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Topic 1 of the provisional agenda

**MIGRATION STATISTICS MAINSTREAMING**

**Migrants in the European Union: education issues**

Note by the European Commission\*

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. In recent decades, the European Union has experienced high inflows of migrants from third countries and high internal EU mobility also related to the latest enlargements. While giving an undeniable contribution to European economic development, immigration is having a remarkable impact in terms of social changes calling for effective strategies of integration, as a way of ensuring cohesion and social stability.
2. Integration requires efforts on the part of the migrants themselves and involves several sectors of society: cooperation between government departments, educational authorities, social services, healthcare services, housing authorities, and asylum and immigration services, as well as dialogue with civil society, are essential to support this process<sup>1</sup>.
3. Education can play a key role, as through education migrants can be enabled to fulfil their potential, increasing their opportunities to be successful in social and professional life later on and developing a sense of belonging to the hosting country. That, in turn, contributes to a society which is more equitable, inclusive and respectful of diversity.
4. Numbers are notable: in many EU Member States, 10% pupils were born in another country or their parents did. The figure is around 15% in Belgium, Germany, France and Austria<sup>2</sup>. Trends

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\* Prepared by *Maria Pia Sorvillo, EC – DG EAC*.

<sup>1</sup> Council conclusions on the education of children with migrant background, November 2009

<sup>2</sup> OECD, PISA results 2006

are also very dynamic: in some countries, such as Ireland, Italy and Spain, school pupils born in another country multiplied by 3 or 4 since 2000. As a consequence, the issue of fostering migrant pupils' success school is getting more and more attention at national level and in the EU.

5. Not only children are expected to benefit from an equitable education focussing on the needs of migrants. Also adults can gain from ad hoc learning programs, helping them updating their skills, adapting to the local labour market and to the every day life, and providing a sense of social engagement.

## II. EDUCATION FOR MIGRANTS

6. There is general agreement among EU countries that educational systems should contribute to the successful integration of migrants, granting equal opportunities and high quality provision. It has also to be recognized that more efforts are needed to reach this goal. While a number of children with a migrant background succeed in education, and indeed some are amongst the highest achievers, there is clear evidence that the issue should be high in the agenda of many Member States, as most migrant pupils' performance tends to be significantly lower than their peers' one. Many children with migrant background suffer from educational disadvantages and unequal patterns exist in terms of access to and achievements in education. Evidence of it can be found in the high incidence of early school leavers among migrants, their lower levels of qualification and lower performance, the fact that they are less likely to attend higher education.

7. In order to open a debate on this issue, the European Commission presented a Green Paper on migrants' education<sup>3</sup>, its main aim being to encourage an informed debate on how to address the issue, and start a reflection on possible initiatives at EU level.

8. Some key factors affecting migrants' possibility of succeeding in school were identified and discussed in the Green paper. At the individual level, specific conditions have been found systematically underling the gap in achievement, such as a poor socio-economic background, insufficient knowledge of the instruction language, families' and communities' attitudes towards education.

9. Disadvantaged household conditions are known to be strongly correlated with lower school performance, and migrant pupils often suffer from a poor socio-economic background affecting their opportunities to fully profit of education and get high achievements. In addition to that, the cultural capital of the family can be insufficient, or unfit for the hosting society, or devalued because of the immigration.

10. Language is a key factor, both in relation to pupils and to their parents. Speaking a language which is not the teaching language hamper comprehension of classes and integration in the school environment. Also parents' participation in the school life is hindered, because of the lack of an efficient communication between school and the family.

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<sup>3</sup> Green Paper on "Migration and mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems, European Commission, 2008

