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The life experiences
of Eastern European
migrant children in Scotland

*A summary version of
the 'At Home Abroad' Report
for practitioners and policy makers*

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**Humanities &
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1. Background

1.1 What is the focus of the 'At home abroad' report and what brought it about?

Migration, while not a new phenomenon in Europe or worldwide, has become in the last few years a key socio-economic issue in the United Kingdom. With the accession of various countries from Eastern Europe into the European Union in 2004, Britain has seen an increasing number of migrants arriving to look for work or settle here with their families. At the same time, migration remains a very contentious issue in the public arena and continues to challenge governments and other agencies as they attempt to balance its benefits and challenges for the economy, service delivery and national identity.

Inclusion of migrants into the societal structures requires reliable research and a great deal of work has been done already to document statistically the profile of migrant workers, providing useful information on their educational background, ages, socio-economic background and country of origin. More recently, research into migrants' own perspective has also developed, looking at people's reasons for migrating, their experiences before and after migration, the types of jobs migrants do and other issues. A group however that has been less studied is that of migrant children from new migrant groups, who often follow their parents abroad without having much of a say in their families' decisions to migrate. In Scotland, the Statistics for Schools in Scotland (2010) census identified 22,740 children with English as an Additional Language, which is more than double the numbers recorded in 2006 when these figures were first collected. This increasing trend is set to continue, despite the recent economic crisis. Knowing what are the needs of migrant children from newly arrived groups and also how migration is experienced by children is key to planning appropriate services and support.

The At Home Abroad study was designed to address this knowledge gap by exploring Eastern European migrant children's views on life after migration, including the impact of migratory transitions on their relationships, feelings, opportunities for education and access to other services, sense of identity and general well-being.

1.2 How does the study define 'Eastern European migrant children'?

The study looked at the experiences of migrant children who arrived from Eastern Europe after the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 due to their families' migration to Scotland, mainly for work purposes. Most children had been living in Scotland for less than 3 years at the time of the study. The nationalities covered in the sample include a majority of Polish children (which is the most common group among new Eastern European migrants in Scotland), but also Bulgarian, Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and Lithuanian children. Some Roma children from Romania, Poland and Slovakia were also involved.

1.3 What were the study's main aim and objectives?

The substantive aim of the project was *to explore the experiences of children from families of Eastern European migrant workers after settling abroad*. Other key objectives were:

- To give a voice and empower children from the new ethnic minorities;
- To reflect Eastern European children's experiences both in terms of short-term goals (e.g. learning English, accessing services, developing networks of support) and long-term goals (e.g. educational aspirations, career plans);
- To identify the main factors (economic, cultural, social, individual) enabling children from migrant families to adapt well and how place of residence impacts on children's experiences;
- To explore the impact of family migration on children's relationships with adults and peers, in Scotland and transnationally, and their sense of identity;
- To examine migrant children's perceptions and access to key services (education, health, leisure, retail) in Scotland or transnationally and how these might be improved.

1.4 How was the research conducted?

A team of researchers from the University of Strathclyde collected the data for the study between Spring 2008 and Spring 2010.

In line with the proposed focus on children's participation, the project worked closely with 57 children from a range of nationalities between the ages of 7 and 16 years. It also had a young people's advisory group to support the project development with ideas on methods to use. Participating children and young people were recruited from lower and higher income households and a range of locations across Scotland, including urban, semi-urban and rural areas, selected based on the statistical data on migrant workers.

Research with children was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, focus groups familiarised children with the study and gathered their experiences of life after migration and the impact of migration on their family life, friendships and opportunities to access services. Out of the 57 children who participated in the 11 focus groups, 7 of them were interviewed afterwards in more detail and 28 participated in detailed case studies, including their families in the research. In these case studies, children could fill in diaries, take pictures or make videos of their life in Scotland and then use these materials to contribute to the research.

Other data were collected through interviews with 19 service providers from a range of agencies, all working with or having policy responsibilities for migrant groups. This included providers from education, health, leisure, housing, Government and voluntary/community workers. Also, 120 teachers working with migrant children participated in a seminar, sharing their views on current issues in supporting migrant children in schools.

