

RECOMMENDATIONS

Skills Development for Multicultural Schools

- Allocation of school time for explaining concepts to students such as non-discrimination, sexism, human rights as well as to provide an understanding of the phenomenon of migration. In contrast to repetitive celebrations of diversity, this will provide a better understanding of diversity from a human rights perspective rather than from a cultural perspective only.

- Compulsory specialist training to help teachers feel more confident about teaching multicultural and diverse classes, as well as the participation of teachers in Human Rights platforms (organized in the context of conferences on human rights) to challenge the “cultural defense” implicit in multicultural approaches.

Ensure Clear Procedures for Dealing with Incidents for the Safeguarding and Well-being of Migrant Girls

- The high rates of forced marriage and attempted suicide evident in some of the partner countries, as well as the commonality of bullying, harassment, domestic violence suffered by migrant girls in most of the school contexts explored in this study suggest the need for a clear proactive safety net for these girls. There should be a safe ‘mesh of support’ i.e. social workers, police, family liaison officers, and mental health counselors who are trained in intercultural dialogue.

- Medical exams/services provided or requested by school authorities should be made available to students irrespective of the migrant status of their parents to guarantee students rights to health and non discrimination.

Develop Specific School Policies to Confront Sexism and Racism

- Good leadership clearly made a difference in the schools we studied. Having high expectations for all groups in the school, instilling an open ethos of valuing one another through respect and trust was instrumental in transcending the barriers of poverty and inequality and religious and racist prejudice endemic in the inner city schools we visited.

- Break the culture of silence in relation to sexist and racist incidences in schools by allowing open dialogue on such issues and by implementing pedagogical measures instead of simply disciplinary measures when such incidences occur in schools. Also set in place mechanisms where girls feel safe in bringing complaints of gendered violence to the school authorities. Racist and sexist incidences can be archived in a data collections system so as to be to draft policies corresponding to these data.

Secure Funded Support for Learning Mentors in Schools

Appointment of learning mentors and parental liaison officers who will enable migrant girls to gain knowledge and understanding of how to navigate through a complex education system. This practice already implemented in some school contexts made an important contribution to the school success of migrant girls.

Provide Clarity on the Process of Becoming a Student

Clarity and provision of substantial information to migrant students and their families in relation to the process of and requirements for becoming full-time students, attending all classes, and receiving evaluation.

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WITH THE SUPPORT OF



European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals of the European Commission

Young Migrant Women in Secondary Education

Promoting integration and mutual understanding through dialogue and exchange



Policies developed for the integration of migrant children in schools usually recognize the fluid and multiple aspects of cultural and language identities but less so the dynamic character of gender in relation to the transnational experience of migrants. Having abandoned past assimilation approaches, schools in many European countries now try to build integration policies and develop practices on the basis of respect for cultural diversity. However, gender mainstreaming is absent from such practices, strategies and policies.

To address these issues, the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) in Nicosia, Cyprus has coordinated a transnational project entitled “Young Migrant Women in Secondary Education – Promoting integration and mutual understanding through dialogue and exchange” funded by the European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals of the European Commission. Partners to the project include the Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities (CREA) at the University of Barcelona (Spain); the Centre for Rights, Equalities and Social Justice (CRESJ) at the Institute of Education, University of London (UK); the Department of Sociology at Panteion University (Greece); and the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research (EMCER) at the University of Malta (Malta).

Within the framework of this 18-month project in-depth research was conducted by partner organizations with the aim to explore how the intersection of gender and ethnic stereotyping produces forms of exclusion and marginalization as experienced by migrant girls in the context of secondary education. This leaflet outlines a few of the main research findings as well as recommendations for policy change at the national level.



"I'm trying to find friends but sometimes people make it difficult, because when they saw me they thought I was Chinese, they always joke on me, but I try to tell them that I'm not a Chinese, I'm a Philippine." Dalisay

La profesora vino y me dijo que ella tenía un título y que yo no sería nunca como ella....

Entonces muchas veces he pensado que un día seré arquitecta y cuando lo consiga iré allí y de diré: "mira".

MALTA

How to be a migrant girl

Migrant girls play with dominant notions of being feminine and migrant generated by discourses within the school. They often play with acceptable and non-acceptable ways of being female; ways which differ across nationalities and cultures. Their feminised subjectivities inhabit multiple cultural worlds.

Looking different

Migrant girls' physical appearance has generated feelings of jealousy and hostility from their Maltese counterparts. Their lack of new language skills, different backgrounds, and poor knowledge about Maltese culture and tradition often triggers episodes of teasing, racialised comments and discrimination. Some migrant girls perceive that they are treated differently in the classroom specifically because they are foreigners.