11. Moreover, parents' and community's expectations have a role in differentiating pupils' performance. Whenever a more positive value to education is shared inside the family or the community, children are likely to have more positive attitudes towards school, and to succeed in achieving better results and a higher level of education.
12. At the macro level, system characteristics and school organization are very important in shaping the educational environment for migrant students. When a de facto segregation is in place, with high concentration of migrants in the same school or in the same class, pupils' performance is likely to deteriorate<sup>4</sup>. Whether segregation is due to an explicit policy or to the "white flight"<sup>5</sup>, quality of learning may drop because of insufficient interaction between migrant students and classmates skilled in the host language. Another drawback could be a high turn over of teachers.
13. To ensure high quality provision for migrants, competent and motivated teachers are essential. In some systems, teachers could not be able to get the specific training needed to deal with cultural diversity and to teach pupils not fully proficient in the host language.
14. As for early childhood education, even though it is considered extremely relevant to counter future educational disadvantages, it is not always fully available for children of migrants, who could face some difficulties in accessing pre-primary school or enrol at a later age. Their special needs, especially as for language teaching, could not be taken in due consideration, decreasing the positive effect of the early schooling.
15. This short list of factors affecting migrants' achievement in education refers to migrants in general, but it is known that they are quite a diverse group of people. And with respect to education, their behaviour and performance is very faceted. As an example, different levels of achievements have been found between first and second generation students; ethnicity or area of origin also play a major role in shaping their attitudes and results in education<sup>6</sup>.
16. Following the Green Paper and a public consultation on the issue, Council conclusions were approved on the education of children with a migrant background<sup>7</sup>. Member States were invited to increase access to high quality early childhood education and care; improve partnerships with migrant communities and communication with parents; provide targeted support for migrants with special educational needs. In the same document, the Commission was asked to support cooperation and exchange of good practices among the Member States; monitor the achievement gap between native and migrant learners; cooperate with international organization working on related issues.
17. Especially the last two items call for stronger efforts in the field of data collection and data analysis.

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<sup>4</sup> NESSE report "Education and Migration,- strategies for integrating migrant children in European schools and societies", 2008

<sup>5</sup> As an answer to a progressive concentration of migrants in an area, some majority households may move away or withdraw their children for a school with unwanted predominance of minority groups.

<sup>6</sup> Sylke V. Schnepf: "Inequality of learning amongst immigrant children in industrialised countries" IZA discussion paper, february 2008

<sup>7</sup> See note 1

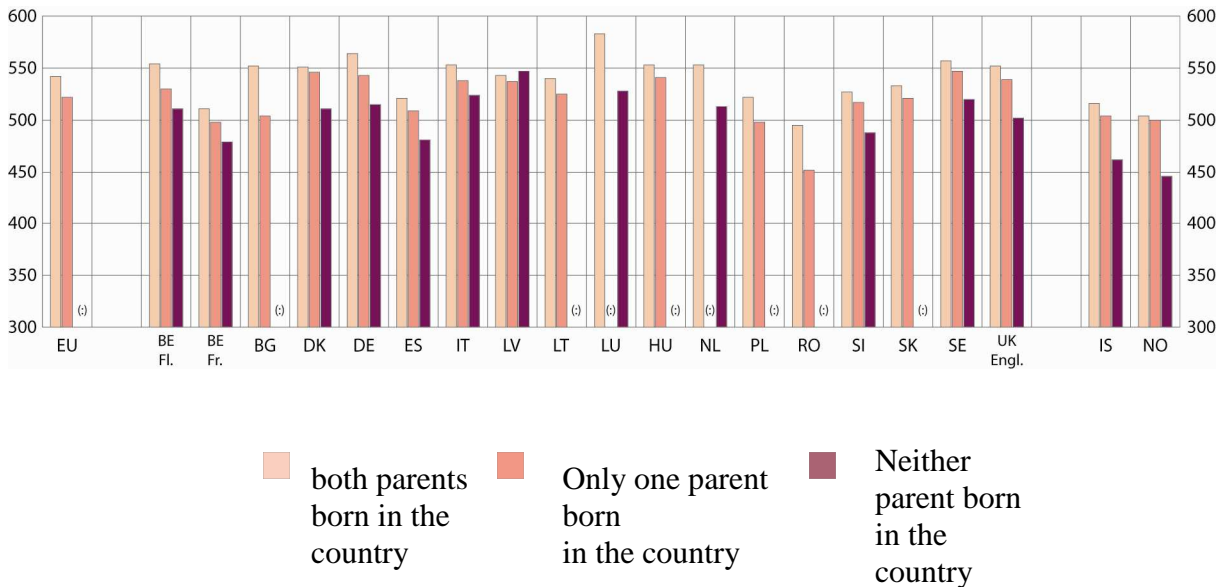
### III. WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW?

