



## Migrant children and education: a challenge for EU education systems

***A Green Paper adopted by the Commission today opens the debate on how education policies may better address the challenges posed by immigration and internal EU mobility flows. The presence of significant numbers of migrant children has substantial implications for European education systems. Key issues are how to prevent the creation of segregated school settings, so as to improve equity in education; how to accommodate the increased diversity of mother tongues and cultural perspectives and build intercultural skills; how to adapt teaching skills and build bridges with migrant families and communities.***

According to both international and national data, many migrant children in the European Union suffer from educational disadvantage in comparison to their native peers: early school leaving is more common among them and enrolment in higher education lower. Even more worryingly, in some countries second generation pupils from a migrant background show lower school performance than the first generation. This indicates that the social divide may deepen over time. At the same time, there are clear signs that tendencies towards segregation along socio-economic lines intensify, as socially advantaged parents tend to withdraw their children from schools with high numbers of migrant pupils. Disparities between schools tend to increase over time.

*"This situation may undermine the chances of young migrant pupils for successful integration in society and the labour market later in life," said Ján Figel, European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth. "If migrant children leave school with an experience of underachievement and segregation which carries on in their later lives, the risk is that such a pattern is perpetuated into the next generation". The Commissioner added that "evidence shows clearly that policies can make a difference. Some Member States are managing to take up the challenge. Exchanging experiences and learning from each other can be fruitful, and the European Commission wishes to support such exchange."*

Research has identified several causes contributing to the current educational disadvantage of many migrants. Some key factors relate to the individual background of migrant pupils – low socio-economic background, language, family and community expectations. However, data also show the importance of education systems and that some countries succeed better than others in reducing the gap between migrant and native pupils, thus demonstrating that policies may significantly influence school performance. Segregation, for instance, is a downward spiral that affects children's motivation and performance. Ability grouping and tracking may have similar effects. Teachers' expectations, and their preparedness to deal with diversity, may further condition results.

The Green Paper undertakes a brief review of policies and approaches that may foster educational success for migrant pupils. It indicates that those systems which strongly prioritise equity in education are also the most effective in integrating migrant pupils. Among the policy measures which seem particularly useful to address the issue are pre-school education, language learning, additional educational support such as mentoring and tutoring, intercultural education as well as partnerships with families and communities. Preventing segregation and desegregating "ghetto" schools seems a precondition to guarantee real equal opportunities to migrant pupils. To do that, ensuring high quality standards in all schools, especially in relation to teaching and leadership, is essential.

Strategies need to be defined and implemented at the national or regional levels, but peer learning at the European level may prove valuable. The Green Paper aims to foster an exchange of views on how to address these challenges at all levels, and also to inquire how the EU might in future support Member States in formulating their education policies in this area. In addition, it explores the future of the 1977 Directive 77/486/EEC on the education of children of workers from other Member States, whose implementation has been patchy.

Interested parties are invited to make their views known about the policy challenge, policy responses, and the possible role of the European Union in supporting Member States, before 31 December 2008. The European Commission will analyse the results of this consultation and publish its conclusions in early 2009.

**To know more:**

[MEMO/08/475](#), "FAQ: Migration and Mobility: Challenges and Opportunities for EU education systems".

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