Webinar: Integration of newcomers in and through education

On 27th September 2022, SOLIDAR organized the webinar ''Integration of newcomers in and through education'' within the SPRING project. The discussion gathered 8 experts and practitioners on education and/or inclusion of newly-arrived migrants, as well as 2 moderators and 35 attendees.

Since the 2000s, the integration of foreign-born students has become a topical issue as performance figures seemed to indicate they lag behind. As a consequence, some countries have launched educational reforms to promote academic success of their migrant youth. **The question of ensuring participation and achievement of newly arrived learners has taken a whole new level of acuity this year following the unprecedent scale of arrivals from Ukraine**, a refugee population composed mainly by women and children, with the urgency to ensure these children's educational continuity.

The discussion looked at what policy frameworks and practices exist to ensure that all newcomers can participate in education, as well as how learning environments can foster a sense of common belonging between the host community and the newcomers. Talks concluded with a reflection on the evidence needed to design and implement inclusive educational policies.

Sogol Noorani, Education Policy and Systems Analyst at the **European Education and Culture Agency (EACEA), European Commission**, presented the results of the Eurydice report ''Supporting refugee learners from Ukraine in schools in Europe 2022'' that she co-authored. While the Temporary Protection Directive recognizes access to education for Ukrainian children and young people as a priority, effective access is far from automatic. Data collected in May 2022 indicated that in some countries enrolment rates of children and youth from Ukraine came relatively high (e.g., 75% in Spain), but in other countries the rate was as low at 9% (in Greece for instance). Overall, a number of barriers were identified that prevented full access: language barriers, the lack of access to information, or families' reluctance to enroll children in local schools near the end of the school year. In an attempt to lift these barriers, a number of European education systems as well as the European Commission have published policy guidance documents and provided support measures for the inclusion of refugee children from Ukraine in schools[i].

Laetitia Van der Vennet, Advocacy officer at the **Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM),** explained that European countries may fare relatively well on access to compulsory education (from 6 to 15 years of age) but much less so on both ends of childhood, in particular for undocumented children and youth (difficult access to Early Childhood Education and Care – ECEC and to traineeships). Legal entitlement is recognized but administrative, financial or practical barriers to effective access to education persist. Besides, factors such as learners' housing situation have a huge impact on their educational attainment. PICUM calls for schools to remain spaces that are safe from deportation and apprehension as is clearly the case in Belgium, for instance, but not so much in other EU countries[ii].

Alessia Signorelli, Research Fellow at University of Perugia and activity manager for the ECO-IN project, set the scene for the rest of the discussion on inclusive education, explaining that inclusion is not just a goal per se, but a journey. Inclusive education should involve everyone, not only within school but also outside of school; we too often see parents marginalized in the discussion, especially

when they have a migrant background, or education policy-makers absent from the conversation on the ground. This is what the ECO-IN project does: it provide spaces, and trains people, for all to work together.

Rareş Voicu, Board member at the [Organising Bureau of European School Students Union (OBESSU)](#) in his intervention highlighted the need for solidarity within the school system. This very system sometimes fails to train and support teachers with the appropriate pedagogical tools they need to work with migrant children. Understanding migrant learners' needs means also looking at their lives beyond school, and integrated (social) services within schools is a good way to act on all aspects of a newcomer's life to enable them to be part of the education system in a meaningful way. Students Unions can be a great way to build bridges between students with a migrant background and their peers, while empowering all students to be actors of their own learning; this is what OBESSU encouraged through the project [Seeds for Integration](#).

Patricia Rubio, Programme Coordinator, [Liga Española de la Educación y de la Cultura Popular,](#) reminded that a higher level of education minimises the risk of dropping out and ultimately the risk of socio-economic exclusion. Liga de la Educación has been working on guaranteeing the fundamental right of all to education in Spain. Its people intervene in schools, teaching adult staff to respect differences, normalising the presence of people with different backgrounds and abilities. Schools are fundamental places to combat hate speech in the long-term. La Liga's role is also to teach how to deal with differences, with a tailor-made approach, heeding specific needs of individual learners or groups.

Katarzyna Gajewska, Programme coordinator - [Fundacja Szkoła z Klasą (School With Class Foundation),](#) highlighted that a participatory process engaging schools communities in decision making is crucial. SWC Foundation's mission is to support and train teachers and headmasters helping them to change schools into innovative, friendly and open environments that helps children become active and conscious citizens. Poland is a country where civil society organisations are very active to support schools to compensate for the lack of structural governmental support. Commenting on the question of acceptance of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, Katarzyna shared that SWC has only had good experience with both Polish governments and people with welcoming people displaced from Ukraine – a striking contrast with the treatment people from Belarus received just six months before.

Hakan Kilic, Researcher and Ph.D Student at [Danube University Krems](#) (and SPRING project partner), gave an overview of the [literature review carried out in SPRING](#), looking at publications on integration of refugees and migrants in English language, from 2011 onwards. The [section on education](#) highlights three main issues:

- **Inadequate consideration of educational needs** of migrant children, little to no consideration of their mental health needs
- **Lack of clarity regarding responsibilities**: ECEC often cannot be provided due to lack of clarity regarding responsibilities, especially in decentralized or federal States
- **Inadequate quality of education services**: low requirements for qualifications of professionals, tendency to reproduce inequalities with separate classes and residence-based segregation, impossibility for teachers to train themselves due to overload of work.

An additional point has been the insufficient evaluation of programmes and their implementation.

Mialy Dermish, Executive Director of the [SIRIUS Policy Network on Migrant Education](#), made a strong case for welcoming schools that cater to learners' socio-emotional needs. Indeed, neuroscience has found that people only can only actually learn when feel safe, secure, and that they belong. 'Feeling

of belonging at school' (PISA indicator) is a very important indicator to look at when trying to measure whether schools are inclusive, and feeling of belonging increases socio-emotional well-being at school, which relates to positive academic performance at school. Belonging should be measured for migrants, people with different abilities and all of us. In fact, when looking at the policy-environment we see that some countries score really low on belonging (in OECD data) while scoring very high in providing top-down educational policy frameworks designed for inclusion, however this shows that policy is not the only answer to increasing academic success in differing marginalized groups.

More than ad hoc interculturality training outside of schools, what teachers needs is a self-reflective community of practice, in place, at their school, with teachers, non-educational staff and students, to become collectively better at including.

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[i] For information on refugee learners from Ukraine in universities in Europe in 2022, see this Eurydice report: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/supporting-refugee-learners-ukraine-higher-education-europe-2022

[ii] For further reading on undocumented children, including their access to education, see https://picum.org/publications/?tx_category=children-families-education