18. In order to answer to the requests expressed by the Council and, more in general, by policy makers some information is already available, as well as quite a number of studies on the topic of migrants' achievement<sup>8</sup>. The main organizations providing internationally comparable data on several aspects of migrants' education are Eurostat, OECD, and IEA.

#### A. Migrants' performance

19. The IEA-PIRLS survey<sup>9</sup> addresses pupils in the fourth grade of primary school (usually about 10 years old), evaluating their reading literacy achievement. Latest results, referring to 2006, show that pupils with both parents born in another country perform significantly lower than pupils with both or only one parent born in the country. The trend is common to all European countries for which data are available, Latvia being the only exception. Chart 1 shows the actual gaps in performance, but some missing data are relevant as well. No information is available, for example, for Austria and France, where the number of migrant pupils is not negligible, and for other countries data are not complete. As a result, the EU average is only partial.

**Chart 1. Performance in reading of 4<sup>th</sup> grade pupils by parents' country of birth. PIRLS 2006**  
(average score on the reading scale)



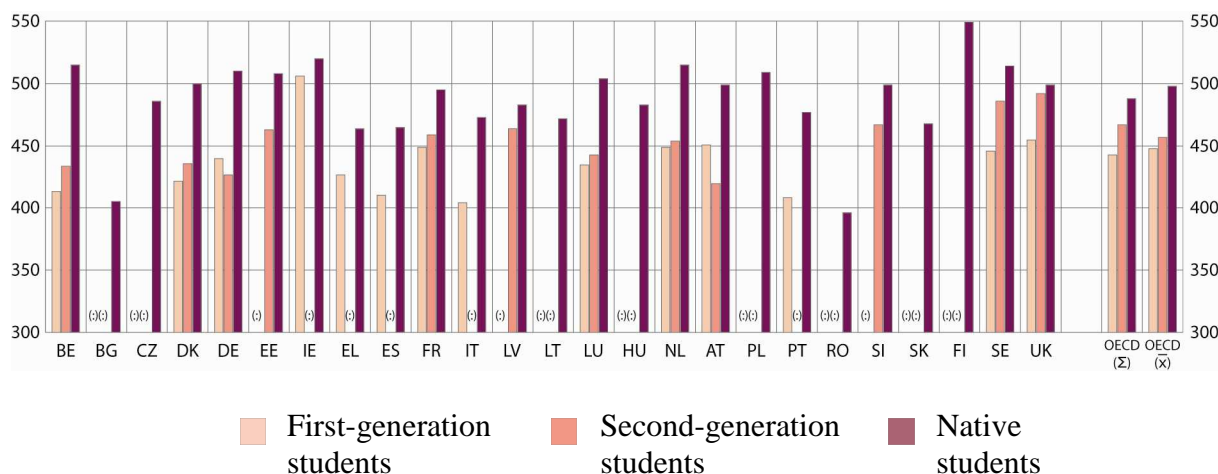
Data source: 2006 PIRLS data set

<sup>8</sup> See for example the OECD report "Where do immigrant students succeed. A comparative review of performance and engagement in PISA 2003"

<sup>9</sup> IEA (International Association for the evaluation of education achievement) is an independent cooperative of research institutions and governmental research agencies. Among several studies, it conducts the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) survey. The third edition will be carried out in 2011.

20. PISA results<sup>10</sup> about the 15 years old students performance in reading, mathematics and science, show a very similar situation. In the three areas, pupils with migrant background perform notably lower compared to native pupils. The gap is generally smaller for second generation migrants, performing better than the first generation. The disadvantage with respect to native pupils is quite remarkable in some countries, exceeding 70 points. That is quite a significant difference, as in the PISA performance scale 40 points correspond to about one year of instruction.

