

Editorial: School Experiences of Migrant Minors

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- 1 This dossier is part of an ongoing series on the education and schooling of migrant minors. Other results are published elsewhere¹. While some of these publications are intended to provide a statement on the general situation as regards the inclusion of migrant schoolchildren², in some cases from a specifically allophonic perspective³, others deliver a situational analysis based on various local contexts⁴. This publication stands out from the others in that it has a dual objective. On the one hand the articles presented in it seek to explain ongoing determining social dynamics arising from difficulties surrounding migration. These provide a starting point for the analysis of schooling situations. On the other hand, the articles also address the issue of government policy and the effects of institutional practices on the progress of migrant schoolchildren. The analyses put forward here therefore touch upon the law, socio-demographics and socio-anthropology, and their shared aim is to try to provide a macro analysis of schooling in immigration.
- 2 Schooling and migration issues have been linked for more than a century in France. The country has experienced family migrations since the second half of the 19th century and the issue of schooling for migrant children arose in particular when the Ministry for Education, spearheaded by Jules Ferry in particular, recognised the universal character of schooling in 1882, as access to schooling was inherently geared less towards such populations than towards their French-nationality peers. In the 1930s, almost 300,000 foreign children were educated on French territory and it would not be until the Popular Front came to power that the universal character of the Ferry laws was written into the act of 9 August 1936 and foreign children were really able to attend school. While the schooling of migrant children is a political issue, government authorities did not fully take ownership of it due in particular to the fact that France

held back, politically, from viewing itself as a destination for immigration (Noiriel, 1988). The political debate and the legislative measures adopted are nevertheless based on a heritage of mentoring children and young people, in particular migrant and homeless children and young people (Armagnague *et al.*, 2016).

- 3 Nowadays the turnover in migrant populations contributes to the emergence of new issues focusing in particular on the arrival of the very young. The impact of conflict and regional instability on migratory currents is well known (Simon, 2008; Badie *et al.*, 2008). The upheavals caused by the Arab revolutions, the Syrian conflict and, more generally, the imbalance of power in the Middle East and Africa have had major consequences for migratory flows as witnessed by the unprecedented number of migrants and refugees trying to cross the Mediterranean in the middle years of this decade⁵. Although France stands out from other Western European countries as having a relatively low rate of asylum requests⁶, it remains true that these arrivals, against a specific context which involves the whole of Europe, have driven government authorities to adjust their policy for receiving immigrants. In this perspective, the migration of minors takes on a special significance. Family reasons were the primary justification for the granting of entitlement to residency in 2017⁷. Moreover, in 2016, a quarter of asylum seekers applying to the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) were minors⁸. Equally, the Departmental offices responsible for the receiving and accompaniment of unaccompanied minors, in association with the French child welfare services (ASE), indicated a steep sixfold increase in this population between 2013 and 2017⁹.
- 4 Whatever the status of migrant minors, there exist unremitting tensions between the government authorities who are the guarantors of the restrictive policies for the receiving of migrants and residency on the one hand and, on the other hand, the stakeholders in the education, social and associated sectors working in favour of the rights of children and the right to attend school. School, indeed, from a social and symbolic point of view, fulfils an important historic role in the social engagement of migrants and their children and highlights social, spatial, institutional and political dynamics beyond the strictly educational framework.
- 5 In the context of a juvenile migration situation that is still evolving, this publication is designed to examine the dynamics contributing to the formation of the school experience of migrant children and young people. It forms part of the various thinking processes contributing to work surrounding schooling and migration associated with the MIGRITI, SAJE, EVASCOL and EDUCINCLU research programmes on the education of migrant children and young people¹⁰. Several issues have arisen. What are the institutional and regulatory frameworks organising – sometimes under duress – the schooling of migrant children and young people? If the right to education in France is a principle relatively open in its form, its implementation is sometimes more restrictive and heterogeneous (Armagnague-Roucher *et al.*, 2018). What are the effects of these “unsettling” settlement contexts on children and young people, and on their school life? How do these children manage to build their school experience in contexts that are so restrictive and so difficult to anticipate? Moreover, migrant minors often arrive under precarious residential conditions, often disadvantaged or marked by significant segregation and sometimes by ethnic or racial tensions. Consequently, when they migrate, children and young people often encounter new forms of social participation associated in particular with the urban ghettoization of juveniles and various forms of

