

# POLICY BRIEF – TEAMS PROJECT

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Teaching that Matters for Migrant Students (TEAMS project) studied how teachers, schools and education systems facilitate migrant integration including support for learning and socialisation of migrant students and the development of their ‘sense of belonging’ in their school communities. The research has been conducted in seven secondary schools: three in Scotland, two in Sweden and two in Finland, from September 2020 to March 2023 by researchers from the University of Edinburgh, Stockholm University, the University of Jyväskylä and Turku University.

TEAMS focused on professional relationships and collaboration that facilitates migrant integration in schools. The research mapped school social networks to examine whom staff reach out to in order to support migrant students, and how these interactions facilitate inclusive practices. A mixed-method approach was used to collect and analyse data from surveys, on-line logs, interviews and observations in the seven schools.

## VOICES OF KEY ACTORS

Across all three countries, the voices of the students from migrant backgrounds and staff in their schools were included to understand how staff in schools support migrant students among others. In particular, the research highlighted how staff acted as ‘agents of change’ who work above and beyond implementing their professional roles - a process whereby school staff linked with other professionals both within and beyond the schools to provide educational support for migrant students among others.

The schools differed in terms of numbers of migrant students, their socio-economic location in affluent or deprived areas and the institutional structures in the country in which they are located. The below research findings highlighted the challenges faced by migrant students and staff in the receiving systems and the ways of working that help students navigate an unfamiliar school curriculum in an unfamiliar country.

## FINDINGS

### KEY FINDINGS FROM THE TEAMS PROJECT

#### DIFFERENT POLICY APPROACHES

A review of education policies uncovered different approaches to migrant integration in schools, ranging from the universalist support systems of providing for migrants within the mainstream (in Scotland) to targeted support for initial language learning in separate provision (in Finland), and mixed-approaches (in Sweden).

Migrant students are faced with unfamiliar systems and their underlying assumptions about the roles and entitlements of learners and families, and various professional services.

#### PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION AND MIGRANT SUPPORT STRUCTURES

When supporting migrant students, teachers tend to reach out to staff in designated roles, whom they perceive as responsible for these students.

## IMPLICATIONS

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION POLICIES AND PRACTICE AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

Supporting newly-arrived migrant students within the mainstream education, creates opportunities for socialisation and learning among local peers. Removing barriers to learning relies on collaboration with other services such as language specialists, while targeted approaches involve preparatory local language classes.

The receiving systems may differ from those in countries of previous education, and could usefully be made more explicit and accessible to the newly arrived migrant students and their families.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL STAFF AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

One of the main services available to teachers and other staff are specialists who offer support for language learning, personal guidance, and learning.

There are examples of schools in which collaboration around migrant students reflects more general patterns of collaboration, indicating that migrants are supported among other groups.

Teachers exercise professional agency to navigate the institutional structures in order to both implement and adapt policies that they perceive as enablers or barriers for migrant support.

Teachers are best placed to get to know the students and their families. There is a need for empowering staff to recognise the vast amount of tacit knowledge that could be mobilised within the schools.

Teachers could be supported in their schools to use their own teacher agency to better support children from migrant backgrounds among others.

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#### INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

In all schools there are examples of teachers seeking specialist support as a resource for themselves to help them better understand students' experiences and cultural heritage so that they could incorporate such knowledge in various subject teaching.

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#### CLASSROOM AND CURRICULUM PRACTICES

In this way, concern for migrant-specific needs becomes a resource for all students and a means to incorporate cultural and linguistic diversity in the curriculum. Teachers need opportunities to learn about cultural diversity and share resources within and beyond schools.

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#### TEACHER AND SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

The fieldwork data shows examples of migrant integration within wider efforts to develop practices that are generally more inclusive for everyone, accepting diversity as a normal, common feature of schools that routinely discuss and address matters of student diversity.

Conditions that enable teachers to develop inclusive collaboration include time for such collaboration built into daily school routines, and flexibility to use professional knowledge and agency to seek creative ways of teaching diverse groups of learners.

Where professional autonomy is used for flexible collaboration among staff and specialists, it is also beneficial for inclusive practices, and that expert advice which school staff seek for supporting migrant students often aligns closely with 'common sense' and their own professional judgement.

TEAMS data also shows that staff who have a migrant background themselves are seen by colleagues as a valuable resource for supporting migrant students, e.g. due to shared language or knowledge of cultural experiences.

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#### WHOLE-SCHOOL CULTURES AND PRACTICES

This has profound implications for teacher development, and for creating the conditions for collaborative and inclusive school practices. Treating diversity as a norm requires time to reflect, question and discuss practices in a safe environment which allows for different perspectives to be voiced, heard and taken on board in all aspects of school life, e.g. in policies around use of home languages in schools, food, or ways of sharing stories about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students and staff.

In the current economic climate of squeezed budgets, and diminishing numbers of support staff in schools where few specialists are available, this implies the need to consider how specialist support resources and expertise can be best used as a resource for all staff to support migrant students.

This has implications for diversifying the teaching workforce (recruitment policies can be at local authority or national levels), which is yet to reflect the diversity of student populations in today's schools and societies.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES VISIT THE PROJECT WEBSITE: [migrant-education.net](http://migrant-education.net)**

**FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE OPPORTUNITIES, PLEASE EMAIL: [migrant-education@ed.ac.uk](mailto:migrant-education@ed.ac.uk) OR EMAIL THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, DR NATAŠA PANTIĆ, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH [natasa.pantic@ed.ac.uk](mailto:natasa.pantic@ed.ac.uk)**