**Chart 2. Performance in reading of 15 years old students by immigrant status. PISA 2006**  
(average score on the reading scale)

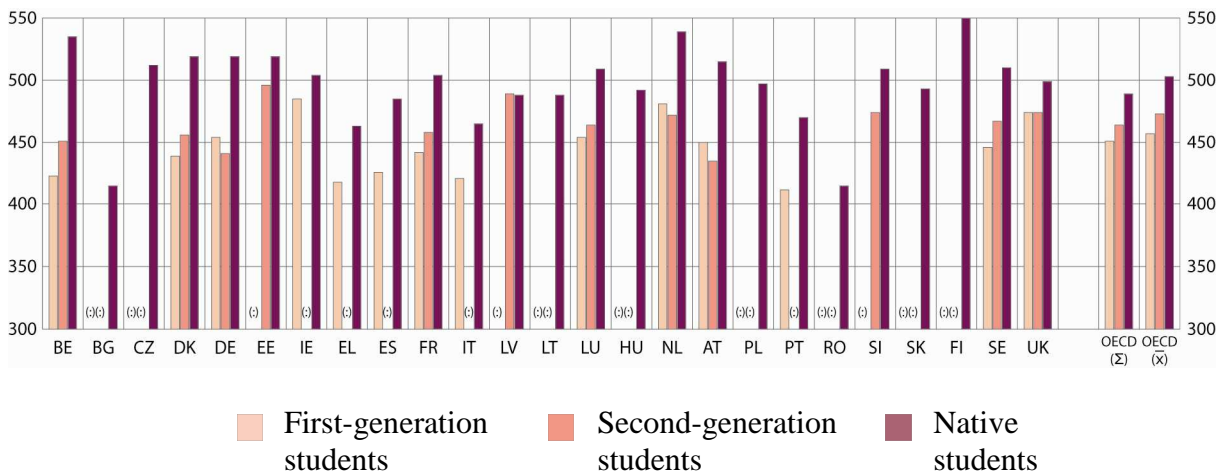


Data source: 2006 PISA data set

21. It should be noticed that not even though the great majority of EU countries are represented, they are not all (Malta and Cyprus did not take part in the 2006 round of the survey) and for several countries results are just partial. This is the case especially for those countries with a more recent immigration tradition and for those with a low share of migrants in their population. As a consequence, a full picture of migrants' situation at EU level is lacking.

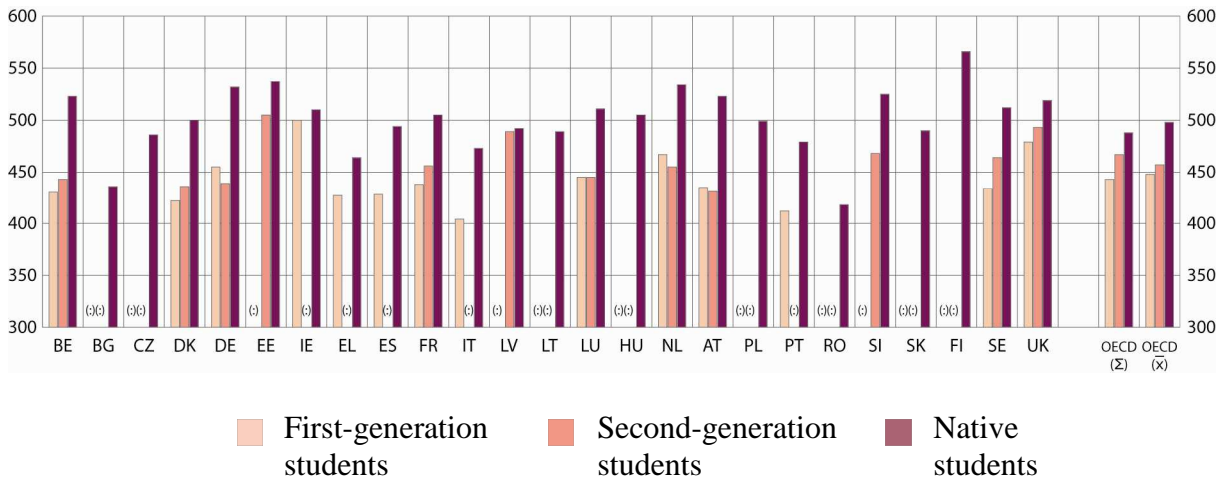
<sup>10</sup> The OECD survey PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is an internationally standardized assessment administered to 15 years old students. With a 3-year rotation scheme on the main topic, it assesses the performance in reading, mathematics and science. Last wave took place in 2009 and focussed on reading competencies, as the 2000 one.

