



Parents Engage

Policy Recommendations for migrant and refugee parents' engagement in schools

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Summary of the Project

Parents Engage is a two-year Key Action (KA)2 Erasmus + project in the field of school education whose primary aim is to reinforce teachers' skills and to equip them with appropriate tools to foster and build productive relations with migrant and refugee families. Another objective is to enable those families to be more actively involved in their children's school life and education. As parents and teachers constitute the lynchpin for the home-school collaboration and a direct stakeholder in the support and encouragement of young learners' school achievement, their effective engagement plays a vital role in this direction.

Readers can learn more about the project by visiting its website: <https://parentsengage.eu/>

The core objectives of Parents Engage project are the following:

- 1) to capitalise on the experiential knowledge of Civil Society Organisations (or CSOs) working with migrants and refugees by researching and evaluating relevant innovative practices
- 2) to provide evidence-based teacher training for enabling teachers/ educators to promote parental engagement at school so as to improve the academic performance of children and avoid possible Early school leaving^[1] (ESL) of refugee and migrant children students that can negatively impact their smooth inclusion and progress at school (considering the primary and secondary education level in each participating country).
- 3) to reach out to migrant and refugee parents, providing tailored supportive materials for increasing their engagement in their children's schooling.

Parents Engage project is implemented by a consortium of 7 European partners (public institutions and non-profit organisations) from 6 different countries (Italy, Greece, Germany, Cyprus, Netherlands, Germany, and Türkiye). It brings together partners with high expertise and extensive experience in the area of inclusive migrant education and parental involvement. In particular, the project's consortium team consists of the following partners:

Stichting International Parents Alliance - IPA (project's coordinator, the Netherlands)

Stimmuli for Social Change (Greece)

CESIE (Italy)

Buyuk Ortadogu Saglik ve Egitim Vakfi – BOSEV (Türkiye)

Center for Social Innovation LTD (Cyprus)

Goethe-Institut E.V. – Athens Branch (Germany)

TUD FaCE – Technische Universität Dresden (Germany)

As already stressed, the project pays attention to the enhancement of teachers' capacities to design effective responses for school–family links, by informing and strengthening refugee and migrant parents to be actively involved in their children's education. For this goal to be achieved, the project focuses on addressing the multiple needs of the following target groups:

a) **Teachers (direct beneficiary):** considering the increased flow of migrant and refugee populations since 2015 in Europe, schoolteachers are called upon to manage and adjust to multicultural environments today, by improving the inclusion and education of migrant and refugee students. As such, the school staff around Europe needs to respond effectively to these challenges and be trained in multiculturalism on how to support these students and their parents. The project emphasizes the provision of consolidated tools and training material for teacher staff, effectively improving their professional development.

b) **Parents (direct beneficiary):** migrant and refugee parents' participation in school life can be hindered by multiple barriers and challenges within education and society. Often, there is less engagement by them in their children's educational life while many migrant students lag in educational achievements. Strengthening parental inclusion in local structures could enhance their involvement in their children's education. Parents Engage project highlights this potential, by leveraging the knowledge and initiatives already carried out by CSOs in collaboration with schools on parents' engagement in school education and school system.

c) **Students (indirect beneficiary):** migrant and refugee children often have lower academic outcomes, and are at higher risk of school dropout compared to children with no migrant background due to various vulnerable factors both at the educational and socioeconomic levels. As parental engagement in their children's schooling has proven positive effects on the academic performance of children, the project focuses on building bridges between school and family, so that migrant families can have equal representation and participation opportunities at school, and work together with the school staff for the benefit of their children.

