

MIGRATION

Barriers to access to education for migrant children

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Abstract

As migration trends escalate and child migrations patterns rise, G20 countries need to rethink policy frameworks and ensure that they facilitate ease of access to education for migrant children. Policies around regularization of stay, inclusive pedagogies and education funding should be strategically developed to enhance enrollments of children of school going age in schools. In the long run these children will become a worthwhile investment as a skilled labor force, participating meaningfully in the labour market and in the economy.

Challenge

The past two decades have seen escalating trends of South-South migration in comparison to South-North movements. Current estimates by the *IOM World Migration Report (2018)*¹ show that there are approximately 258 million international migrants globally. Recent statistics also show that global displacement as a migration factor is very high, estimating that there are about 40 million internally displaced migrants and more than 22 million refugees. Although trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean (irregular) migration from Africa to Europe is prevalent, Dick and Scraven (2018) note that migration within the African continent is much more prevalent than migration from Africa to Europe. At the centre of migration patterns is the fact that G20 countries have recently received significant migrant in-flows. The *Global Displacement and Migration Trends Report 2017*² shows that almost two thirds of all international migrants, live in the G20 countries.

Amidst this escalating (South-South) migration trend, the number of migrant children across the globe has also risen. A dataset provided by UNICEF shows that out of the 244 million global migrants in 2015, 31 million were children, while a 2016 report shows that nearly 50 million children across the globe have migrated.³ Specific country reports produced by UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM⁴ show that between 1 January and 31 December 2016, 100,264 children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria, while Yaqub (2009) shows that already in 2009 Argentina, South Africa and Chile were hosts to an estimated total of 1,359,183 migrant children. Literature makes a clear distinction between unaccompanied migrant children or children separated from

1 www.iom.int/wmr/world-migration-report-2018

2 www.oecd.org/g20/topics/employment-and-social-policy/G20-OECD-migration.pdf

3 <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration/>

4 http://www.iomvienna.at/sites/default/files/UNHCR_UNICEF_IOM%20Factsheet%20on%20refugee%20and%20migrant%20children%20in%20Europe_201....pdf



both parents (Yaqub, 2009) and accompanied migrant children, thereby implying differential challenges of education access (Hashim and Thorsen 2011).

Despite the different categories assigned to migrant children, they have a right to education enshrined in several international protocols such as for *example Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Migrant children often struggle to get access to good quality education and learning opportunities in their host countries due to a variety of barriers that are both individual and systemic. As a result, their learning is interrupted.

There has been a global realization of the need to protect migrant children's right to education and address barriers to their education access (Hashim, 2005). In the 2016 Agenda for Action on Children, Migration and Displacement, UNICEF called on governments to protect children's rights and to "keep all refugee and migrant children learning..." (UNICEF 2017: 111-112). There is therefore a global recognition that successful integration of migrants into labor markets starts with provision of access to quality educational opportunities. It should be noted that quality education is not just a concern for migrant children but for locals too. Initiatives to address this barrier should be targeted at local children too. It should however be noted that efforts to realize the right to education for migrant children cannot, however take a blanket approach. They have to be contextualized to specific countries or regions.

Proposal

Towards facilitating access to education for migrant children in G20 countries

As hosts to a big proportion of the global migrant population and therefore migrant children, G20 countries have a collective responsibility of facilitating ease of access to education for migrant children, and realize such children's right to education. Beyond being a social responsibility, this is a right recognized in several regional and international conventions and agreements⁵. Making education accessible to migrant children is a step towards preparing them for future integration into the economic and labor market, and breaking the cycle of poverty that often comes with a migrant

5 Examples include: The Convention on the protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their families, 1990, Article 12.4; African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), 2009 Article 9.2(b); European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950 (Article 14, Article 2 of the Optional Protocol 1 and Article 1 of the Optional Protocol 12).



status. In order to do this G20 countries need to focus on the following policy areas:

- **Immigration laws that act as an enabler not a barrier to education access:** Countries need to consider developing flexible immigration legislation that facilitates the regularization of migrants, and access to educational resources in host countries. In doing this countries should draw from best practices from other G20 member states in order to work towards the possibility of related, if not similar G20 migrant legislative frameworks.
- **Inclusive pedagogies:** G20 education systems should move towards curriculum reforms and teaching and learning practices that embrace diversity of cultures and languages. Education policies in G20 countries should legislate teaching and learning methodologies that integrate children from different cultures, who speak different languages. The policy aims and implementation should work towards integrating migrant children into host education systems and communities, without alienating them and isolating them into “foreign/migrant children’s programs”. For this, G20 policymakers need to draw on ample available research in this area, and documented best practices in other regions globally.
- **Provision of financial resources and exemptions for those who cannot afford education:** Since economic resources are some of the barriers to access to education, G20 countries should make policies that make it easy for migrant children to get access to education funding, and to be legible for exemptions where a country has that facility for the local population.

Addressing these policy areas will move towards the empowerment of migrant children and a facilitation of their preparedness for economic participation. This is an investment into the future of not only individuals but economies because a skilled labor force is an economic asset. This policy brief moves towards seeing migration as an economic asset and not as a burden.

Systemic barriers to access to admissions into schools

Gaining access to quality education through the formal schooling system for migrant children is often barricaded by national legislation governing regularisation of stay and admissions for foreign students. In some member states there are high fee categories for foreign born students, which some migrant children from low income families cannot afford, and admission into public schools is characterised by preference for local students. In this way access to education becomes unequal and may prevent migrant children to access schools completely.