2. Key findings

2.1 What were children's experiences of migration?

Children had little agency in the process of family migration, although many parents mentioned their children's opportunities for a 'better future' as a key reason for their family's migration. Parents often felt that there would be more opportunities in terms of education and employment in Scotland for them and their children than in their own country, even in times of economic recession.

> *'My mum decided [to come here]. She heard other people saying this is a good place, they could get a job and stuff, and she also thought I could go here to University more easily. So she came first, and then after two months, we came too.'*
> *(Brona, Lithuanian, age 14)*

> *'All I want is for us to have a good life and to be able to provide for my children. And I want to make sure that my children are happy and to give them what other children have and a good education, so they don't need to ever feel ashamed.'*
> *(Gregorz, Polish parent)*

Children's experiences of migration varied considerably. How migration was experienced depended on a range of factors, including family income and housing conditions, local area, support from parents and siblings, and their own resilience. For those whose parents were in poor employment, the experience was more negative, as migration often meant limited family time, poor housing conditions and more restricted access to services and public spaces.

> *'To the swimming pool we go with dad and sometimes he takes us to the cinema. But many times we don't go, because he is at work.'*
> *(Michelle, Polish, age 10)*

Children of different age and gender seem to experience migration differently. After the initial stages of anxiety and fear of the unknown, most children adapted well to their new life. Younger children seemed to be more adaptable. Some older children had considerable emotional difficulties and talked about being homesick and wanting to return to their home country.

> *'At first, I was very anxious. I was scared. But then we got a house, I went to school and I just kept going every day, and in the end I was fine.'*
> *(Vladislav, Lithuanian, age 12)*

Migration prompted children to reflect on their own cultural identity and sense of self. Many talked about a 'blended' identity, where they kept some elements of their own culture, but also adopted some new ones, like a Scottish accent or Scottish traditions. Some found they had to adopt different identities depending on the place they were in.

> *'Interviewer: If I said are you Scottish or are you Lithuanian which do you think you would pick?*
> *Daina: I'd pick Scottish.*
> *Interviewer: You think you changed a little bit?*
> *Daina: Yeah. When I go to Lithuania I feel Lithuanian, when I go to Scotland I feel like Scottish.' (Daina, Lithuanian, age 9)*

> *'I'm more Polish at home and more Scottish at school.' (Piotr, Polish, age 13)*

Being 'at home' most often meant back in their country of origin, but also in Scotland, and for some **both places were 'home'**. Children often brought home knowledge about the Scottish culture and shared them with their families, becoming 'cultural brokers'. Ways of keeping their native culture alive included cooking traditional meals, observing traditional holidays, attending church and events through diaspora groups and reading papers online.

> *'Christmas is a time of joy and happiness, such a big event for us. I already prepared pierogi [traditional dumplings], then I'll make other dishes on Christmas Eve, like Kwasnica and Barszcz [traditional soups], and then we go to church on Christmas day, like we do back home.' (Agnieszka, Polish parent)*

> *'We did Halloween and I was trick or treating, that was awesome! I want to do it again! It's just fun knocking on people's doors and just singing or dancing, we don't have that in Bulgaria.' (Ana, Bulgarian, age 12)*

In general, **children's experiences of migration were positive**. They generally felt included at school and enjoyed living in Scotland. They felt most Scottish children and adults were friendly and welcoming, although some negative experiences of abuse and racism were mentioned. For many, migration was a formative experience, with opportunities to improve their English, meet new people and become more knowledgeable about the world and other cultures. In this respect, although challenging, migration was perceived as a 'good experience'.

Migrant Roma children who are traditionally disadvantaged in Europe are also vulnerable after migration and more likely to be victims of disadvantage, discrimination and racism.

> *'The first flat we lived in, it was terrible. There were drunk teenagers shouting abuse almost every day, banging at our door, drawing swastikas on our door. The Police was here almost every week and we were afraid to even go out.' (Andrzej, Polish parent)*

> *'We had some problems in the playground. Some children are not that nice. They tried to scare us, shouted 'Poles, go home' and threw stones at us. But most people are ok and treat you nice.' (Marta, Polish Roma, age 11)*

> *'Life was not good for us back home, we didn't like it there. People would call us names and throw things at us. And they would beat you up in school. We've had some problems here, but not as much [as before].' (David, Romanian Roma, age 8)*

2.2 What are the main factors affecting children's experiences of migration and acculturation practices?

The main factors affecting children's experiences were their families' socio-economic circumstances after migration, neighbourhood characteristics and quality of local services, range of social networks through family and friends, as well as children's resilience and ability to cope with their new circumstances.