**Chart 3. Performance in mathematics of students 15 years old by immigrant status. PISA 2006**  
(average score on the mathematics scale)



Data source: 2006 PISA data set

**Chart 4. Performance in science of students 15 years old by immigrant status. PISA 2006**  
(average score on the science scale)



Data source: 2006 PISA data set

22. International assessment of competencies gives important insights on the migrants' situation both at the initial phase of the course of study and close to the end of compulsory school. Differences in the design of studies carried out by different organizations ask for special attention when considering results jointly, and researchers have to be quite cautious in comparing data with a pseudo longitudinal approach. Nevertheless, such an exercise can prove to be extremely interesting, and some research on PIRLS and PISA results<sup>11</sup> found evidence supporting the hypothesis that immigrant pupils could even fall behind over time.

<sup>11</sup> See note 6.

B. Other aspects of migrants' education

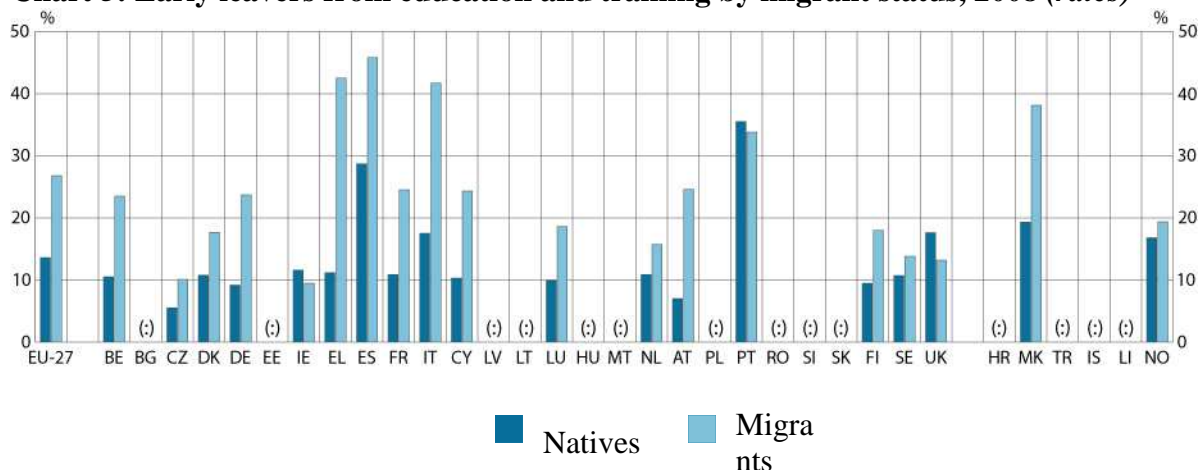
23. In the latest report on progress in educational systems<sup>12</sup> some more insights on the issue of migrants' education were presented, in the framework of the analysis of equity in different national systems and in EU as a whole. Main data source is the EU Labour force survey, whose sample is generally - but not always - large enough to give reliable information on a relatively small group as the migrants' one.

24. A key indicator of educational disadvantage for young migrants is the fact that they are more often found out from the education and training system without having a sufficient level of education, i.e. without having attained at least the upper secondary qualification. In the EU as a whole, the probability that a young migrant is an early leaver from education and training is almost double that for natives (26.8% vs. 13.6%, see chart 5).

25. Considering national results, and limiting analysis to countries for which results are reliable, the highest ratios of early leavers among migrants are to be found in Southern Europe (Spain, Greece and Italy) where more than 40% of migrants are in this disadvantaged condition, far above the EU average. In relative terms, migrants are at least 3 times more often early leavers in Greece, Austria and Slovenia. Also in Germany the migrants' ratio of early leavers is 2.6 times higher than the one for natives.

26. This is a sensitive indicator, not easy to interpret, as it can derive from very different scenarios possibly coexisting: discrimination against migrants is a serious and permeating issue; measures have been taken but they lack of effectiveness or need more time to bring visible results; recent immigration flows consist mainly of low-qualified young workers. In this case, more in depth analysis both of characteristics of migration flows and migrant students would help in a clearer interpretation of results.