After presenting the target groups on which the project concentrates, the main outcomes that will be developed are displayed below:

Identification, collection, assessment, and analysis of existing innovative educational initiatives
(Result 1)

Development of Parents Engage Online Platform, including interactive training materials for teachers and a small-scale pilot in school of each country (Result 2)

Creation of a mobile application for parents (Result 3)

Digital Storytelling (set of audio-visual material) videos with teachers and refugee and migrant parents for sharing their experience (Result 4)

Policy recommendations for migrant and refugee parental engagement in schools (Result 5)

Executive summary

This document is the last deliverable of the Parents Engage project. Building on the research conducted for the first project result, “Collection and analysis of innovative initiatives engaging migrant and refugee parents in school life”, the experiences of partners and the participants of the pilot training and multiplier events and the desk research conducted by partners to collect data for this deliverable, this document offers policy recommendations for European, national and local/regional level that policy makers may consider while other actors can use in their advocacy work to support the successful inclusion of migrant families in society, through the school, as a social center of the community, and to prepare the school staff for their professional role in the inclusion process. The recommendations all start with key messages that are broader, more general recommendations for policy makers, then a description of how we know it or the evidence they are based on, some good practices when available implementing the recommendation, and that are concrete steps policy makers can take at the different levels.

The recommendations focus on the professional, and thus initiator role the teachers and school leaders play in facilitating parental engagement in the school, for all parents, and the necessary changes in training in and pre-service teachers to be able to perform this responsibility as a part of their job description. Parents have to be seen as equals to the school staff, and the experts of their children, regardless of their socio-economical background, cooperating with the school for the benefit of the child, building on mutual respect. Schools need to cooperate with the experts of NGO-s and CSO-s, as well as the community to share resources, build trust and learn from each other. Migrants families arriving to European countries from within and outside of Europe, should receive support to not only learn the culture and language of the new country, but to keep and nurture their heritage, and mother tongue.

Introduction

In the diverse and dynamic landscape of European education, the engagement of parents with a migrant background in the school community is still a pressing challenge and a valuable opportunity in most European countries. Recognizing the wide range of needs of migrant families within the European member states, this policy recommendation document offers targeted strategies to enhance their participation in their children's education. As most schools strive to be beacons of inclusivity, it is essential to acknowledge the specific hurdles faced by migrant parents, including language barriers, cultural differences, and a sense of unfamiliarity with the education system, and the opportunities schools and policymakers have to help overcome these barriers. This document recommends

evidence-based policies designed to bridge these gaps and establish a collaborative partnership between schools and migrant families on European, national, and local levels.

Parental Engagement as a responsibility of the school

Key messages

- Regularly engaging with all parents needs to be a mandatory part of teachers' jobs.
- Teachers need to be compensated for the time they spend engaging with their students' parents.

How we know it

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children, and is applicable in every single European country. In this document it is clearly stated that parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and the development and the education of the child. The school is one of the places the children are educated, but not the only one. For the best interest of the child, formal and informal educators need to cooperate, share information, and experiences. The partnership between parents and teachers is the key for a child's success. Recognizing this, it is imperative to make parental engagement an explicit and integral part of teachers' responsibilities. Studies consistently highlight the positive impact of parental engagement in academic achievement, behavior, and overall well-being. When parents actively participate in their child's formal education, it creates a collaborative and supportive learning environment, enriching the educational experience.

Teachers, being professionally trained educators, bring in the pedagogic expertise on how these relationships can be effectively built, despite socio-economic differences between the teacher and the family, and can support the parents with evidence-based practices to overcome challenges. As facilitators of this crucial collaboration, they play a pivotal role in fostering effective communication and cooperation between school and home. They must invest additional time and effort outside regular classroom hours to organize events, workshops, and parent-teacher conferences. This commitment requires acknowledgment and compensation, given the tangible benefits it brings to students, classrooms, and the school community. Compensating teachers for their dedication to parental engagement is not just a matter of recognizing their extra efforts but also a practical

acknowledgment of the time invested in professional development. Teachers continually enhance their communication and collaboration skills to engage with parents effectively. This ongoing commitment to improvement is an integral part of ensuring the success of the collaborative partnership.