For most families, migration meant a **change in their socio-economic circumstances**, sometimes for better, but often for worse. Parents were often well qualified but unable to find work that matched their skills and this meant they had to work longer hours with less time for the family. Most families had at least one member in work (usually the father). This also impacted on the quality of housing families could afford, as well as access to services.

'We used to have a house with garden and animals back home, now we live in the tower blocks near Hope Road, so it's not very nice, but hopefully it will get better.'
(Wioleta, Polish parent)

'I'm working from Sunday night until Thursday, and Fridays children are in school, so we don't go anywhere, and then Saturday we usually just get the weekly shopping done.'
(Grzegorz, Polish parent)

Neighbourhood characteristics were key to how children experienced life after migration and parents' willingness to allow children to go to local places independently. Young people living in more deprived areas were more likely to have restricted access outside, were more concerned about potential racist or gang attacks and unhappy with services available locally.

'Because of the area we live in, there are many teenagers who take drugs, drink and smoke in the local park, and sometimes shouting things like, stupid, f**king Polish when you pass by, so there is no way I would let Bartek out to play.'
(Agata, Polish parent)

Quality of local services was very important to how children perceived their opportunities in the new country and how they felt about their life in Scotland. A positive, **inclusive school environment** in which children felt they were achieving their potential was key for migrant children and parents, who generally had high educational aspirations. The provision of **good quality health services** was also important, migrants often commenting negatively on waiting lists and limited access to specialists. Indoor **leisure services** were mentioned less often, while outdoor activities, such as parks, natural reserves, touristic attractions were highly valued.

'School is good here, it makes me happy. My teacher asked two girls in my class to show me around and to help me with Science and History lessons and they are all very nice to me.' (Wiktoria, Lithuania, age 15)

'My school gets an interpreter if I don't understand something or if my mum needs to come in to speak to the teacher. This is good, at least she knows what's going on.'
(Anna, Polish, age 14)

'My child has asthma and they said you need to wait two months for a specialist, so I just decided to take a flight to Poland and see the doctor we know there.'
(Agatha, Polish mother)

'We love it here, there are so many places to visit, and I love that everything is green.'
(Dora, Bulgarian, age 14)

Social networks after migration were key to successful acculturation. Some children seemed more resourceful in creating new networks of support by developing new friendships, acting as 'cultural brokers' for the family, finding out information on services available and diaspora groups. Some families have migrated en masse, with three generations living in Scotland, and grandparents often providing most of the childcare and housework while parents were working.

'My daughter's English is better, she learns from her school and friends, so she tells us what places to go to from the Internet or her school and she reads letters for us and things.' (Emilia, Polish mother)

'I came first, then I brought my husband and my children maybe two months later after I found a place for us to live. And then my parents came and my brother and sister with their families, so now we are all here and my mum helps with the children.'
(Joanna, Polish mother)

The most common difficulties encountered were related to the **language barriers** and difficulties in forming friendships, especially in older children. In relation to this, education services and employers were seen as having a key role in providing opportunities for children and parents to learn English and interact socially with local families. Many mentioned **libraries** as places which facilitated their language learning, through borrowing books, activities for families and access to internet.

'When I arrived, around 3 years ago, I was the only Polish child in this school. It was very difficult to make friends; everyone was asking me words in Polish. I was talking to them in Polish as I didn't know English at all. They laughed at me, and no one wanted to be my friend. I think it's much easier for the Polish kids who are coming now, as you know you will find some Polish students here.' (Klaudia, Polish, age 13)

Finally, **technologies** (computers, mobile phones etc.) were mentioned as key mediators of social networks, in the UK or transnationally. Children used technologies at home and in public places (schools, libraries, cafes) to keep in touch with family and friends back home and their own culture, for example through reading newspapers online.

Access to technologies was very important for finding out about local services and opportunities, including jobs, and also kept older young people entertained when parents were in work. Many used **online learning resources** to improve their English, like reading online news and looking for information in English, playing games in English or conversing with new friends on social networking sites.