Speak my language

The language barrier is one of the main challenges both migrant girls and teachers face at school. For migrant girls, communicating and following lessons proves problematic as well as their performance in school exams. Although some provisions are provided for by schools so that the migrant girls gain some basic language skills, the findings demonstrate that these are not sufficient to address the problem in a satisfactory manner. There are also no provisions within schools for migrant girls to continue studying their first language.

Including Differences

The school environment is not always receptive to the diversities of migrant girls. Some teachers tend to homogenise students in their class and their teaching does not address their experiences as girls and/or migrants. Differences are sometimes ignored, reflecting a lack of understanding and sensitivity to the educational entitlements of the migrant girls. When these differences are taken into account, the approach is either assimilative or not sufficiently inclusive.

UNITED KINGDOM

Access to Education

For migrant girls, education was a means of personal transformation and belonging in socially and economically restrictive circumstances. However, access to education and thriving in school was not experienced on a level playing field.

Route to Migration

The girls' 'route to migration' was important: her social class and parental background, how long she had been in the UK, fluidity with English, and the circumstances which led to their family's migration (i.e. as a dependant or fleeing harm) were all tipping factors in terms of their confidence and well being. Migrant girls with unqualified parents or parents who had differing degrees of mental health problems e.g. depression, or who had familial responsibilities, such as caring for siblings suffered the most. Access to EAL (English as an Additional Language) was important as well as inclusion into integrated mainstream classes (i.e. no separate reception classes).

Educational Policy

The migrant girls' gendered subjectivity and experiences of education were also contextualised by interviews with policymakers. On the one hand their concerns were characterised by the dual multicultural discourse of invisibility i.e. that no agenda existed that specifically acknowledged them as a group with particular needs. On the other hand, if they did receive attention they were subject to discourses of gendered surveillance, risk, safety and well-being.

School Support and Mental Health

The girls' ability to survive and flourish depended on their resilience and ability to negotiate the harsh educational terrain of urban inner cities schools. Their ability to overcome everyday issues such as sexual and racial bullying, forced marriage, depression, poverty and parental restrictions and surveillance depended on the schools' ability to mediate and support them. Access to good school support such as counsellors, parental liaison officers, educational welfare officers could be chaotic and often came down to the individual teacher or tutor that was approached. The migrant girls suffered surprisingly high rates of psychological stress including domestic abuse and attempted suicide. They also voiced great disappointment in the ability of schools to contain the racial and sexual bullying that was rife between and among different competing ethnic migrant groups.

Schools Do Make a Difference

A good school often acted as a substitute for lack of (middle-class) parental social and cultural capital, providing learning mentors and integrated professional advice about educational choice, including further and higher education opportunities. Thus we found 'schools do make a difference' as leadership was a crucial factor in establishing a sound inclusive and antiracist vision.

"I...think that her mum's status as a migrant is making it very difficult for her, because her mum is just all alone and desperate for help and support...I feel very much for them."

Denise, Head of Sixth form, Hazelwood

Γενικά, 1η και 2η Λυκείου είχα πρόβλημα μόνο στη φυσική. Στη 3η Λυκείου είχα πρόβλημα στα μαθηματικά γιατί ειδικά στην κατεύθυνση ήταν δύσκολο να παρακολουθώ. Επειδή δεν πήγαινα εγώ φροντιστήριο, και όλοι οι άλλοι πήγαιναν, συμμετείχα αλλά όχι τόσο πολύ. Δεν πήγαινα ενώ όλοι οι άλλοι ήξεραν από το καλοκαίρι καλύτερα από μένα.

CYPRUS

Educational Policy

The overall policy framework of the educational authorities in relation to intercultural education and integration (two concepts that produce on an official level almost identical policies), is narrowly focused on providing language support. Simultaneously, other activities or measures undertaken within the context of achieving similar goals put great emphasis on the cultural rights/background of migrant students, thus shifting attention from the need to undertake action against structural racism and inequality.

School Support

Girls and their families invest substantially to the institution of the school as a means to achieving integration as well as a better quality of life. This investment however can lead to unfair negotiations in relation to their reactions in cases of bullying and sexist behaviour. The fact that they are girls as well as migrants places them in a more vulnerable position as they are called upon to prove their 'regularity' and 'conformity' to the gender norms of the receiving society so as not to be characterized in derogative terms. The level such vulnerability varies depending on factors such as ethnic origin, class, popularity and color.