**Chart 5: Early leavers from education and training by migrant status, 2008 (rates)**



Data source: Eurostat (LFS)

<sup>12</sup> Commission working paper: Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training - Indicators and benchmarks 2009

Additional notes:

- MK= former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Migrants include non-nationals and born abroad.
- Data for Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Finland and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia lack reliability due to small sample size

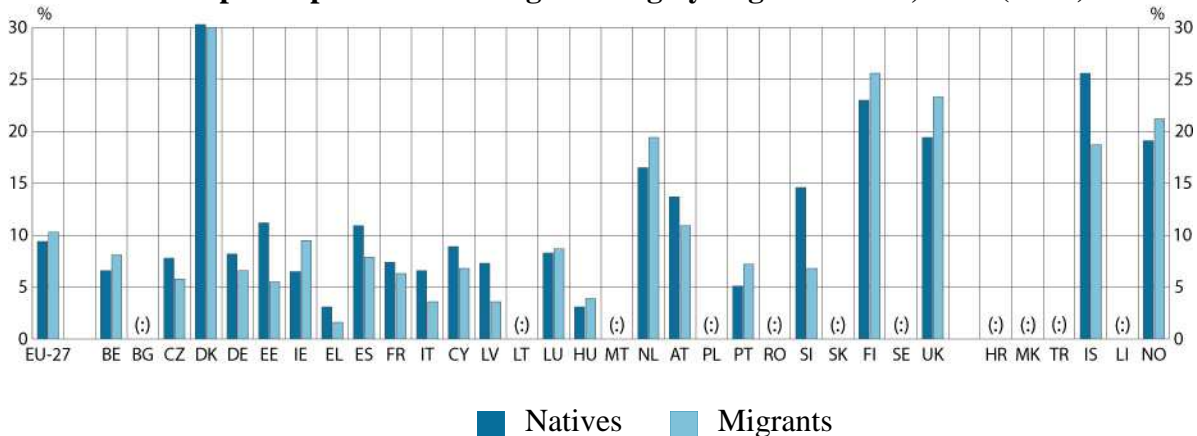
27. Recent research claims there is an over-representation of migrant children in schools for pupils with special needs. This is especially the case in provision addressed to pupils with learning and behavioural problems. This situation needs to be carefully analysed and cannot be interpreted in a simple way, as several factors are interrelated and need to be considered: type of special need actually recognized, type of population, possible links with low socio-cultural and/or economic status of households. However, the fact that pupils with an immigrant background are sometimes over-represented in special schools seems to highlight that there is confusion in distinguishing between language difficulties and learning problems<sup>13</sup>.

28. One of the pillars of EU policy in the field of education is Lifelong learning, and especially adult learning as it can prove to be effective in for economic development and enhance social cohesion and to tackle demographic challenges (i.e population aging). It could be particularly meaningful for migrants, helping their adaptation to the local labour market and providing a sense of social engagement.

29. In this field, migrants do not seem to be at a disadvantage as in other sectors of the educational and training system. In the EU as a whole, participation in lifelong learning is slightly higher for migrant adults than for natives. This is the case especially in Netherlands, Ireland and UK, where the migrant participation rate exceeds that of nationals by at least 3 percentage points, but it is also higher in Nordic countries, Portugal and Belgium (chart 6).

30. Excluding Member States where migrants are too few to draw general conclusions, in 9 EU countries they have poorer opportunities to access adult learning. The system is particularly unfavourable to them in Italy, Greece and Latvia, where migrants' participation rates are about half those of natives.

**Chart 6: Adult participation in lifelong learning by migrant status, 2008 (rates)**



13 Soriano, V., Grunberger, A. and Kyriazopoulou, M., (2009), Multicultural Diversity and Special Needs Education. Odense: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.



Data source: Eurostat (LFS)