'I come home and sit on my computer, maybe read the news, look at cool websites and then I just wait for my friend from Poland to finish her homework so we can chat.'
(Marta, Polish, age 12)

2.3 How does migration affect children's family and peer relationships?

Migration often meant **family separation** for a shorter or longer period of time and sometimes led to family disintegration through divorce. Many children described having a family member, usually their father, working abroad before they migrated. While for some children, migration was an opportunity for family reunion, for others, temporary separation led to the permanent disintegration of the family unit.

Children missed family members left behind a great deal and this often had considerable impact on their well-being and ability to adapt to their new life. Many talked about their grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles who used to play a key role in their life before migration. **The absence of key family adults** after migration impacted on children's life style, opportunities to access activities and emotional well-being.

'I am the type of person who likes to have people around and I miss that here, we hardly have anyone opening the door. Back home, the house was always full. So we have to manage and look after children by ourselves, which is hard and lonely at times.'
(Berta, Polish parent)

Other things that children and their parents missed included **family pets, traditional foods and national festivals** and celebrations, although many families made an effort to celebrate these when in Scotland.

'The things I miss most are my dog, Zebra. We had to give him away, as he didn't have a passport and my grandparents didn't want him. We used to have lots of pets, I miss that.' (Kasia, Polish, age 10)

'I miss the food, the food doesn't taste the same here. Meat is maybe better, but the fruit and vegetables are like tasteless.' (Gintare,Lithuanian, age 14)

'This year, we celebrated for the first time Halloween. It was fun going trick and treating and getting all those sweeties. But we also celebrate our national holidays and my mum bakes cakes and stuff.' (Marta, Polish, age 11)

Lack of social support and family networks put considerable **pressure on migrant single parent families** and families on low income, often headed by mothers. The difficulties of providing childcare, financial support and working were often compounded by jobs that required long unsociable hours of work and employers who were unsympathetic to family needs. Children in these families had to 'grow up' and show resilience in coping with difficult circumstances.

Limited social networks after migration often mean that children depend on family members more than before. In these initial stages, the role of other agencies and diaspora groups in giving information on opportunities available to socialise and meet new people seems crucial. Often parents expressed concerns for children's safety due to the unknown risks in the local area and their limited language skills and restricted their independence and access to public spaces.

'Because of the area in which we live, my mum doesn't want me out much, she says it's not safe and my English is not good either. So I tend to stay mostly at home, while back in Lithuania I could go out by myself.' (Radicz, Lithuanian, age 13)

Friends left behind were greatly missed and often hard to keep in touch with, despite many children using modern technologies to do so. Not having friends was identified as one of the most difficult things to cope with immediately after arriving in Scotland. New friends could be difficult to make and schools were the main environment to develop social networks.

'The most awful thing is having to leave your friends. Family are always with you and no matter what you do and where you go, you'll be in touch with them. But friends, you know you can lose them [when you go abroad] and that's the worst part.'
(Gintare, Lithuanian, age 15)

'There are different ways how you say things, then different words for things, and then you maybe play different games and maybe you have different clothes. So it's difficult to make friends because you are different at the beginning.'
(Agatha, Czech, age 11)

New peers played an important role in helping children cope better with the transition after migration, learn the new language and culture and also in **facilitating access to key services**. This seems to be increasingly the case for older children, who crave a more independent lifestyle.

'I miss my best friend, Dorotka. We used to go together in trips, spend a lot of time together, just chat, go for pizza or to the cinema, it was fun... Now I don't have a friend like that.' (Kasia, Poland, age 10)

2.4 How does migration impact on children's use of public and private services?

Migrant children accessed a relatively limited range of services. All children identified education as the main service used and were generally pleased with their learning experiences in Scotland. Health and leisure services were accessed to a more limited extent in Scotland. Retail services were used locally, but also through online shopping.

> '*Kasia:*   *I go to school and maybe shopping, that's about it.*
>
> *Interviewer:* *And your arts and music lessons?*
>
> *Kasia:*   *The teacher comes to my house.*
>
> *Interviewer:* *What about the swimming pool or cinema? Or maybe parks?*
>
> *Kasia:*   *We don't really go.*' (*Kasia, Polish, age 10*)

The organisation of provision of services for migrants and how accessible these were based on information translated, access to interpreters and specialist EAL teachers, systems in place to monitor quality of service experience **varied considerably between local authorities**.

