The Importance of Youth Education for African Migrants Children in the EU

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1. Introduction

This is the 4th edition of a series of E-Policy Briefs published by the project officers of the European-wide African Diaspora Platform for Development (EADPD) project, who are responsible for the setting up of Africa-Europe Platform (AEP), otherwise known as ‘The Platform’. The AEP is a network of African Diaspora Organisations (ADOs) operating in all 27 EU Member-States including Norway and Switzerland. The E-policy briefs falls within the framework of one of its activities: ‘Migration and Development Policy Monitoring and Analysis’. The main purpose of these e-Policy Briefs is to enhance knowledge among Diaspora organisations on key Migration and Development (M&D) policy issues as well as to raise policymakers’ awareness on the views of African Diaspora organisations on key M&D policy issues. In our 3rd edition, three prominent Diaspora and development-related topics were addressed: Local development Entrepreneurship and Diaspora and Science. In line with the EU policy on migration and development, this edition takes another step further by addressing one issues of great concern to African Diaspora communities in Europe: Education.

This will be discussed in the context of existing policies developed by European governments for education of migrant children. We also examine the weaknesses of these policies, which are an obstacle to the "young diaspora" in their quest for knowledge. In this section, we will also identify some of the obstacles can be overcome at the macro, meso and micro. We also seek to know what policies to adopt societal level to help cope with the difficulties and improve the curriculum to better meet the needs of migrants. Finally, we will show case an example of good practice, present an appendix of a catalogue of good practices in the African and European contexts, as well as recommendations.

Education will be examined in the context of existing policies and put in to place by European governments to the children of migrants in this area and the lacunae which have arisen out of such policies, forming challenges for these ‘Young Diasporas’ in their drive to gain knowledge. It will also spell out how some of the challenges can be managed on the macro, meso and micro- levels. It will further examine what policies on a societal level can help remedy the situation and how schools can be improved to better meet the needs of migrants; lastly, an appendix of some examples of good practices chosen from Africa and European contexts will be laid out, as well as recommendations. Our choice for the thematic: «education» is based on the premise of enhancing knowledge and raising awareness of key migration and development policy issues of the EU, and how these are perceived by migrants.

2. Situation in the EU

A close examination of the 54 African States produces a typology of different African migrant communities resident in different affluent Europe Union Member states. They are classified under different modes: those who were brought in as young migrants, those who are born in the EU also known as 2nd generation migrants, those with either: poorly, averagely or highly educated parents, those who came in as regular foreign students either paying fees or under scholarships but
Stayed after studies with the hope of finding good jobs, those with higher diplomas who end up doing menial and less paid jobs such as gate-keeping and security servicemen, those whose came in as illiterates but worked their way up the educational ladder and later occupy high places in the society and those who reside in unprivileged slump areas and attend unprivileged segregated schools mostly reserved for children with migrant backgrounds. Although these characteristics and their dynamics vary from one EU Member-State to another and they singly or collectively impact on the quality of education for migrant children and youths.

3. EU’s approach to Education

The European Union supports and complements Member States’ actions in accordance with articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, in resolutions whereby each Member State is responsible for the organization of its education and training systems and the content of teaching programs. It further stipulates that the Union shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training. As such, the EU’s legislation on education, training, youth aims to play an essential role in transforming the European Union (EU) into a world-leading knowledge-based society and economy. Evidence of this is the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) and the Maastricht Communiqué (2004), which reasserted the priorities of transparency, recognition and training quality and set out priorities at national level.

Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut immigration policy for the EU which is under the domain of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSPD) as spelt out in the 2007 Lisbon Treaty addressing specifically to migrants’ education. However, two important schemes were devised: Europass-Training (1998), which described skills acquired by training abroad, and Europass (2004), which combines five documents aimed at providing a clear and simple picture of the qualifications and skills of citizens throughout Europe. The Leonardo da Vinci sectoral programme, as part of the action programme for education and life-long learning is the funding vehicle for training activities. It seeks to support and supplement the action taken by the Member States, by promoting transnational partnership and mobility, innovation and quality of training and also the European dimension of training systems and practice. These serve as the key elements to support growth and employment by encouraging the emergence of a highly qualified and adaptable population: first by the “Education and Training 2010” work program, followed by the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training “ET 2020”. This cooperation has led to the formulation of common targets and initiatives that encompass all types of education and training and all stages in lifelong learning. Furthermore, a number of networks and agencies support action in education and training, namely the Audiovisual, Education and Culture Executive Agency and the European Institute of Innovation and

Technology\(^2\). The ultimate goal is to build a dynamic future through strengthening of social cohesion and active citizenship within the European Union.