According to the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency released a report 2016 showing that more than half – 3.7 million – of the 6 million school-age children under its mandate have no access to school. Only 50% of refugee children attended primary school. In addition to that, the report pointed out that Some 1.75 million refugee children are not in primary school and 1.95 million refugee adolescents are not in secondary school, and the worst fact that refugees are five times more likely to be out of school than the global average. This corroborates a survey of migration policies in 28 countries, including 14 ‘developed’ countries and 14 ‘developing’ countries, Klugman and Pereira (2009) established that 40% of the developed countries and over 50% of developing countries did not allow children with irregular status access to schooling. A UNICEF (2017) report also shows that in countries such as Germany, entry into the school system for migrant children is often determined by factors such as the country of origin; the rules of the federal state where they land; and their prospects for permanent residence in Germany. In South Africa, there is inconsistency between the legislative frameworks regarding admission of migrant students in schools and what the schools implement in practice. Crush and Tawodzera (2012) show that schools may demand study permits and birth certificates which are often difficult to obtain for these children. The Report to the Commission of Human Rights (2012), shows that, in some cases, parents are returned home by the South African Department of Home Affairs to obtain birth certificates or additional documentation, even if their child was born in South Africa. For many parents, such trips are financially impossible, or they pose a security risk, therefore, their children’s enrolment are delayed or denied completely. In this regard, access to education is not universally guaranteed, especially for children with irregular status as alluded to in various reports (Crush and Tawodzera 2011, Report to the Foundation for Human Rights 2012, Bartlet 2015, and UNICEF 2017).

Policy Recommendations: Solutions to barriers to access to admissions in schools

- G20 countries should make a concerted effort to ensure that their government systems adhere to the international protocols which enshrine the fact that all children have the same right of access to education, regardless of their status or place of origin.
- G20 countries should ensure that at the local level appropriate policies and programming related to education rights for migrant children are developed and utilised.
- G20 countries should establish mechanisms through which migrant parents can independently report discrimination where access to schools has been unfairly denied due to systemic policies or educational institutions.



- G20 countries should strengthen the capacities of relevant institutions in hosting countries to provide better quality education and to increase enrolment rates.

The Language Barrier in the classroom

Many migrant children reside in countries which do not share any of the languages in their linguistic repertoire. The UNICEF (2017) analysis of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) global database shows that in 2016 an estimated 66% of refugees were living in countries where none of the official languages were spoken in their countries of origin, while 34% were living in places where one or more of the official languages is spoken in their country of origin. For children in these situations who have to enrol in schools, this can be a serious barrier to education attainment.

When migrant children enrol in schools where their language is not spoken, they are confronted with the challenge of having to learn concepts in a language they do not understand. Learning the new language along with new concepts takes time and this causes such children to lag behind in their work. Crush and Tawodzera (2011) show that while this may be advantageous to local students, given the well know benefits of mother tongue education, it disadvantages migrant students because they take time to adapt to the language. The Report to the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa (2012) established that migrants identified language as a pervasive barrier to educational access. The report also established that there is a shortage of English medium schools to which migrant children can be enrolled and, among the well-performing government schools which are in high demand, their admission is compromised by their linguistic abilities.

Recommendations for addressing the language barrier

- G20 should ensure that education systems develop curriculum that has content that can be adapted to different languages. In that way teachers will be able to develop education interventions and programmes that address the language barrier for migrant children. In particular education systems should work towards the adoption trans-linguaging pedagogies to enable children to learn using the range of languages in their linguistic repertoire.
- G20 countries should ensure that countries offer language and literacy support programmes for migrant children. This should be coupled with language support capacity-building for teachers to empower them to develop and run programmes that will facilitate the integration of migrant children in



the local system. This will enhance a sense of acceptability for these children while it also enhances their learning abilities.

- International bodies and organisations that work in the sphere of migration should also create particular Education Programs for Migrant Children that would support host countries to deliver these extra capacity building initiatives to enable migrant children to better access to education.

Financial and economic barriers

For some migrant parents who are not economically stable (in particular forced migrants), children's education costs, which could include school enrolment fees and other secondary costs such as transportation, school uniforms, and materials, are unaffordable and can therefore potentially impede the right to access education. In countries like South Africa, where there are fee exemption opportunities for families below specific income groups, migrant parents may not be able to access this exemption. They are either barred from getting these exemptions by lack of certain required documentation or preference for local children. While for migrant children from better-off families it is easy to enrol in private schools, poorer migrants cannot afford the private school sector and the fee exemption would make a good contribution (Crush and Tawodze 2012, Report to the Foundation for Human Rights Prepared 2012). This restricted access to exemptions for needy parents constitute a barrier for their children's access to education.

Recommendations: Solution for financial barriers

- G20 countries should develop and implement inclusive policy options that will enable migrant children to equally access exemption to fees or any other financial opportunities available in the specific country in the same way as local children. Examples of segregating policies is seen in the main host countries in the MENA region, such as Jordan and Lebanon, which established a double Shift schooling system that resulted in segregation and low-quality education of refugee children.
- G20 countries should also recognise the specific financial needs of migrant children and make available funding for their education. Such funding instruments should be tailored to meet migrant children's needs and be distributed without discrimination. They should also be accompanied by a clearly constructed sustainability plan so that there will be continuity of the programmes even after the funding ends.



It is envisaged that if these policy areas are addressed the G20 countries will successfully provide access to education for migrant children. This will foster future skills preparedness that will see these children participating in the economy in the future. In that way the G20 countries would have invested in the future and improved future social capital.



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