School was the key service children used and the quality of their school experience strongly influenced how children perceived their whole experience after migration. Parents and children expressed high educational aspirations. On occasions, parents felt children were working below their ability in certain subjects, often because they thought children's developing competence in English interfered with the assessment of their competence or because of differences in the educational systems in Scotland and their own country.

> '*I want to be a dentist, so I know already what subjects I need, but sometimes the teachers think I wouldn't understand things, but I've done much harder stuff back home, for example in Maths and Science*' (*Gintare, Lithuanian, age 15*)

> '*Kuba:*   *I like math and science.*
>
> *Interviewer:* *so you like natural science and you have analytical mind.*
>
> *Kuba:*   *I'm one of the best pupils in math in our class.*
>
> *Interviewer:* *You might get an award then.*
>
> *Kuba:*   *I already received award, top in Maths, only 4 children in school got this.*'
>
>   (*Kuba, Polish, age 10*)

> '*School is much better here than back home. Here, you can choose subjects you want to do, the computers are all new and you can do your own thing, you have a lot of additional projects and classes. Last week, we prepared a performance and we also had to do a professional film, so it's all really interesting.*' (*Marta, Polish, age 11*)

Services such as the complementary Saturday school and church were very important to children's and parents' sense of cultural identity, especially for Polish migrants. Also, informal services, such as private violin or ballet lessons, were pursued by the more middle-class families.

Many children talked about how much they enjoyed Scotland's scenery and touristic attractions, which they often visited as a family. Children played games like football and basketball and liked the outdoors (public parks, the countryside).

Families' linguistic competence was a key issue in accessing other services. If children were more proficient in English, they often acted as 'cultural brokers' and mediated access to services for their parents or told them how the 'system works'. If children's competence in English was developing, parents took the lead in finding services and accompanied children to these. They also tended to restrict children's independent access to public spaces in these situations:

> '*I read the letters we get and find out things, then tell my mum.*'
> (*Giorg, Hungarian, age 12*)

> '*I went once with my dad to the swimming pool, but he works late and I'm not allowed to go by myself because my English is not so good yet. So I sit at home and wait for my friends to come and chat on skype, when they finish their homework.*'
> (*Viktor, Slovak, age 12*)

Sometimes, families were making **use of services transnationally**, for example by going to see doctors or dentists back home, although they made sure they had access to services in Scotland in case of an emergency. This was often due to the perception that services were too expensive, might not be in their entitlement or were 'different' or 'worse' than in their own country.

> '*We went to see a dentist, and they said it's 4 months wait, so my mum just said we'll go to Poland for the week-end and we got all the dentist work done there.*'
> (*Kasia, Polish, age 11*)

> '*We had to wait to see a specialist so long, so my mum decided to take a flight to Bulgaria and go and see the eye doctor who treated me first there, it was quicker.*'
> (*Andrea, Bulgaria, age 12*)

The main barriers mentioned in relation to access to services were: lack of information in their own language, uncertainty of entitlement to service, accessibility of services (opening hours, location, transport etc.), different systems of service provision between countries, lack of peer relationships to support service use and parental restrictions due to safety concerns.

Young people thought that a **quality service** available to newly arrived migrant children should be accessible locally, with friendly and supportive staff, with interpreters or information in their own language at the beginning to help them understand the system. They also wanted inclusive, non-judgemental and non-discriminatory services, especially important in services such as schools, leisure and health.

> '*For me, a good service has information for me so I understand what's on offer and what I can do there.*' (*Piotr, Polish, age 13*)

'I'd like if people wouldn't treat me as foreigner when I go to a place, like the swimming pool. I think sometimes they think we shouldn't be entitled to free swimming and they talk down on us.' (Kasia, Polish, age 12)

Service providers often talked about **difficulties in providing a good service** for migrant families due to lack of resources, lack of information on similar services in children's country of origin and language and cultural barriers.