discrimination, stigmatisation and accompanying marginalisation. The socialisation of these populations of children and juveniles will therefore be thoroughly reshaped and changed, and this will have an impact on the processes by which they will be able to make choices. Finally, it changes the relationship these children and young people will have with their own school lives. Equally, migration dynamics will be reconfigured by school pathways which will be a formative mould for them.

- 6 This publication has provided a forum for a range of different analyses which aim to work through government policy in particular as well as institutional realities and practices or their effects on the social journeys of migrant children and young people at school or in college. The articles offer macro-social legal and sociodemographic avenues of analysis on the one hand and, on the other hand, invite serious consideration on the specific means of organising socio-educational situations in various contexts while drawing specific attention to the ways qualitative studies can be undertaken on minors in and outside of school. For this reason, studying migrant children and young people raises the epistemological and ethical question of the place of the researcher in an inquiry situation and the question of the means of data collection, a situation which is still in its initial stages which necessitates contingent (Armagnague and Rigoni, 2016) and hybrid (Armagnague *et al.*, 2017) methodologies. This stimulates food for further epistemological and ethical thought regarding research on childhood and migration.
- 7 The article by Jean-Luc Primon, Laure Mogu rou and Ya l Brinbaum offers a macrosocial reading of the educational pathways of migrant children at school in France, with a view to data from the statistical survey Trajectoires et Origines (TeO – Trajectories and Origins). After summing up studies with a statistical scope bearing on these school groups described at varying times as “foreign pupils”, “children of migrant workers” or “first-generation immigrants”, the authors present the main socio-demographic characteristics of migrants arriving in France younger than the age at which schooling is no longer compulsory, and who were between 18 and 35 years of age on the date of the TeO study. They then deliver an analysis of the educational pathways and levels of educational qualification, paying particular attention to the progress of school-age migrants within the various reception facilities for first-generation immigrant schoolchildren or for non-native speakers but also in adapted classrooms or pre-apprenticeship classes of various types such as SES, SEGPA, CPA or CPPN (general, vocational, adapted or pre-apprenticeship or pre-professional classes for ages 15+, etc.). This involves discovering whether the pupils who have not mastered French or who have little knowledge of French when they arrive in France have been able to attend the specific classes arranged for them and the extent to which there is (or is not) statistical overrepresentation of migrant children in adapted classes at educational institutions. In other words, the objective is to discover whether there are forms of institutional ghettoization or institutional discrimination against these groups of school children. Finally, the authors are interested in the subjectively reported school experience of migrant pupils in response to questions on favourable or unfavourable treatment that they have experienced in school. They reveal that the first results seem to indicate an experience of school in France which is perceived to be fairly positive, despite difficulties by comparison with the descendants of immigrants (born in France of immigrant parents) in particular.