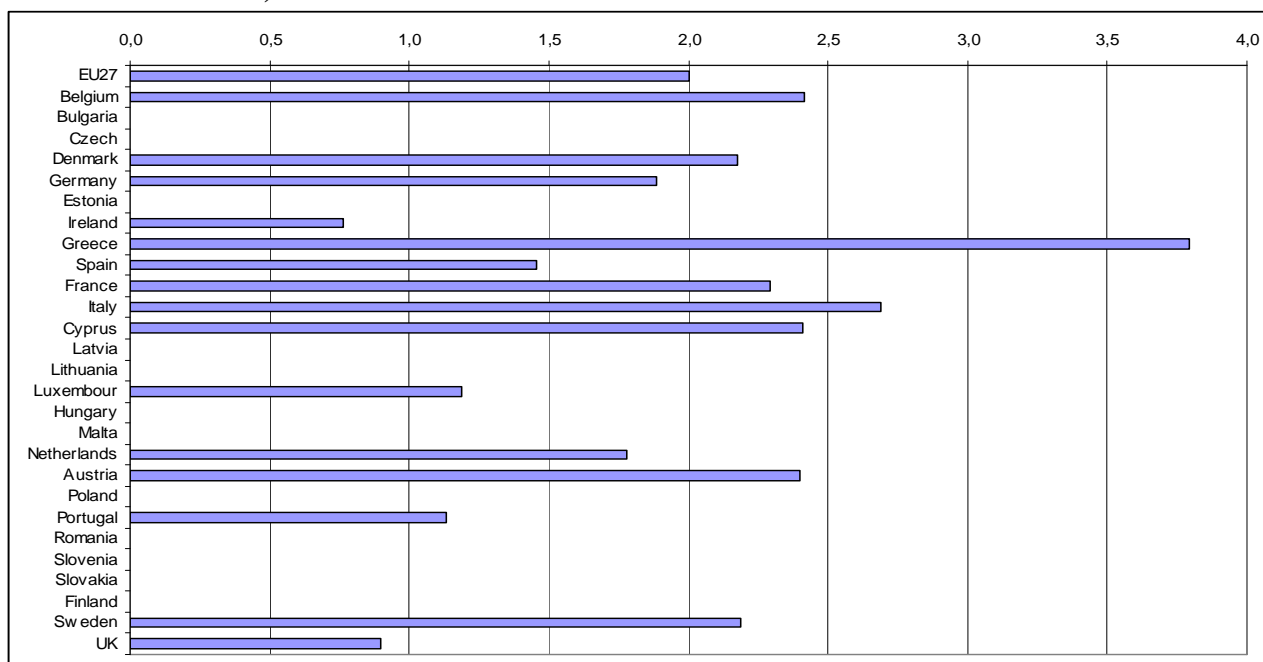
Additional note:

- MK= former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Migrants include non-nationals and born abroad.
- Data for Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia lack reliability due to small sample size

31. The LFS can provide also data on the general level of education of population. As for migrants, it can be regarded both as the starting point (mostly for first generation migrants) and the outcome (for second generation) of their educational paths. Chart 7 shows the gap in educational attainment between nationals and non-nationals. It is common in all Member States, but levels differ remarkably. Two main mechanisms can affect these findings: the specific countries' migration patterns, contrasting those attracting more qualified young people vs. destinations of less skilled labour force; the effectiveness and equity of each educational system, especially for the part of immigrants who have attended school in the hosting country.

32. It should be noted that even for one of the largest sample surveys in the European Statistical System, data are not available for all EU member states, or at least not reliable enough to allow a full picture.

**Chart 7 Low educated (less than upper secondary) 24-29 years old by migrant status (ratio non-natives/natives) - 2008**



Source: Eurostat (LFS)

#### IV. WHAT WOULD BE NEEDED

33. There is a clear trend toward an increase on the side of the demand of comparable and detailed information about migrants and education. Constraints existing to the development of new

tools are evident, especially during a period of economic crisis as the present one, as they require a great amount of resources, heavily weighing on budget and on human resources. Hence, efforts should be focussed on the better exploitation of already available data sources: "The challenges ahead require an integrated statistical response comprising all available tools; both surveys and administrative data have their strengths and weaknesses and should be combined to maximise the possibilities in each Member State in a cost-effective manner"<sup>14</sup>.

34. As shown in previous paragraphs, important information is already available, together with a deal of research, especially in the field of comparative analysis of migrant students' performance at different levels of the educational ladder and in different subject matters, namely reading, mathematics and science.

35. For other areas, not less crucial in order to assess the equity of educational systems with respect to migrants, only some basic information is available for sound international comparison. Generally speaking, data often lack in one or more of the following dimensions.

#### A. Completeness

36. Not all countries are represented in international data sets, and for some of them data lack in reliability. This is due to different reasons. Not all EU countries do participate in OECD and IEA surveys, as they are usually carried out on a voluntary basis. Even when they participate, countries can decide not to include all the relevant question in their questionnaire (e.g. Sweden and France do not ask country of origin in their PISA survey). The issue of reliability can also arise if migrants are a very small part of the population, as is the case in some East Europe countries, or if the sample size is too small, leading to missing or unreliable results.