'We have huge issues with translation services, there is no funding to allow us to do that.' (Headteacher, Rural Area)

'We work with almost the same resources we had five years ago despite a huge increase in the number of EAL learners.' (EAL manager, Semi-urban area)

'People are used to a different health system, so they expect access to specialists for example when it's something we would deal with in the practice. The other thing with Eastern Europeans, their perception of illness and health is different and what they want from us. Sometimes, they see their doctor in Poland and come to us for a second opinion- so there is a clash of cultures.' (GP, Rural Area)

3. Implications for Policy and Practice

3.1 THE MAIN THEMES TO EMERGE FROM THIS RESEARCH ARE:

- **Children's experiences of migration vary considerably, depending on a range of factors.** While for many, migration, although emotionally challenging, led to a positive experience, others may find it exceptionally traumatic.

- **The main factors affecting children's experiences are their families' socio-economic circumstances, neighbourhood characteristics and quality of local services.** Children whose parents gained economically after migration tended to see their experience as more positive. For others, migration meant living in poor housing and with limited access to outdoor spaces or local services.

- **Access to inclusive, well-designed services is key to successful acculturation and integration.** The quality of services available, especially in relation to educational services, was one of the main factors influencing children's views on their life in Scotland. Lack of information on services available and how these operate and entitlements was often cited as a barrier to effective service use.

- **Schools are key in providing children with opportunities to achieve academically, develop new friendships, learn the language and find out about local opportunities.** Parents and children had mainly positive experiences of schooling, and praised support received and the inclusive ethos of most schools.

- **The most common difficulties encountered were related to language barriers and difficulties in developing social networks.** Families' linguistic competence in English was key to the integration process, affecting parents' opportunities to find well-paid jobs and develop social networks, to children's opportunities for academic achievement, friendships and access to services.

- **Some disadvantaged groups among migrant children, like the Roma families or single parent migrant families on low income, can fall through the gaps in system due to language and cultural barriers.** This may leave migrant children not attending school or being 'high risk cases' which do not receive attention from social services because they are not properly assessed or their whereabouts are not followed as closely as in the case of non-migrant children.

3.2 KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

Given the increase in the number of Eastern European families currently living and working in the United Kingdom, it is important that **policy makers at national** level through the Scottish Government and local authority level and **managers of** public services and **practitioners** working with migrant families consider the following recommendations:

Family migration from Eastern Europe is often a decision taken by adults in search of better employment opportunities. Children's future and better education and career opportunities are key reasons for deciding to migrate.

Recommendation for policy: Current policy on population targets and initiatives aimed at attracting migrant workers are not enough to keep migrant workers in Scotland. Consider how better policy initiatives, aimed also at supporting migrant children, can be developed, to better support families newly arrived and ensure their long term settlement. A clear strategy and guidelines are needed to clarify how services should be meeting the needs of new migrant families.

Recommendation for services: Ensure services are meeting the needs of migrant families, by consulting with families to identify their needs and concerns about service provision.

Provision for migrant children varies considerably between local authorities across Scotland. While some variation is necessary given varied demographics, a much more consistent approach is required, to ensure migrant children's needs are met.

Recommendation for policy: Provide more guidance to local authorities through a national framework on best standards in supporting newly arrived migrant families and their children, to ensure better integration in communities. This should include provision of information, access to services, guidance and support available and general opportunities for community participation.

Recommendation for services: Develop systems of monitoring service provision for migrant groups and ensure consistency across the service and among practitioners.

Schools and statutory services are very influential and key to children's and families successful integration. This is especially the case for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who may not have any other means to access services or develop social networks.

Recommendation for policy: Provide further funding and guidance to schools to enable them to support migrant children who are new arrivals, in terms of assessment of their language skills and academic competencies, and also in terms of supporting families with information on other services and community opportunities.

Recommendation for services: Ensure children's linguistic and academic competencies are assessed accurately, perhaps through the use of interpreters or bilingual assistants, and provide a challenging and culturally appropriate curriculum. Support newly arrived children with emotional difficulties and opportunities to develop friendships and networks of support.

Eastern European migrants have generally high expectations of their children's academic achievement and well-being and happiness in school. Decisions to migrate back to their country of origin are often taken based on how well children adapt in school and achieve academically.

Recommendation for policy: Provide schools with more information on other educational systems across Europe and support for provision of specialist subjects in children's own language, if possible, or bilingual teaching assistants. Ensure schools have financial means, perhaps through a pupil premium for migrant children, to provide the appropriate support in terms of language learning and academic achievement of migrant children.