- 8 The article by Maitena Armagnagne offers an analysis of the school experience of migrant children and young people shaped by a tension between republican/liberal logic characterising the French educational system and the socio-political climate determining restrictive migratory policies. The result is “confusion” in the implementation of the right to schooling and the destabilisation of educational practices of the educational stakeholders but also children and their points of contact in education. A comparison between time in school and the social experience needs of children and young people will then reconfigure school pathways marked by unpredictability. This situation contributes to the production of scattered educational practices that are sometimes disrupted for educational stakeholders, the pupils and those close to them who do not always succeed in grasping the political and philosophical credibility of the institutional approaches of schools.
- 9 Marie Françoise Valette is committed to defining the often disregarded distinction between the right to education and compulsory education, relying on the main international European and French legal sources which are the primary sources in the hierarchy of standards. Taking for example refusal by certain municipal authorities to register migrant children into nursery school as well as refusal to educate unaccompanied minors above age 16, the author emphasises the multitude of these situations while offering a legal reading. To analyse the obligations incumbent upon government authorities and parents or tutors respectively gives a better understanding of the origin of the confusions between the right to education and compulsory education and to set them against an instructive historical perspective.
- 10 Gwenaëlle Audren, Virginie Baby-Collin and Marguerite Valcin question the role of the elementary school in poorer districts where large first-generation immigrant populations reside. Their reflections are presented in the results of a qualitative study conducted in a less affluent district in the centre of Marseilles. The authors analyse the school as a resource itself as much as a hub of resources in the urban environment. They present the way in which educational professionals adjust and engage in their practices with first-generation immigrant populations, in particular in an intermediary role.
- 11 Simona Tersigni and Lorenzo Navone centre their own reflections around the inclusion of a juvenile population – school children from Italy of North-African descent – having already experienced migration and schooling in several countries. Through detailed analysis of the procedures for receiving and providing accessible education for such school children in specialist systems and ordinary classes at the académie de Strasbourg, the authors question the functioning of the French educational institution and denounce emergency educational policies.
- 12 Finally, the article by Alexandra Vié offers an analysis of the issue of schooling and migration in the border territory of Guyana, showing the effects of anchor points and territorial investment there which characterise children and their families. Such territorial practices and the manner in which they are described in stories by the children and young people concerned, forge educational pathways to a much greater degree than ordinary socio-administrative dimensions.

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NOTES

1. This translation took place with the support team of Grhapes (Groupe de recherche sur le handicap, l'accessibilité, les pratiques éducatives et scolaires ; EA 7287) to the INSHEA.
2. Maïtena Armagnague, Claire Cossée, Catherine Mendonça Dias, Isabelle Rigoni et Simona Tersigni (Éds.) (forthcoming), *Enfants migrants à l'école*, Lormont, Le Bord de l'eau.
3. Mendonça Dias Catherine, Azaoui Brahim et Chnane-Davin Fatima (Éds.) (forthcoming) *Allophonie. Inclusion et langue des enfants migrants à l'école*, Paris, Lambert Lucas.
4. Armagnague Maïtena, Rigoni Isabelle et Tersigni Simona (Coords.) (2019) La scolarisation des élèves migrants en France, *Migrations Société*, 31 (176), pp. 17-164.
5. Almost a million migrants and refugees crossed the Mediterranean in 2015 (by contrast with 219,000 in 2014) according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), 3,700 of whom lost their lives in the process. Moreover, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that more than 34,000 migrants and refugees arrived in the same year in Bulgaria and in Greece after having crossed Turkey. "This total represents the greatest migratory flow since the Second World War" in Europe the IOM states in a communication sent to the media in December 2015.
6. According to Eurostat, 84,270 asylum applications were made in France in 2016 by comparison with 745,155 in Germany and 122,960 in Italy, out of a total of 1,259,955 in the 28 countries of the European Union, [online] last checked on 06/07/2017. URL: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=fr&pcode=tps00191&plugin=1>

7. Ministry for the Interior, annual statistics on immigration, asylum and acquisition of French nationality, 16 January 2018, [online] last checked on 03/12/2018. URL: <https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Info-ressources/Actualites/Communiqués/Communiqué-de-presse-Statistiques-annuelles-en-matière-d-immigration-d-asile-et-d-acquisition-de-la-nationalité-française>

8. Eurostat data, available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/>

9. Ministry for Justice (2018) *Mission MNA, Annual activity report 2017*, [online]. URL: http://www.justice.gouv.fr/art_pix/RAA-MMNA-2017.pdf

10. MIGRITI (2014-17) was funded by the Université Paris Lumières (UPL); SAJE (2016), by MSHS, Poitiers; EVASCOL (2015-18), by the Advocate for human rights; EDUCINCLU (2016-19), by IRES.

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