

CYPRUS COMMENTS ON THE GREEN PAPER ON “MIGRATION AND MOBILITY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR EU EDUCATION SYSTEMS”

Introduction

In general, Cyprus agrees with the contents of the Green Paper on “Migration and mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems”. Indeed, challenges faced by education systems as a result of the continuously raising numbers of migrant children will be diverse and complex.

Hence, in order to respond to the emerging challenges focused educational policies should be developed. Such policies should aim to enhance the smooth inclusion of non-native speaking students to the education system and the hosting society. Furthermore, inclusive educational policies should aim to cultivate feelings of respect and acceptance of the others and to abolish stereotypes and prejudice among all students, native and non-native.

The emphasis placed on the acquisition of the language used in the hosting country is of major importance for the educational achievement of migrant children, as well as for their future integration in the labour market. At the same time, the provision of support to their families with respect to their children’s education is of equal importance and therefore adequate attention should be placed to the provision of adult education courses as well. Consequently, family initiatives will be promoted that would satisfy simultaneously the learning needs of parents and children.

A. The policy challenge

1. What are the important policy challenges related to the provision of good education to children from a migrant background? In addition to those identified in this paper, are there others that should be taken into account?

At the beginning of a new century, educational systems all over the world are facing increased demands for the provision of quality education for the good of all. In order to meet today’s numerous challenges and the complexities of contemporary educational provision, there is need to work together with all stake holders –teachers, students, parents, the academic community, political parties- in a spirit of understanding and cooperation, joining our efforts and potentials for the successful implementation of inclusive policies and reforms. In this quest for achieving educational reform, inclusive education is the key dimension for quality education.

Hence, we believe that the major challenge for education systems is to provide equal opportunities for all students in terms of access, participation and achievement in education, considering multiculturalism and individual needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Furthermore, a major challenge would be the capacity of hosting countries to provide for the learning of the mother tongue of migrant children. Another challenge would be to face the concentration of migrant student populations in certain areas.

B. The policy response

2. What are the appropriate policy responses to these challenges? Are there other policies and approaches beyond those listed in this paper that should be taken into account?

A comprehensive educational policy is necessary for the effective response to the challenge of appropriate educational provision to children of migrant workers and for the timely social integration of these people into the hosting society. Therefore, strategies that retain a socioeconomic equilibrium are important and necessary.

The basic aim should be to intensify efforts towards achieving respect for diversity, cultural, linguistic and religious pluralism and consider multiple intelligence. Such efforts should be directed towards children of migrant workers and native children as well. Measures such as the following could facilitate the achievement of the above aim:

- Establishment of zones of educational priority based on the principle of positive discrimination in areas with high concentration of non-native student population
- Classes for teaching the host language for non-native students who face difficulties in communication and understanding of the language in order to prepare them to integrate in the school programme successfully.
- Language lessons for adults
- Employment of interpreters in schools to develop communication trails and better relations between families and the school society.
- Psychologists, social workers who could provide support to students and their families
- Appropriate curricula, textbooks and teaching materials for the needs of migrant student populations
- Production and publication of material in various languages with information about the educational system. These leaflets will include information targeted towards migrant families (children and adolescents).

Emphasis should be placed on the initial training and the continuous professional development of educators who are the major actors and determinants for the successful implementation of the abovementioned policies. Educators need additional skills in order to respond effectively to the multicultural environment in the classrooms and schools.

Mechanisms for the cooperation of hosting and sending countries should also be established in order to facilitate the teaching of the mother tongue of migrant children. Furthermore, monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of measures taken should be established in order to respond flexibly to continuously changing needs. The development of indicators and methods of evaluation with a view to evaluating progress, adapting policies and measures and facilitating coordination is necessary.

It is also important for hosting countries to take appropriate measures in order to prevent high concentration of migrant children in certain schools.

C. The role of the European Union

3. What actions could be undertaken via European Programmes to impact positively on the education of children from a migrant background?

4. How should these issues be addressed within the Open Method of Coordination for Education and Training? Do you feel that there should be an exploration of possible indicators and/or benchmarks as a means to focus policy effort more strongly on closing the gaps in educational attainment?

Based on the principle of subsidiarity, the role of the European Union could be supportive. Within the context of the open method of coordination, exchange of good practice among member states and public consultation with all the relevant stakeholders could provide the stimulus for addressing practical issues raised. Relevant indicators and/or benchmarks could be specified at EU level in order to achieve divergence among educational systems across EU. Indicators and benchmarks specified should consider the whole spectrum of the diversity of student population and not migrant children especially, reflecting the need for the provision of quality education for the good of all children. The cooperation among educational institutions (schools, universities, ministries) could be enhanced by various European programmes.

D. The future of Directive 77/486/EEC

5. How can Directive 77/486/EEC, taking into account the history of its implementation and bearing in mind the changed nature of migration flows since its adoption, play a role in supporting Member States' policies on these issues? Would you recommend that it be maintained as it stands, that it should be adapted or repealed? Would you propose alternative approaches to support Member States' policies on the issues it addresses?

Based on the fact that the Directive 77/486/EEC does not provide for the education of children of migrant workers coming from third countries (countries outside the EU), and that a considerable proportion of migration flows comes from third countries, alternative approaches should be considered, taking into account the principle of subsidiarity. Such approaches should reflect the negative consequences of segregating educational policies and emphasize more the need for the provision of the mother tongue. In any case, the national conditions and context should be seriously considered, as the flow of migrant workers varies among member states.