Therefore the EU uses education, capacity building training and youth programs as management strategies to promote thematics such as ‘Strengthening the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility: increasing Coordination, Coherence and Synergies’. European values, dimensions, mobility and cooperation. It also employs education and training as a mechanism to expand its influence over a multitude of strategic policy issues, such as: “Cooperation with Third World Countries in the Areas of Migration and Asylum”. It also employs strategic policy agendas to expand through the use of management strategies. The main EU agencies responsible are as follows: the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), Thessaloniki; the European Training Foundation, Turin; and the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training established in 2004.

Policy cooperation among Member States and the EU institutions is based on the “strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020)\(^2\)”, which is complemented by a number of funding programs. The Lifelong Learning Program supports exchanges, cooperation and mobility. It brings together four sub-programs: The Comenius (pre-school and school education), Erasmus (higher education), Leonardo da Vinci (vocational education and training) and the Grundtvig (adult education such as Empowerment kit for immigrant women with low educational/working experience)\(^3\).

The Council of Europe on Human Rights Education formally recognizes the role of education in promoting the core values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and member states of the Council are expected to use the human rights to education as a means of sharing and facilitating the exchange of good practices. Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut immigration policy for the EU which falls under the domain of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSPD) as spelt out in the 2007 Lisbon Treaty. Over the last two decades, the European Union has greatly expanded its cooperation with the African Union in the areas of peace, security, good governance, technology innovation, climate change, and food security. Cooperation in the area of migration is relatively new. However, there are different, loose policy areas that do not directly address a coherent and broadly agreed policy on migrants’ education, but can be derived from various interpretations.

The EU’s ‘Neighbourhood Policy’ deals with relations between countries and regions that share boundaries with the EU, such as Eastern Europe and Africa. The Dakar Strategy of November 2011 for the period 2012–2014 offers greater opportunities for study and work for Africans in the EU. Furthermore, there is an ongoing dialogue between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of States, based on article 13 of the


Cotonou Agreement which, among other things, addressed the issue of education of migrants. The Ouagadougou Declaration and Action Plan on Employment and Poverty Alleviation, which preceded the Joint Africa–EU Partnership Declaration on Migration and Development in Tripoli in 2006, paved the way for the maximization of migration benefits.

According to Paragraph 26 (69) of the Joint Africa–EU Partnership (2006), the Summit emphasized the need to strengthen the role of Diasporas in the African development process, and maximize the development benefits of remittances Joint Africa–EU Partnership⁴. Paragraph 29 further calls for the creation of an African Diaspora Network. With the Lisbon Treaty entering into force, relations with Africa have become an integral part of the EU’s overall political, economic, social and humanitarian agenda, with the inculcation and elevation of the level of social capital amongst migrants and their children as one of its top priorities. Other high dialogue meetings ensure that migrants receive civic education based on fundamental European values and learn the language of their host country. In addition, the EU must continue to support projects in the field of intercultural education, education of immigrants and inclusion of disadvantaged youths via relevant program.

Since 2011, the EU launched its overarching external migration management policy, known as ‘Strengthening the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility: increasing Coordination, Coherence and Synergies’. This strategic phase has recently come under criticism, especially for the EU’s approach to migration which is more focused on mobility management, with little attention paid to migrants’ welfare. However, this approach promotes the linkages between migration and development, and the need to maximize the impact of remittances on development and also facilitates the involvement of diasporas/migrant communities in development processes. It also seeks to promote the protection of the human rights of migrants and their families, assist and protect asylum seekers and refugees, and help countries of origin, transit and destination in Africa build capacity to better manage migration, including the empowerment of migrant women and children education.

Finally, the EU thematic program “Cooperation with Third World Countries in the Areas of Migration and Asylum”⁵ is based on Regulation (EC) No 1905/2006, establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation (DCI Regulation)⁵. Amongst other relevant issues, it aims to promote migrants’ rights, protect migrants against exploitation and exclusion, and support the fight against trafficking in human beings, support vulnerable groups especially unaccompanied minors, protect of migrants’ human rights, fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination, providing relief and assistance to vulnerable categories of migrants. It has initiatives focusing specifically on the individual needs of the migrant. These provide strong indications that EU migration policy is shifting from a border protectionist to a migrant centered-approach. Our interests lie in this section which is

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directly concerned with the setting-up of the African-Europe Platform.

