

New Perspectives for Learning - Briefing Paper 17

Integrating Immigrant Children into Europe

Context of the Research

Although, the phenomenon of immigration is not a recent development, its complexity does not appear to be yet fully understood. This is tending to result in policy that is reduced to addressing “emergency issues” such as gaining entry, finding a job and crime.

This is even more noticeable with regard to minors of immigrant origin i.e. those with immigrant parents and/or grandparents. The national policies designed to integrate immigrant minors and minors of ethnic origin into their host society have not been very successful, leaving minors at risk of social exclusion.

This project has analysed national definitions, indicators, and evaluation systems, both in conceptual and in statistical terms. It also analysed specific policy responses in each of the countries that have been examined (Italy, Greece, Great Britain, France, Sweden, Belgium and Israel), especially in education and training. The project has reviewed classification and definition systems for the well-being of children and has developed a new definition of well-being for children of immigrant origin according to a hierarchy of basic indicators that could be used for evaluating the condition of children and targeting specific policy.

Key Conclusions

The following conclusions were reached: -

1. Current classifications for immigrant minors and minors of immigrant origin are insufficient and vary from country to country. This promotes confusion and makes any harmonisation of policies at a European level objectively complicated.
2. A pilot media analysis in Italy found that immigrants are most commonly represented in the media in terms of security, or at any rate in conjunction with crime-related issues, even in the case of minors. The effects of this “media image” are detrimental to the policies aimed at the integration of immigrants and encourage feelings of social exclusion in immigrant minors trying to find their place in the host society.

3. The well-being of immigrant minors is the main object of social policies yet the current focus is on basic needs. It was found that additional factors like growth and development, participation in society and the formulation of a complete functional identity are fundamental for minors' well-being. Therefore the indicators of well-being have been redefined as: -
- a) *Material well-being* - standards and density of housing, poverty rate and family employment all affect well-being of minors.
 - b) *Health* - immigrant minors still have higher mortality rates and lower birth rates. They are also at risk to certain types of mortality.
 - c) *Delinquency* - crimes committed by immigrant minors and minors of immigrant origin should be distinguished between the demonstrative crimes (that reflect social unease and "rage" against exclusion) and the instrumental crimes (committed for material gain, which possibly reflect economic difficulties).
 - d) *Community Participation* - immigrant children need to feel that they can be members of their host country with equal rights and without the risk of expulsion in adulthood. Their involvement in youth activities and sport, neighbourhood or community activities should also be measured as pro-social participation.
 - e) *Education* - the school system is failing immigrant minors and minors of immigrant origin in a variety of areas: -
 - i. *Enrolment* - minors are assessed in the host countries language, not their mother tongue. This can lead to children being placed in classes below their age group, which dramatically hinders their development.
 - ii. *Choice of schools* – they have a tendency to choose vocational or technical schools, over high schools. This has resulted in a very high concentration of immigrant minors and minors of immigrant origin in certain schools, which are often in underprivileged neighbourhoods and have bad reputations.
 - iii. *Drop out and expulsion rates* – they have higher rates than native students.
 - iv. *Discrimination* - immigrant minors struggle with the language demanded by the school, and minors of immigrant origin have difficulties in the acquisition of cultural skills that are demanded by the school.
 - v. *Results* - they have lower results than the native population. This difference increases as students advance through the years.
 - vi. *Careers Advise* – they have limited job prospects their background affects their choice of a course of study (i.e. Belgian advisory services encourage

immigrant minors towards technical and vocational sectors regardless of their results). Immigrant families also translate their perception of the prospects for integration as adults, on to their children, which directly influences minors' attitudes to their life and career prospects.

- vii. *Higher Education* - significantly less choose higher education than the native population.

Key Recommendations

Some of the following proposals rely on common definitions and regulations being established between countries: -

European Policy Recommendations

1. Establish a European Intergovernmental Commission to unify the criteria used to define minors of immigrant origin, at a European level.
2. Common objectives need to be established for the well-being of minors, relating to school, the community, family, security and participation. These should be used to monitor native and immigrant minors' well-being, and social and cultural risk factors based on the United Nations international convention on the rights of minors.
3. A common approach to immigration needs to be established between countries and the requirements for citizenship need to be clearly identifiable for minors and their families to allow them to invest in the host society.
4. The criteria adopted for collecting statistics on minors (with immigrant backgrounds) needs to be harmonised.
5. A process needs to be adopted to monitor the minors that arrive in the host counties and for the granting of citizenship to minors.
6. Language skills and the performance of school pupils in different countries (with emphasis on the mother tongue) also need to be monitored.
7. A common definition of the target of reference for cultural and educational policies directed towards the younger generation, should include immigrant minors and minors with immigrant parents and/or grand parents.

National Policy Recommendations

8. Revision of school textbooks and curricula to introduce elements that are intercultural (inclusive of cultures) and reflect multicultural society.
9. Creation of training and refresher schemes for teachers.
10. After defining the professional qualifications and skills that will be required, cultural mediators should be employed in schools, health care and public administrations.
11. Translate and diffuse the manual for school operators drawn up as part of this project by CBAI (Centre Bruxellois d'Action Interculturelle).
12. Promotion of periodic campaigns to inform immigrants of rights and duties, and criteria and principles relating to the well-being of minors. Exchange programmes between students of different countries could encourage mutual respect for different cultures.
13. Support for the production of fiction, radio and TV programmes that are oriented towards promoting attitudes of reciprocity, particularly with regards to minors.
14. Organisation of training and refresher seminars for advertising and media operators, in order to provide greater understanding of the issue.
15. Revision of self-regulatory codes of conduct adopted by the media with explicit reference to respect for ethnic minorities and the way minors are depicted in the mass media.
16. Promotion of projects that highlight plays, books and films, which focus on the patrimony of various cultures and promote the use of the museum system for intercultural purposes.
17. A study into the illnesses that affect immigrant minors, particularly those connected with poverty (i.e. respiratory infections) and the treatment of immigrant minors and minors of immigrant origin with psychiatric disorders compared to the native population, attention must be placed on hospitalised minors.

Further Information

Full title of Project - "Child Immigration Project" with the final report completed in February 2001

[Full report](#), [Abstract](#), [Summary](#) [Partner details](#), [Website](#)

Contact Person

Dr. Carla Collicelli
Censis - Fondazione Centro Studi Investimenti Sociali
Piazza di Novella 2
Roma
00199
Italy

Tel: +39 6 860911

Fax: +39 6 86211367

Email: c.collicelli@censis.it

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