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SIRIUS Policy Brief

School Leaders – Advocates for Refugee and Migrant Students

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Summary

Key Roles of School Leaders in Implementation of Migrant and Refugee Education Policy:

A: Creating and supporting inclusive school culture

- Creating opportunities for celebrating diversity
- Ensuring a safe learning environment
- Ensuring diversity of teaching and learning resources
- Providing opportunities for inter-ethnic contact and co-operation of students
- Involving others in decision making

B: Supporting teaching and learning

- Organising welcoming courses
- Structuring the process of enrolment and mainstreaming (including assessment of prior learning and transition into mainstream classroom)
- Informing parental choice
- Mainstreaming of language learning, immigrant languages and cultures and intercultural education
- Supporting use of migrant teaching assistants and recruiting teachers with migrant backgrounds
- Supporting teachers in continuous professional development

C: Outreach to parents and communities

- Setting up schools as information and welcoming points
- Providing psychological support to students and families
- Outreach to the receiving community

D: Use and attainment of additional funding

- Strategic use of available funding for context specific measures
- Direct demands for funding from educational authorities
- Fundraising from local communities and national EU projects and programs

Key recommendations:

- A. Ensure adequate and accessible professional development provision to school leaders
- B. Organize and support peer learning between school leaders
- C. Provide support to school leaders for accessing and managing available funds
- D. Ensure school leaders have the autonomy to implement context specific measures
- E. Empower school leaders to be involved in the process of policy development

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Introduction

SIRIUS Policy Network on Migrant Education has since 2012 debated and researched policy priorities for migrant education and inclusion. Although its research did not specifically zoom in on the roles and responsibilities of the School leaders in this regards, the SIRIUS Agenda for Migrant Education in Europe (2014) outlines specific recommendations regarding the school leaders. The further exploration within the network and its experts and consultation with relevant other stakeholders from European Policy Network on School Leadership (EPNoSL) shines more light on the key roles school leaders have in implementing migrant and refugee education policy. With this Policy Brief SIRIUS attempts to highlight the school leaders as advocates for refugee and migrant students, agents of inclusiveness and social justice and focus on the role of school leaders in the implementation of refugee and migrant education policy as well as provide policy makers with recommendations on how to best support school leaders.

School leaders play a crucial role in the life of every school across the globe. Whatever their leadership style is, whatever the educational system is like and wherever they are geographically placed it is the school leader who sets the tone of the school. The perspectives on leadership in this policy paper are mostly drawn from critical leadership theories, such as culturally responsive leadership, inclusive leadership, transformative leadership, social justice leadership and other. In sum, critical theory frameworks offer opportunities to identify and discuss structural and dominating forces within school, and the school leaders' ability and willingness to facilitate for equal opportunities for minority students' learning. Likewise, it serves as a helpful lens in determining how school leaders frame the challenges concerning teaching and learning, and their perceptions regarding how to approach the challenges, and how to analyse and display inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create or perpetuate inequity and exclusion in school (Shields, 2010).

A wide body of research indicates that school leaders have significant impact on creating inclusive school cultures, teachers' motivation and commitment resulting in better students' achievement (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2010). School leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school (Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010). Studies on school leaders in successful multi-ethnic schools show that school leader in them: a) have strong personalized articulation and implementation of values based on social justice; b) believe that school can make a difference in ingrained social inequalities and believe they can do something about it; c) consciously go beyond school doors and into communities; d) consciously build inclusive culture in their schools; e) use asset based theory believing that every student not only has potential but contributes to the school and community (Dimmock et al., 2004; Walker, 2004; Walker & Dimmock, 2005).

Key roles of school leaders in the implementation of migrant and refugee education policy

School leaders have a responsibility for both the academic and psycho-social wellbeing of all their students. They play a key role in the implementation of policies and have numerous opportunities to impact the learners of their schools. The strategies school leaders use for implementation of the polices described below are not extensive, however they are examples of how school leaders across the continent are implementing the polices and should serve as inspiration to policy makers for designing a more targeted policy for both migrant and refugee education as well as for supporting school leaders in implementing them.

A: Creating and supporting inclusive school culture

In simple terms, culture is the "way things are done" in a certain place. In other words, culture involves the norms, expectations, or habits of an environment. An inclusive school culture benefits all learners it is however of crucial importance to migrant and refugee students. It includes:

Creating opportunities for celebrating and acknowledging diversity by encouraging discussions among teachers and students on the diversity of their school. Actively acknowledging different ethnic, religious, geographical backgrounds of their students and teachers and portraying it as an asset for the school.

Ensuring that school is a safe environment by clearly reputing bullying or any form of discrimination. Teachers and students should be supported in recognizing and addressing all forms of bullying and discrimination. School leaders must inform and report discrimination.

Ensuring that teaching and learning resources are diverse, ie availability of diverse literature in the libraries in immigrant languages and from immigrant cultures.

Providing opportunities for inter-ethnic contact and co-operation of students in academic and non-academic activates of students, learning groups to support peer learning, student clubs, volunteering in the community.

