In times of Covid19, migrant students shouldn’t be forgotten.

A call for evidence and contributions on the experiences and needs of migrant and refugee students during the global lockdown.

The Covid19 pandemic is affecting everybody, but we are not “all in this together”. In fact, this health emergency and the ‘lockdowns’ that have followed are acting as a multiplier of socio-economic inequalities, at the intersection of class, gender, (dis)ability, ethnicity and migration status. Whilst the last few weeks have been marked by unprecedented acts of community solidarity, we have also witnessed a reinforcement of divisions within and between societies, with a further strengthening of nation-centric stances. Exceptional measures have been put in place by governments across the whole of Europe, but some people seem to have been largely forgotten. Among these, there are migrant and refugee students and their families. It is hard to find any mention of their experiences and needs within public discourses, in policy interventions, in the endless media commentaries and even on mainstream social media.

Migration has largely figured – once again – as something to stop or control ever more tightly; and even as a potential source of viral contagion. Pro-migration stances have concentrated on the role of foreign workers within the economy (with many of them being ‘key workers’) and on the need to offer them a more stable legal status and to ensure they can access health-care and welfare support. These are of course fundamental issues, that need quick and radical interventions. However, they have been discussed largely ignoring the broader issues faced by migrant families and particularly the right of their children to access education. With the closure of schools, we haven’t closed just places where knowledge and skills are acquired, but fundamental spaces for the development of one’s sense of self, belonging and citizenship.

Learning for Citizenship

This call stem from the organising committee of ‘Learning for Citizenship’, an initiative to build an international network on "good practice of inclusion, engagement, practical and emotional support for migrant and refugee students". The group currently includes the University of Nottingham (UK), the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain) and the University of Turin (Italy). Our first main activity was meant to be a conference¹ at the University of Nottingham in May 2020, co-funded by the Social Policy Association (SPA).

Because of the lockdown, we had to postpone the event till further notice. However, we believe it is now more important than ever to have a public discussion about the experiences of vulnerable young people of migrant background. We think this should take a transnational, inter-disciplinary approach, involving academics as well as third sector organisations and education practitioners, from across Europe and beyond.

¹ Conference website: https://learningforcitizenship.eventbrite.co.uk
In our previous Call for Papers, we highlighted how in recent years many countries have accumulated experiences of good practice; but also how the volatility of their social and political contexts continues to pose new challenges. Among these, the emergence of new forms of nationalism, the hardening of migration policies and the redefinition of boundaries between and within national spaces, which risk placing schools at the centre of controversies and contestations. Too often the presence of migrant students and families is seen as a potential burden rather than an opportunity. Targeted resources and interventions can be scarce, and constant changes to policy and funding frameworks make it difficult to sustain successful approaches. At the same time, the diversification and social stratification of many local settings requires interventions which recognise such complexities and reject blanket approaches aiming at fixing ‘problems’ rather than recognising the individual needs of young people.

What happens in and around the classroom is only part of a wider picture. With regard to refugee children in particular, there is evidence that they experience high levels of bullying and mental health issues and long delays in getting a school place. Moreover, whilst compulsory education and education rights are nominally available to all, many migrants face restrictions based on immigration status, and the transition to further and higher education is often arduous.

Call for Evidence and Contributions

How are all these issues affected and compounded at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic? What is the impact of the lock-down and schools closures? How is ‘online learning’ impacting differently on different communities? What are the specific challenges faced by particularly vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors and recently arrived forced-migrants? What are the experiences and responses of migrant families who have been in a country for longer? What problems do they face, but also, what resources to they have access to? What creative responses have been put in place by schools, families and community groups?

With this call, we are asking organisations and researchers who are working in this field to get in touch in order to exchange and discuss views, evidence, good practice and solutions.
We would welcome particularly:
- Blogs;
- Short working-papers;
- Proposals for webinars or podcasts;
- Updates about events, research projects and other local, national and international initiatives.

To get in touch please email: learningforcitizenship@gmail.com

Further information and updates will be made available on http://learningforcitizenship.wordpress.com/

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