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Partners:



Develop operational and policy recommendations to promote the use of the tools to decision and policy makers

As a result of wars and the refugee crisis, a significant percentage of refugee children currently residing in European Union Member States (EU MSs) have been out of the school environment for several years, and many have never attended school, although they are of school age.

All EU MSs, and especially Mediterranean countries such as Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal (especially through relocation), which have been experiencing an influx of refugees during the last years, in parallel with a severe economic crisis, are facing the challenge of successfully integrating refugee children in their education systems. However, according to MIPEX 2015 education appears as the greatest weakness in migrants' integration policies in most EU MSs.

Children with migrant background across the EU tend to have lower educational performance and are more likely to leave school early compared to native children. According to Eurostat, in 2016 the highest shares of non-EU-born early leavers from education and training were found in Spain (31.9%) & Italy (31.4 %); the share in Greece was 18.5% & in Portugal 15%. Also, Italy (47%), Greece (43.7%) and Spain (40.9%) had the highest proportions of foreign-born migrants with low educational attainment.

The EU countries try to respond to the large numbers and poor outcomes of migrant pupils with many new, but weak targeted education policies, which are not always well implemented or effective in practice. Few school systems make professional assessments of what newly arrived children learned abroad (MIPEX 2015), and the way countries organise assessment procedures, differs across Europe.

Refugee (and many times migrant) children arrive in Europe with a multiplicity of prior education and schooling. Children of the same age cohort are found to have completely different prior education experiences. At one end of the scale, there are children (and young people) who had little exposure to school in their countries of origin, whereas on the other end there are those who attended school without interruption until their departure and in some cases have already attained educational qualifications.

Assessing the children's previous learning proves difficult in most cases. Many refugee children have no documentation of their previous school attainment and grades. Not only prior education must be considered, but also their gaps in education, trauma and the family situation. Getting the initial assessment right is of paramount importance for the integration perspectives of children and youth. Once enrolled on a level below their actual potential, or in a place where special needs are not taken into account, pupils may never be able to catch up and succeed.

Integrating these children and young people into education that builds up on their prior schooling is essential, but requires the connectivity of the existing systems with the prior education of the children, and structures to identify the level and type of their prior education.

In many systems, the responsibility for assessing prior learning is passed onto schools and teachers themselves, who may not be adequately trained to deal with the specific needs of refugee pupils. Even within EU states, establishing uniform high-quality procedures can represent a considerable policy challenge. At the moment, in most EU MSs, including Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, there are not many policies with concrete provisions for enabling the continuity of learning for newly arrived refugees, and no systematic and country-wide standards/procedures for assessing education levels.

As there are the lack of specific legislation regarding the recognition or/and validation of prior assessment learning in national as well as in international context; the lack of elaboration of well-structured good practices specialised for primary and secondary education as well as the lack of prevention and specific legislation.

However, it is worth mentioned that despite the bibliographic review of relevant laws and presidential decrees, laws for the recognition or validation of prior assessment learning / knowledge were not found and this is a very important recommendation.

The directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe on laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection defines that Member States shall provide children of applicants and applicants who are minors access to the educational system, under the same conditions as the nationals; such education may be provided in the accommodation centres. The directive also defines that the aforementioned access shall not be postponed for more than three months “from the date on which the application for international protection was lodged by or on behalf of the minor”. Preparatory classes are also foreseen, including language classes, in cases that children’s participation in education needs to be facilitated, while in the case the above participation is not feasible, due to the “specific situation of the minor”, the Member State “the Member State shall offer other education arrangements in accordance with its national law and practice”. With Law No. 4540/2018, Greece has adapted this directive in the national legislative framework.

In order to address the aforementioned challenges, this Policy recommendation paper will aim at:

- Increasing the spread and use of state of the art, effective tools for the assessment and validation of prior learning of newly arrived migrant/refugee students in primary & secondary education
- Enhancing the competences of educational leaders and educators on the use of tools for assessing knowledge and validating prior learning, and
- Increasing the awareness, knowledge and competence of policy makers, educational leaders and educators with regard to inclusive educational approaches

with the overall goal to support the inclusion of newly arrived migrant/refugee children in education in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, by effectively assessing and validating prior learning.

The main goal of CIRCLE project is the development of prior learning assessment tools and validation mechanisms in the local education systems in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain (and other EU countries) to enable the continuity of learning for newly arrived refugees/migrants.

Specifically, CIRCLE created innovative diagnostic tools, in the form of 3 booklets, to help teachers

validate the prior knowledge of refugees/migrants and TCN students, with minimal language skills (host country or English) and interrupted education. The tools include different assessment techniques (oral, written, visual), tailored to address the specific challenges faced by refugees/migrants and TCN children. The assessment and validation of prior learning will contribute to the more successful classification of new students in primary & secondary education, and especially will guide educational authorities and institutions in the development and implementation of the most appropriate educational methods and material to better address the actual needs of these students, thus reducing their chances of early school leaving and promoting their successful progression through the education system.

The validation of the prior learning will also further facilitate the access of children to all levels of education and employment opportunities in the future.

The expected results of the project are the development of more targeted education policies and inclusive educational approaches in the partner countries (and the EU in general), to support the inclusion of migrant/refugee children in education and society. Successful inclusion of refugee children in the education systems can pre-empt later integration costs.