These different accords, joint-actions, strategic partnerships, conventions, treaties and agreements, and approaches, some of which duplicate one other, singly or collectively serve as direct or indirect mitigations to the challenges faced by African migrants and their children as far as education as a migration-related thematic area is concerned.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Europe is the primary destination for African migrants and, a majority of the approximately 4.6 million African migrants living overseas are in Europe, constituting the largest share of migration into Europe. But the Migration Policy Institute believes there are between seven and eight million irregular African immigrants living in Europe. More than half of this total is made up of children and young people under the age of 20. Most of them have automatically inherited the difficulties of their parents of not having opportunities to gain knowledge or and fall under the category of ‘irregular’, or more accurately, ‘undocumented migrants’ who have no access to any type of education. Inasmuch as there is growing recognition that migrants to Europe can act as agents of development for their countries of origin, and that this is something that should be encouraged through engagement with Diaspora and migrant organisations, the same enthusiasm and attention is not paid to migrant children in terms of education. In this context, youth education should be considered, firstly and foremost, as a fundamental Human Right, and secondly, as an investment in human capital for the future.

4. Challenges

According to a 2004 survey conducted by the Association of African Universities, the number of students with African background who attend European schools, colleges and universities has seen grown remarkably over the years, constituting 18% of students with migrant backgrounds in all European educational institutions. More and more students of African origin choose to study in Europe, but not all of them have the financial means to do so due to the social and economic status of their parents. As a result, many eligible African students take advantage of scholarship grants to help them access quality education in their countries of residence or any European country of their choice, depending on their EU residential status. But there are other factors at work.

Firstly, children from migrant families with no residence permits and uneducated parents can play a significant role in affecting school performance. Researchers working within the human-capital framework assert that highly educated parents have the financial and non-monetary resources to invest in their children’s abilities early on, which inevitably places them on track not only for better school performance but also for the likelihood of pursuing a university education (Corak 2001). In most cases migrant children directly or indirectly inherit or are victims of the mishaps of their uneducated parents. These might provoke psychological instability which

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The EADPD project is financed by the European Union and co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Corporation, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
adversely affects their academic performances in schools at all levels.

The enlargement of the EU has seen an unprecedented influx of cheap labour from Eastern EU Member States. The situation is made worse by the global financial crunch, which has rendered many African parents unemployed. This has adversely affected the level of remittances sent home, and above all the economic status of parents. Many psychologists have argued that there is a big correlation between the socio-economic situation of parents and the children’s choice of school and academic performance. Research shows that natives are on average as much as one grade ahead in their Mathematics skills compared to immigrants Schnepf (2007). Such parents in low incomes groups reside in compact residential areas with poor housing. The so-called socioeconomic gradient, which reveals the intergenerational correlation between the socioeconomic status of parents and the educational performance of children is always high (Entorf and Minoiu 2005). Low education groups seem to suffer the most from economic shocks such as the current global financial crisis, and education questions are increasingly seizing the attention of educational scientists, labour economists, as well as politicians.

However, all studies reveal that there remains a considerable educational disadvantage to immigrants that is not explained by observed individual heterogeneity. This indicates that immigrants face further barriers that might be related to unobserved heterogeneity (note that most studies quoted above are based on cross-sectional data) and unfavourable factors arising from their lacking integration into (Western) societies. For instance, given that immigrants are concentrated in large cities and the suburban areas, equality of educational opportunities is limited by spatial and social segregation and the resulting emergence of ‘good’ or ‘bad neighborhoods’, i.e. by ‘peer effects’. Peer effects in the context of schooling whereby pupils or students are grouped according to age groups (Hoxby 2000); (Hanushek et al. 2003). Generally, children with migrant backgrounds face the following challenges:

- Low teachers’ expectations on minority students can have negative influence on performance;
- Absence of teachers and mentors of a migrant and minority background have a negative influence on migrant achievement in schools;
- Migrant students are disadvantaged in terms of enrolment in type of school, duration of attending school, indicators of achievement, dropout rates, and types of school diploma attained;
- Learning first (family language) and second (lingua franca) language is always a major problem;
- Integration into the culture of the immigration country is a major challenge for migrants;
- Clustering children under peer groups is a challenge as emphasis is on age group rather than language and education system;
- Concentration of migrant children in schools due to housing and social segregation and economic status of parents hinders their academic performance while exposure to classmates with better performance and
higher educational aspirations tend to increase their own performance;

- Immigrant parents generally do not seek contact with schools and teachers as a follow up of child’s performances. They do not assist in home work and often reluctant to register for after-school activities for such as sports, dancing and other social clubs for their children.