Involving others in decision making, even when participative structures do not exist in the educational system as such, school leaders create informal or semi-formal structures that will address the current need of their school for the benefit of the learners. Creating internal leadership teams consisting of different actors from the school and beyond (2nd language teachers, migrant teaching assistants, psycho-social counsellors, community leaders) to assist the school leader in making decisions that are in line with the needs of the learners.

B: Supporting teaching and learning of migrant and refugee students

Key recommendations for school leaders for supporting migrant and refugee students' academic wellbeing is to retain high standards and ambitions of and for the students, to ensure use of mother tongue whenever possible and to be aware that they have a key role in either promoting or stopping double segregation: segregation to schools and within schools in tracks. In more centralized educational systems in the EU the school leaders do not have the autonomy to use direct leadership strategies to manage diversity such as a revision of the curriculum, influencing teaching strategies to reflect the needs of the student population or recruitment of teachers. Therefore not all of the strategies below are available to school leaders across EU.

Organising welcoming courses in both their structure and content;

Structuring the process of enrolment and mainstreaming through ensuring use of mother-tongue in assessment of prior learning, assessment of transition to and support in mainstream classroom and being involved in grade/school level placement and brokering case-by-case pupils' permeable transition between schools/tracks, especially for late arrivals (arrivals between ages 14-17).

Mainstreaming of language learning, immigrant languages and cultures and intercultural education;

Recruiting and supporting use of migrant teaching assistants and recruiting teachers with migrant backgrounds;

Supporting teachers in continuous professional development in regards to inclusion, social justice, intercultural skills, language learning, and the specific needs of migrant and refugee learners;

Informing parental choice on school systems, schools, tracks and ensuring the choices are made in the best academic interest of the student.

C: Outreach to parents and communities

Working beyond the school is a prerequisite if the students are to achieve within the school. Most important reason for the outreach is for the school to be fully informed on the individual student's circumstances outside school including understanding student's cultural heritage in order to provide necessary support. This requires strong parental links and building trust between the parents and the schools as well as outreach to the

community groups. Community groups can be a resource to school in terms of articulating community concerns and aspirations, recruitment of migrant teaching assistants and can provide a link between an individual family and the school in cases of language and other barriers. As much as the outreach to the communities is important it has to be understood that the specificities of each community and school will require a different approach and activities. Many school leaders were in the recent years faced with large influx of refugee students. In many cases schools are the first structure that the refugee families are involved in and schools act as mediators between the refugee families and the “system”. Creating support systems for the newly arrived students and their families was an option that enabled schools to ensure their students psycho-social wellbeing and better adjustment to new circumstances. The strategies were aimed at outreach to the newly arrived families as well as to the receiving community.

Setting up school as information and welcoming points for refugees families – to be informed on their rights as well as on housing, healthcare and other services available to them and thus nurturing a relationship between school staff and family.

Providing psychological support to students and families in order for them to adjust to new circumstances;

Outreach to the receiving community through organizing community meetings and other events in coordination with local authorities to prepare the community for supporting the refugee families.

D: Use of and attainment of additional funding

Funding for strategies named above is not always easily available to school leaders and it is often the case that school leaders need to innovatively and strategically use funding they do have. In order to do this a clear understanding of their context and the needs of the school are necessary as well as the knowledge on which measures will best respond to the need.

The strategies school leaders use for attainment of additional funding include direct demands to educational authorities, fundraising from the local community and fundraising from national and EU projects and programs. There are also cases where in more decentralized systems the Local communities were able to mobilize in response to refugee crisis by recruiting multi-professional teams including school leaders, teachers and parents to help to adapt the annual local education budgets in order to address the new need for funding.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Leading schools in all circumstances and in particular in circumstances of great diversity or great change such as in a situation of the influx of refugee students is a demanding job. It requires school leaders to be reflective, flexible and quick to respond to the new situations while at the same time they need to keep the standards and high expectations both from their staff and their students, often lacking resources both in teaching force and in funding. There is a common misconception that (school) leaders are born. Perhaps, this misconception has brought us to the situation that across Europe, professional development of school leaders and support to them has been neglected or is non-existent. Especially relevant for the education of migrant and refugee students is the fact that the limited professional development provisions available hardly ever include topics like inclusive school cultures, diversity, intercultural education, social justice or engagement with parents and local communities. There is legitimate concern that leaders should be sensitive to the cultural needs of the organizations they lead yet very little support in that regard is available. Finally, the greatest support to the school leaders would be if the strategies they have used as described in the policy brief and for which they have proof are effective would be mainstreamed and supported with funding.

Key recommendations:

Ensure adequate and accessible professional development provision to school leaders on developing inclusive school cultures, diversity, intercultural education, social justice and effective engagement with parents and local communities.

Organize and support peer learning between school leaders through exchanges, study visits and job shadowing on national, regional and EU level.

Provide support to school leaders for accessing and managing available funds for special programmes at national, municipality, EU level as well as knowledge about project implementation and evaluation

Ensure school leaders have the autonomy to implement context specific measures, such as offering language support, providing teacher training or hiring assistant teachers.

Empower school leaders to be involved in the process of policy development. School leaders should be more influential than they are in the process of policy development and not only in implementation of the policy, however they are often unaware of the process they are in and their knowledge and experience is not utilized to the fullest in policy development.

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