What the different levels can do

European Level

- Financing the development of good practices and examples of how parental engagement can be a mandatory, paid part of teacher's job description
- Collection and promotion, and supporting the upscaling of of internationally developed good practices of how parental engagement can be a mandatory, paid part of teachers' job description
- Recommendations for adequate financial compensation and support for teachers

National Level

- Parental Engagement as a specified element of teachers' professional responsibilities, and review the current responsibilities they have
- Adequate time and compensation for teachers' various tasks
- Coaching and mentoring support for schools to engage on parents on a regular basis

Local Level

- Specifying parental engagement as a part of teachers' job description and annual performance review
- Specifying the tasks school leaders have to manage and support their school's teachers in engaging with parents

Examples of good practice

134th Primary School of Athens, Greece

All teachers conduct monthly meetings with the parents of the children in their classes. Prior to each meeting, both the teacher and the parents suggest an agenda for discussion. During these meetings, teachers have the opportunity to address issues of anger or conflict, while also sharing the achievements of the children. Parents are encouraged to express their concerns or make suggestions

that involve their participation in school life. For instance, one parent proposed the idea of an "open class day," during which all parents and children had the opportunity to learn about the traditions and customs of the country of origin of the other children, including aspects like cooking.

Initially, the school collaborated with NGOs for interpretation services, but over the years, parents have taken on the role of interpreters themselves. At the beginning of each school year, parents inform the teacher of the languages they are proficient in (such as Albanian, French, Arabic, etc.). If there is a need for translation during meetings, the responsible parent not only provides live interpretation but also translates the invitation into the relevant language.

Pre-service teacher training reforms

Key messages

- **Teacher training curricula need to have parental engagement as an integral part of the program.**
- **Teacher training curricula need to focus on equipping new teachers with knowledge and awareness of different cultures and how to work with students and their families from them**

How we know it

One of the most impactful actions to change the reality migrant students and their families face in schools, is to redesign the teacher training curricula of universities. At the moment, most countries do not train their teacher students, particularly on the topic of parental engagement, let alone the engagement of families not belonging to the majority population, because of their migrant, or different cultural heritage. If teachers are already trained to expect a heterogeneous student body, with a variety of different family backgrounds, it is much less shocking for them to deal with the current reality of European classrooms, where multiple languages might be spoken, there are various socio-economic statuses being featured, and the children come from different cultures. As research shows, teachers tend to be females, belonging to the majority ethnicity and religion, coming from middle-class families, and without proper training, it can be challenging to successfully interact with people belonging to different classes of society as themselves. Students and their families in their classroom may face challenges they have never encountered themselves and without proper preparation on how to deal with these situations they might react in an insensitive way. Teacher training students should have the opportunity to visit and practice in schools at diverse locations with diverse populations, so they are ready to teach in whatever classroom they end up in after their graduation.

What the different levels can do

European Level

- Supporting the development of a teacher training curricula focusing on parental engagement of a diverse group of families
- Supporting the development of a teacher training curricula focusing on cultural diversity among school stakeholders
- International exchange, opportunities for teacher training students, particularly to European countries that have a high number of migrants to the home country of the teachers

National Level

- Making it a mandatory requirement for accreditation to include cultural diversity among school stakeholders in the teacher training curricula, as well as providing professional support for teacher training institutions on how to include this topic
- Making it a mandatory requirement for accreditation to include parental engagement of a diverse group of families in the teacher training curricula, as well as providing professional support for teacher training institutions on how to include this topic

Local Level

- Opportunities for teacher training students to visit local schools
- Facilitation of knowledge sharing opportunities between schools, families, community organizations, NGOs and teacher-training students
- Implementation of a teacher training curricula focusing on cultural diversity among school stakeholders
- Implementation of a teacher training curricula focusing on parental engagement of a diverse group of families

Examples of good practice

Teacher training across Europe

In Germany, all teacher training students need to learn to teach German as a second language, to help them deal with the large amount of student population, who do not have German as their first language.

In Ireland, the religion classes even in church schools teach about multiple religions, respecting the religious freedom of all children, but also acknowledging the important part religion plays in a country's cultural heritage.