Migration and Gender in Educational Policy

The migration dimension of intercultural education and integration is not currently addressed. This is also true of the gender dimension, a factor equally important in formulating young people's school experiences. These factors remain unidentified and absent from educational policies as well as from school responses to racist and sexist incidences and often become invisible under general categories such as 'juvenile delinquency'. As a result, gendered abuse is understood by migrant girls as a personal issue to be dealt with on an individual basis.

Cypriot Context of Racial and Gender Stereotyping

Families migrating to Cyprus are open to a process of hybridization in order to adjust to the new social environment of the host country, and their children reflect this openness to adjustment and change. However, the gender norms with which they are faced with in the local society often inhibit this process. Girls are often pre-defined by their peers on the basis of larger racialized categories relating to migrant women in Cyprus and struggle with the direct or indirect violence that these kind of stereotypes produce.

Reproducing 'Others'

Migrant girls themselves adapt to local processes of 'othering' and to established national narratives about ethnic 'others'. This leads to the reproduction of racist categorization of certain ethnic groups and a further enhancement of migrant girls' vulnerability to violence. This also contradicts existing perceptions of culture as a static entity which are usually embedded into national educational policies on intercultural education and integration.

Misinformation

There is a great deal of misinformation in relation to the system of becoming a 'regular' student in school. Many girls find themselves struggling with the pre-requirements to achieve this status while others relate this achievement to the continuation of the residence permit of their families, thus undertaking a large amount of stress, believing that the family's stay in Cyprus is dependent upon their school success.

GREECE

Gender Acknowledgment in Curriculum

A number of research educational programmes related to gender issues in education have been implemented over the last decade in Greece. However, the proposals, recommendations, and, in particular, the material produced as a result of other research and programmes are not incorporated in the curricula and the educational process. They remain 'blind' to differences and inequalities related to gender.

Access to Private Classes

According to migrant girls, the problem identified in school life is the intensifying need for private classes after school. The fact that teachers assume that all children attend private after-school classes has a direct influence both on the quality of teaching and reproduction of inequalities between those children able to attend private classes and those who are not.

"Double Burden" of Work

Many of the girls reported that they are involved in various forms of work within the home as well outside the home. For example, they work alongside their mothers during the summer or on weekends. This work, as explained by migrant girls, is a duty towards their families. It includes taking care of younger brothers and sisters, as well as assisting them and their mothers in learning the Greek language. The above, combined with their lack of access to private classes after school, indicates that migrant girls experience a 'double burden' of work.

Gender and Educational Pursuits

Most girls believe that there are no gender differences in the educational process. They believe, however, that boys and girls differ in their inclinations and interests; girls tend to be more interested in theoretical courses, while boys are more interested in science and technology. However, many of the girls who participated in this research chose to follow and pursue occupations considered to be traditionally "masculine".

"Όχι έγραψα ότι είμαι από την Κύπρο, ο μπαμπάς μου είναι αυτό και η μαμά μου είναι αυτό... Έπρεπε να γράψεις όλη σου την ιστορία. Όρεξη... Έπαιξα πολλά γράφω πως είμαι από την Κύπρο" - Νικόλα

SPAIN

Overcoming Different Types of Barriers

Immigrant girls face many barriers in secondary education: some policies addressed to immigrant students mean an actual reduction in their opportunities; they also face lower expectations towards their future, are discriminated against by different groups and suffer from stereotyping due to their gender and immigrant status. They also take on family duties and are sometimes pressured by their families to abandon their studies; even professional advisors direct them towards the labour market or towards vocational paths. The reality and particular difficulties of these girls, as well as their efforts to overcome this reality, go mostly unseen and unrecognized. In general terms, the research identified no educational measures and specific provisions addressed to these girls in the context of secondary education.

Girls' Empowerment through Education

Many of the immigrant girls in the study grant a great value to education and they have made great efforts to be where they are and achieving what they are achieving, both as girls and as immigrants. They have found many different ways of tackling their situation and the difficulties encountered. This has sometimes included facing certain reactions and reaffirming themselves in their personal project.

Significant Others' Support

To overcome the obstacles faced, girls value the help and support they get from the educational centre and from their family and friends as being fundamental. It is one of the elements that they indicate as being critical for their continuity and eventual success.

Contexts of Dialogue

There are elements that possess a great potential to promote migrant girls' educational success and inclusion. This is mainly referred to as spaces of dialogue and solidarity on the one hand, and the mechanisms of support among themselves and with girls or women that become role models for these girls.