their destination societies as well as their countries of origin.**