In the University of Malta, teacher training students have to take a course called “Parental Involvement” where they provide a “general overview of the concept of parental involvement in education with different possibilities for genuine parental participation”. It is a field work course, with parents and in-service teachers invited as guests to share their experiences with the teacher training students. Find [here](#) the description of the course.

In-service teacher training to equip teachers with tools and methodologies needed to support the needs of the ever-changing student body

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Key messages

- Teachers need to update their skills and methodologies to work successfully with parents
- Teachers need to update their skills and methodologies to work with culturally and linguistically diverse groups
- Parents can be an essential resource to support the school with the development of certain necessary skills.

How we know it

A high percentage of current in-service teachers are using outdated methodologies and lacking essential skills to engage their students' diverse group of parents successfully, as their pre-service training did not include these topics, and only a low number of teachers have access to in-service trainings to update these skills. Education practice and research is developing rapidly, and with the high workload of teachers, it is tough to keep up to date with the latest developments in successful

methodologies without adequate support and time dedicated to professional development. While in almost every school, there are opportunities for teachers to educate themselves further, skills related explicitly to parental engagement have not been in focus. As successful parental engagement has proven to impact the student's academic outcomes greatly, it is in everyone's interest to prioritize these skills and competencies to be developed so that teachers can successfully reach every student's parent. In every school, there are some practices in place, such as parent-teacher meetings, where there is communication between the family and the school; these practices tend only to reach a low number of parents, and often only those belonging to the majority society. The most vulnerable parents, often with low socio-economic status and or a different mother tongue or culture than the teachers, are generally labelled as 'hard-to-reach' parents whom the schools do not yet have the tools to communicate successfully with. There are various ways to reach all parents. However, the teachers need to be motivated to want to reach every family, and they also need to be trained to apply these methodologies. Sometimes, parents who are labeled as hard to reach, have an easier time to first develop trustful connections with other parents, or community leaders, who can be used to help build bridges between the school and those parents who have not yet been reached. It is essential not to dismiss those parents who don't have regular contact with the school by claiming that they simply don't care, but to explore the obstacles that prevent them from regularly coming to school or successfully engaging with their children's teachers.

What the different levels can do

European Level

- Supporting the development of methodologies to reach all families
- Supporting the development of teacher training materials
- Facilitating international exchanges between teachers to learn from different national practices

National Level

- Financing and facilitating in-service teacher training

Local Level

- Regularly performing needs assessment based on the local realities and adapting local training plans based on these needs
- School leaders need to monitor and realize if new needs are emerging in their school and organize trainings themselves or reach out to local training providers for support

Examples of good practice

Parents'R'US project

Parent'r'us was a European Erasmus+ project consisting of a consortium of NGOs and schools from five European countries, one being international. Its main aim was to support teachers in increasing and promoting parental engagement to support children's academic achievement and well-being at school. The objective also focused on enhancing teachers' competencies through an innovative mentoring mode integrated under a holistic approach. It was mainly addressed to elementary school students, parents, and teachers. The mentoring model was piloted in four countries (Romania, Spain, Hungary, Portugal). Strong and equal partnership between parents and schools is essential for student success. Still, it is often not successfully established and maintained in the case of families with low socio-economic status. Parent'r'us was designed to change this perception by peer mentoring parents and supporting teachers in the process of necessary mindset change through a unique and innovative mentoring model. The project paid particular attention to the increasing need for empowering disadvantaged families, providing them with information and ideas about parenting competencies in their children's school life and on how to help them at home. More information [here](#).

ParENTrepreneurs project

The ParENTrepreneurs project was an Erasmus+ funded project, focusing on developing the entrepreneurial skills of parents (or any adult) and as secondary target group, of their children. Entrepreneurial skills, such as financial knowledge, creativity, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving and active listening are basic skills necessary for everyone in the 21st century regardless of their socio-economic status, or occupation. In the project there is an online and a face-to-face training available, as well a certification process, to recognize that while often unacknowledged, these skills are also part of the day-to-day parenting, and through the certification procedure they can potentially be transferred to the labour market. Teachers will find the trainings very relevant to develop their own skills as well. More information [here](#).