37. All these cases result in a partial coverage of the migrant population that could hamper reasoning for EU as a whole and make comparisons inadequate.

#### B. Depth

38. Whilst basic indicators can be drawn from international datasets, policy makers often require more detailed information. A clear example is the need to distinguish between different groups of migrants, deserving targeted policies, such as first and second generation migrants. It could also be relevant to consider separately migrants whose country of origin is another EU Member State and those coming from a third country, often a less developed one. In some situations, single nationalities would deserve specific analysis (e.g. Turkish in Germany). Also the issue of gender is often relevant in relation to migrant students, as it could take specific features. Finally, the socio-economic background should be taken into account, as it has been proven that it has a very strong interaction with migrant status in terms of educational achievements.

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<sup>14</sup> Declaration on "Mainstreaming of Migration in official Statistics" after the 95<sup>th</sup> DGINS meeting (Malta, 2009)

### C. Width

39. Some areas of interest for the policy makers – and for researchers as well - are almost completely dark. As an example, not much is known about early childhood education, regardless of its importance as a tool to counter future learning difficulties. The same applies to the area of special needs education, as very few quantitative information is available at international level to monitor to what extent migrant children are misclassified as pupils with severe learning problems and are taught in special schools or in special classes.

40. Also contextual information would be of the highest importance to fully understand differences found between Member States. Main characteristics of the migrant population, such as socio-economic status, area of origin and length of stay, are relevant as a frame in the study of educational achievement. In addition to that, systemic level information contributes to evaluating the general performance of educational systems: which measures are taken to cope with relevant issues related to migrant pupils (e.g. improving communication between school and parents; providing language support; ensuring teachers' professional development in managing cultural diversity); specific features of the education systems, such as levels of school and class segregation, are essential parts of the picture.

41. A great deal of information can be found in recent reports from the European Commission and from OECD, as well as from other research bodies<sup>15</sup>. But information is still lacking, especially in terms of extended quantitative analysis.

### D. Comparability

42. Variables available to define the migrant status are not exactly the same in different international surveys; hence the word "migrant" can be interpreted in slightly differently in reports drawn from these surveys. This can hamper comparisons between results and, eventually, lead to ambiguous interpretations.

43. Some examples follow:

- PISA data about migrants are presented considering "first / second generation" students (e.g. individual and parents born in another country / individual born in the country and both parents born abroad) or the language spoken at home (whether it is the language of assessment or another official language of the country)
- PIRLS refers to country of birth of parents (one parent born abroad / both parents born abroad) and to the language spoken at home (if it differs from the language of the test)
- LFS considers the country of birth and the nationality of the individual only (no information about parents)
- In the UOE, two definitions are used: citizenship of another country; past mobility (in terms of residence and/or prior education)

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<sup>15</sup> See Eurydice report "Integrating Immigrant children into schools in Europe" (2004); the Commission Green Paper (2008); NESSE report "Education and migration" (2009) and the OECD thematic reviews on migrants' education.

- The European survey on languages takes into consideration the country of birth (individual and parents), languages spoken at home (by the student and the family) language spoken as a small child (for the student).

## V. CONCLUSIONS

44. Considering the growing importance of migrants in EU society and the growing need to set up evidence based policies and monitor their results, data availability is to be considered a key issue. In particular in the field of education, especially relevant in view of a smooth and effective process of integration, available information is sometimes insufficient or lacking in completeness, width, depth or comparability.

45. In order to fill this gap, major enhancements are required and more efforts should be devoted to fully exploit existing data sources. Quite often, international surveys do not allow for detailed break-downs, such as migrants' area of origin or socio-economic background. In other cases, data are not available separately for migrants due to technical limitations, such as small sample size. Moreover, some areas of interest for the policy makers are insufficiently covered; this is the case, for example, of early childhood education and special need education.

46. A crucial step forward would be to develop the organizational infrastructure and the methodological tools needed to exploit more extensively existing sources. Eurostat is in the position to lead this process, owning the necessary expertise and being the focal point of the whole European statistical system. But also other relevant international organization, such as OECD and IEA in the field of education statistics, are to be involved in cooperation in order to give the needed momentum to the process.

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