

EAEA Statement on Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems.

December 2008

A response to the consultation on the Green Paper from the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

The EAEA welcomes the publication of the Green Paper and the opportunity provided by the Commission to participate in the debate on how education policies may better address the challenges posed by immigration and internal EU mobility flows.

The EAEA is an association which promotes adult learning and the widening of participation and access to formal and informal adult education for all, particularly for groups currently under-represented by

- providing policy advocacy for lifelong learning at an European level;
- developing practice through publications, projects and training;
- international co-operation with other stakeholders in the field

The EAEA has 131 members from 41 countries (of which 25 are EU members). The majority of the members organisations are NGOs. Many of our member organizations work with migrant communities.

Introduction

The EAEA fully recognises the credibility of the background and challenges described in the Green Paper. The prevalence of educational underachievement of migrant children in the school systems of many EU countries acts as a further barrier to economic and social integration of migrant communities. By examining the causes and consequences of these levels of educational disadvantage, Member States may be able to share policy and practice approaches to address the challenges.

Policy Challenges

The Green Paper provides evidence of the policy challenges.

The EAEA would like to suggest further exploration of the different educational outcomes of different migrant communities.

Many EU counties are experiencing 'super diversity' as a relatively new phenomenon. In the past, where migrant communities existed in member states they tended to be relatively small in number.

In the UK for example the population of a major city may have been made up of the host community and two or three large and relatively stable migrant communities from the former

commonwealth. In the last 10 years however the number of migrant communities has grown considerably and is much more diverse, with migrants from a large number of countries, both inside and outside the EU. The patterns of settlement also are more diverse with new migrant communities moving to smaller towns and rural areas. The migrants include refugees, those seeking family reunion, students, and economic migrants. Among the latter category there are groups that intend to stay in the UK, those who intend to return home and those who migrate frequently from one country to another. The educational achievements of migrant groups varies considerably. Some, such as those from India and Eastern Europe are highly successful in initial education in the UK; others including those from Bangladesh and Pakistan do far less well than the host community. In considering policy responses to underachievement in initial education it is necessary not to view migrants as a homogeneous group, but rather as a set of diverse groups with different characteristics and different barriers and opportunities to meet the challenges of migration. Different communities may require different policy initiatives to enable them to make progress in national school systems and their new localities.

Policy Responses

Involving parents

The Green Paper identifies the important role that mothers play in influencing school performance. In some migrant communities mothers (and grandmothers, who also have a child rearing role) are the family members with the fewest opportunities to learn the language of the host community. This may be because they are not economically active and therefore are not seen as in need of language learning for employment; they may have fewer contacts outside their own language group; they may have heavy family responsibilities which keep them in the home; and they may have no access to the money necessary to pay for language classes.

However this lack of knowledge of the language used at school means that mothers cannot easily support their children's learning or understand the school and the pre-school systems or wider developmental opportunities that their children may benefit from.

An important policy response to this challenge is to ensure that women gain access to language learning, which is appropriate to their situation. Primary schools or nurseries are ideal locations for parent education where parents and grandparents can learn the language with a view to supporting children's learning.

Family learning initiatives can also involve parents from the host and settled communities and aid the integration of migrant communities.

Starting Learning at the earliest opportunity

Evidence from a range of projects suggests that the earlier children and adults gain access to learning opportunities in the new country, the more motivated they will be to succeed. When new migrants arrive in an EU country there is often a delay before the children gain school places and an even longer delay before adults gain the right to access language learning. During the waiting period both children and adults learn to survive without learning the language or gaining accurate knowledge about their new surroundings. It is important that policy responses are developed to

enable new migrants to have their learning needs and existing learning achievements assessed in order to provide appropriate school or learning programmes at the very earliest opportunity.

Recognising prior learning

The Green Paper states that the knowledge that migrants have accumulated loses its value in a new country. It states that the EQF should improve this situation for migrating EU citizens. However third country migrants are not likely to benefit from this development. The EAEA suggests that further developments to recognise the knowledge and experience of all migrants gained through formal and non-formal learning should be speeded up.

In view of the need for more teachers and support staff in schools with migrant backgrounds it is clear that systems to recognise and build upon the experience of migrants as educators in their home countries would assist migrant children and adults in their new learning environments.

The Role of Adult Education

The Green Paper suggests that partnerships between schools and voluntary and community organisations could contribute towards raising the expectations of migrant parents, their children and their teachers. Such partnerships could also enable migrant children to benefit from wider educational and cultural experiences in their new countries and provide mentors for young migrants. Migrants' organisations can also help to provide the support necessary to maintain the home languages through the provision of after school clubs etc.

There is a role for adult education in providing the support for community organisations in developing such partnerships, roles and capacities, and in training volunteers from both migrant and host communities to work together and understand the cultures and contexts of intercultural dialogue.

The Role of the EU

The Commission has already played an important role in identifying the challenges and producing both the Green paper and the synthesis of research findings for policy makers.

This role could be developed by continuing to identify evidence of the needs, policy responses and examples of strategies and good practice. Consideration could be given to drawing up guidelines for the basic requirements to meet the educational needs of new migrants- both children and adults. In doing so the learning needs of adults should be taken into consideration, since the family experiences of children have the greatest influence on their learning outcomes. All parents should understand the educational systems of the countries in which they are living; the expectations of the school systems regarding their children's learning; the support they as parents should provide before and during their children's schooling; and the wider opportunities that their children should be able to participate in. Family and Community education should therefore have a significant place in the measures designed at policy and programme level in order to ensure that migration and mobility enables EU countries to benefit from the talents of new migrant communities.

Sue Waddington

President of the European Association for the Education of Adult
Dec 2008.