Inclusive engagement celebrating and preserving cultural and linguistic diversity

Key messages

- Children should be supported to learn their mother tongue as well as the language of instruction.
- Parents cannot be excluded from school due to language barriers
- The previous education and knowledge migrants have obtained need to be acknowledged and recognized

How we know it

As per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child all children have the right of mother tongue education. While it is essential for children to have a way to successfully communicate in their new country of residence (this might mean an operational knowledge of the country, or the use of a third language spoken by many), they have the right also to nurture their knowledge of their mother tongue. According to Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) outcomes, migrant children don't have lower results if they can fill in the survey in a language, they feel more confident in. Sometimes, their families have low reading and writing skills themselves, and they cannot provide adequate support, or they simply think that it is more important to focus on the language of instruction, and they don't spend enough time teaching their own language and culture to their children. Schools and teachers, being professional educators, should encourage parents to teach their heritage to their children and support them in this task, and provide the necessary support to ensure the equal rights of children regardless of their family's educational background. Schools can be a place where all stakeholders can celebrate their culture while learning about others. Parents who don't have a common language with the teacher, cannot be excluded, and it is advised against to use the children as translators. Community organizations, NGOs, and other families with the same culture can be essential partners in this knowledge exchange, sustainably utilizing resources.

Many times children and their families arriving in a new country seem to have low education or lack of skills because they don't speak the language of instruction or the country's language. Teachers need to be trained to recognize the difference between lack of subject knowledge and lack of language

knowledge, and there need to be skill-adequate opportunities for children to continue their education so they are not falling behind simply because of language difficulties. This is also true for the parents, for example many migrants have been trained as professional educators in their own country, however due to the huge differences in national standards, usually almost none of their experience and knowledge is recognized, forcing them to completely restart their education if they wish to do the same job in their new country of residence. The successful inclusion of migrant teachers in national education systems would diversify the teaching body, and make it much more adequate in catering for diverse school stakeholder needs.

What the different levels can do

European Level

- Development of international standards that allow the successful inclusion of migrant students on the proper level
- Development of international standards for various professional roles, particularly for professional educators, and school staff to facilitate the inclusion of migrant professionals in the national systems

National Level

- Flexibility in migrant student enrolment, allowing students to join schools on the adequate level
- Recognition of skills and experience of migrant workers

Local Level

- Regular local needs assessment
- Development of multilingual methods and resources
- Adequate language support in the form of translators or technology

Examples of good practice

Open School Doors project

The Open School Doors (OSD) development programme was an international project that was implemented between 2017 and 2019 and was coordinated by the Media Center and the Faculty of Educational Sciences of TU Dresden, in close cooperation with educational practitioners and researchers from Austria, Belgium, Greece and Great Britain. It was investigating how parents with a migration background can be more actively involved in the education of their children with the help

of digital media, such as the development of community maps with all relevant local resources for migrant families. It was designed to support schools (e.g., leaders, teachers, and support staff) to build knowledge and understanding of challenges faced by newly arrived families and to develop new ways of bridging the division between schools and local communities so as to impact positively on the lives of young people and their families. Find more information [here](#).

DENISE International School in the Netherlands

The New International School of Esprit (DENISE) offers universally accessible international education based on the reality of today and the collective responsibility for the future of the world in which we live. The school is in the Netherlands, and students learn in Dutch and English. In addition, they use their native languages in preparation for an English-language or Dutch-language diploma program. The school uses five programs, so that each student can receive tailor-made service based on their own background and can make their own choices for their own development. In addition to the academic learning goals, DENISE also places great emphasis on the individual development of each student by setting personal learning goals. Special attention is paid to developing qualities such as thoughtfulness, resilience, adaptability and international awareness. The school is a place where parents actively participate and help shape the international profile of the school as a community. There is a strong focus to prepare the students for an international life, in which they can take an active role as global citizens. The school is a public school with students from various socio-economic background from over 70 countries.