Notwithstanding these challenges, according to Professor Friedrich Heckmann, a specialist in European migration studies at the University of Bamberg, segregation of minorities in schools according to peer groups has greater adverse effects on performances than otherwise perceived. Citing the review of Farley (2006), he corroborates that migrant children when exposed to classmates with higher aspirations could do even better than them, attain higher IQ scores as their autochthon peers, attend good universities and get good jobs thereafter.

5. Recommendations

- EU Member States should improve on human rights issues with an emphasis on equality, inclusion and personal freedom, to avoid xenophobia and segregation. Schools and individual teachers should regard diversity as normal, treat each individual with respect, and give migrants the support they need. They should appreciate non formal education through viable skills complementary to the ones acquired in school and cooperate with non-formal education providers and youth organizations. There is the need for EU legislation guaranteeing educational rights of third - country students and long resident migrants;

- Discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, and nationality and residence status should be addressed, but diversity, special attention and support to most vulnerable migrant groups, including girls must be promoted in school curriculum. Schools with high proportions of immigrant children should be equipped with staff who can cope with the challenges of new educational systems. In order to increase teaching performances in schools, teachers should be trained in intercultural skills to enable them deal effectively with diversity in the school where children are allocated classes on the basis of educational level and individual needs rather than peer (age) group. At all levels, dialogue in the framework of the open method of coordination should be launched. Best practices should be published a common agenda addressing shortcomings of immigrants’ education should be developed;

- Through monitoring and evaluation, the EC Commission should regularly report on progress made in the integration of migrant children in the school systems with emphasis on enforcement of early pre-primary education in Member States. It should stress the need for adult and lifelong education for migrants in order to promote integration at all ages. Large towns and cities must make use of the freedom to coordinate policy designed to promote the integration of migrant children with policies and strategies regarding housing, child-care, employment market, health and welfare, eventually impacting on the academic results of migrant children and their successful integration;
• European cooperation in education and training of migrants should be flexible, with strategic objectives, principles, working methods, cross sectoral and yet, very effective as well as transparent. The educational systems should be harmonized while giving much consideration to minorities by incorporating related policy areas such as migration which will advance stronger dialogue and cooperation with third countries and international organisations and all relevant stakeholders;

• The EU should promote multicultural and multilingual education approaches among Member States. This encourages migrant children to learn their mother tongue and to ensure preservation of cultural heritage. Also interdisciplinary teacher education that will render teachers as role models for children with difficulty or recruit immigrant teachers so as to facilitate migrant children's contact with the culture, civilization of their country of origin as well as mobility for teachers;

• This can serve as an integral part of teacher education programs that gives them an opportunity to spend one or two semesters at host universities abroad. The EC should advocate for special training for teachers that explicitly addresses the special situation of the children of migrants. The necessity for integrating them successfully in mainstream school education systems should be emphasized and the need to improve their level of educational attainment. Programs on counseling services to help migrant children and young people deal with culture shock and adapt to the host society should be introduced in host countries. The EU should ensure that Member States take full account of the need to involve young migrants in a wide range of extracurricular activities such as sports associations. Such extracurricular activities play an important integrative role in promoting social integration and social inclusion of those from less privileged backgrounds;

• The EU should encourage Member States to introduce ‘positive discrimination’ or ‘affirmative action’ whereby specific scholarship programs are instituted for students with migrant origins due to their inability to compete with host country mates. Examples of such a good practice have been tried in Germany and in the Netherlands.

• In the Netherlands, the African Young Professionals (AYP) has initiated a network aimed at integrating and raising awareness about the challenges for people with foreign backgrounds is the Dutch society. They mitigate their challenges by bring together their different professional skills and backgrounds to form a pool of ideas, knowledge and competences which serves as a springboard for personal career development & professional growth, which can simultaneously be translated in to business projects.

6. Conclusion

Mean while, the success of education and training programs is highly dependent on the political will of governments and civil society
members of the European Union, host and origin countries and practitioners in the field of migration and development to adopt favorable policies for migrants. This is even true that the political decision-making at multiple levels within the European Union is still a difficult process. This is pivoted on the premises that member state governments are not willing to support a policy of European integration in areas such that education which will benefit migrants, but undermine the national identity of their countries.

In addition, it also depends on the ability of migrants and their children to seize the opportunities offered to them to acquire new knowledge in their host countries.
References