Collaborative partnerships for an inclusive society

Key messages

- Schools need to reach out and use the expertise of NGO-s working for and with the migrant and refugee community
- Schools need to involve community leaders of different migrant communities to build trust and learn about culture

How we know it

Non-governmental and civil society organizations have been developing various research, good practices, and partnerships with international, national, and local organizations, government bodies, community organizations, schools, and families for a long time. During the refugee crisis many CSOs often took on large parts of the informal and non-formal response actions, but their contributions have remained undocumented due to their grassroots or sporadic nature, despite the strong hypothesis that valuable experiential insights may be found in their practices. Still, it is important to partake in this knowledge, because ‘civil society actors can play a vital role in migration-related policymaking with their critical and on-the-ground knowledge of what migrants’ needs and wants are’ (Desvachez 2015). It is in everyone's interest to allow their expertise to be utilized and their connections and experts to be allowed in schools. They can be used as a bridge between schools and migrant families, as often they already built trustful connections with the most vulnerable groups of society. Allowing them to take part in decision-making and strategizing in schools can bring in multiple points of view that the general school staff or the majority parent population might not be aware of. Community leaders can bring similar value to schools; they can point out some obstacles of parental engagement originating in cultural differences and try to offer solutions on how to overcome these challenges.

What the different levels can do

European Level

- Development of a standards of cooperation between NGO-s and schools
- Development of standards of cooperation between community organizations and schools
- Funding the upscaling of NGO developed methodologies

- Funding for NGO-s to further develop methodologies for the successful engagement of (migrant) families and other challenges schools face

National Level

- Allowing NGO-s to cooperate with schools
- Funding NGO-s to cooperate with schools
- Funding schools to cooperate with NGO-s, and test new methodologies

Local Level

- Providing opportunities for local cooperation of schools, ngo-s, community and industry

Examples of good practice

The PHERECLOS project

The PHERECLOS is aiming to establish "Local Education Clusters" (LECs) of different design as examples of open schooling. All LECs bring together schools and other relevant actors in the education ecosystem in a particular pilot region, supported by a peer mentoring programme. The LECs are incubators for enabling a dialogue between various parties and help to set up joint activities in formal and non-formal education. The LECs also help to develop collaborative learning environments as experimental testbeds for schools, and in parallel, they aim to impact on the quality of science engagement opportunities available in these areas. More information [here](#).

The Learning for Integration Project

The Learning for Integration Project is an ongoing CSO-led practice, implemented by the organisation ELIX mainly at refugee camps at the region of Attica and Korinthos and in organisation's learning centers. It is addressed both to refugee and immigrant children (aged from 3 to 17) and to their parents for boosting their involvement into their schooling process. One of the initiative's top priorities is to respond to the day-to-day educational needs of students and to the familiarisation of their parents with the Greek educational system so as to be more engaged with the children's schooling. Parents actively participate as motivators/ encouragers to the enrollment and learning process of foreign students in the host country. More information [here](#).

TOYS for Inclusion Play Hubs

The "TOYS for Inclusion Play Hubs" is an EU-wide project, composed of 7 partner countries, coordinated by REYN Italia, an international organisation. The initiative focuses on the pre-school children level, as well as on vulnerable children with low education levels. The direct beneficiaries are children, as the workshops are designed to help them develop the necessary skills and knowledge for

formal education. The play hubs are open to all family members to visit the young children and learn about how play can support children's learning development and access information about other family services in the community. Parents mostly act as collaborators, but they also play a supportive role in the hubs. The multi-family workshops in the hubs encourage parental engagement across different families to strengthen community bonds. The community-based Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Play Hubs are located in areas that are reachable for all families and are designed and run by multi-sectoral teams composed of representatives of communities, school and preschool teachers, health services, parents, and local authorities. More information [here](#).

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