Recommendation for services: Ensure that migrant children are challenged academically and do not fall behind because of their developing competence in English. Create genuine opportunities for parental involvement in children's learning and school life. Take advantage of the diverse language and skills pool of parents from other countries, especially as some of them may not be in work.

Supporting migrant children's cultural identity and opportunities to use their native language are key to successful integration and long-term settlement of families.

Recommendation for policy: It is important that further policy initiatives on inclusion and cultural diversity acknowledge the changed makeup of Scotland's population and ensure initiatives aimed at tackling racism and discriminatory attitudes are well funded and sustained, especially in times of economic downturn.

Recommendation for services: Migrant children should feel included culturally in the school community and allowed to express freely their cultural identity by using their native language and talking about their culture. This should not be done in a tokenistic manner, by asking children to showcase 'traditional' aspects from their country, but rather through the development of a genuine multicultural ethos.

Development of children and their parents' linguistic competence in English is key to facilitating successful integration and opportunities to access services. Migrant parents and children are keen to learn English, but often encounter barriers in doing so.

Recommendation for policy: Given the importance of parents' linguistic skills in English in securing employment and participating in community life, it is crucial that provision of free English language classes is funded appropriately and continued. Similarly, schools should be given support to help children who are learning English as a foreign language. Funding for translated materials and interpreters should also be available.

Recommendation for services: Community learning services and employers should ensure access to language classes, as these are key to adults' ability to adapt well in the new environment. These should be free, focussed on communication skills and provided flexibly, including evening classes. Limited language skills often are the main barriers to migrant mothers, who are isolated in their homes, often more than their children and partners. Children should be supported to learn English in nurseries and schools, but not at the detriment of accessing the curriculum through segregation from classes.

Migrants' use of services was rather limited, especially in relation to health and leisure, often due to lack of information on entitlements and services available. Access to information on services available is vital for migrant families newly arrived, as often they lack other means of information, for example through informal networks.

Recommendation for policy: Encourage and support all key services to make information about services provided and entitlements accessible in other languages, depending on nationality groups migrating in each area. This information should be provided for adults, but also in formats accessible to children, who are often cultural mediators for their families.

Recommendation for services: Target information at parents as well as children from new migrant groups to ensure that information about services is presented in an accessible and detailed manner, so that families are aware of services available and benefit from using them.

Professionals often feel that their lack of knowledge on migrant families' needs and expectations gets in the way of providing a good service experience.

Recommendation for policy: Provide guidance on the standards of training required for professionals working with migrant groups, facilitate opportunities for training and funding available at local authority level. Make data on migrants available and accessible to service providers and fund research and consultation with migrant families, to get more reliable data on their needs and expectations.

Recommendation for services: Ensure practitioners working with migrant families have access to relevant training on working with migrant groups and information available on culture-specific issues and migrant families' needs and expectations.

Language barriers and service providers' limited knowledge of cultural backgrounds may mean that migrant children who may be at risk of marginalisation or vulnerable may fall through the gaps.

Recommendation for policy: Ensure appropriate guidance is developed in relation to identifying and managing vulnerable children from migrant backgrounds. Ensure these are treated as children first, with needs for protection through available services, and ensure services are well trained in identifying and supporting vulnerable cases.

Recommendation for services: Risks such as failure to attend school, emotional and physical abuse, poverty etc. in migrant families may be more difficult to detect if service providers encounter language and cultural barriers. It is important that services make sure migrant families with children are assessed through the same mechanisms of child protection and appropriate help is given, when needed. Service guidelines should be developed in time, to capture the specific needs of migrant groups and what can be done to address these.

There is still relatively limited participation of migrant families in public debate, local decision making and consultation. They are often seen, but less heard.

Recommendation for policy: Given the important contribution that migrants make to the economy and cultural diversity, it is important that public discourse on migration is driven by well-thought out policies on inclusion and positive community relationships. Opportunities for engagement of migrants in public debates and consultation should be pursued actively at national and regional level, to ensure civic participation and representation of migrant groups.

Recommendation for services: Create opportunities for involvement of migrants in service delivery, decisions about services are offered and consultations on how to improve these, especially in relation to migrant groups. Work in collaboration with established diaspora groups to disseminate information about services available and conduct consultations to find out how services could be tailored to cater for the specific needs of new migrants.

4. Why should we listen to migrant children

At Home Abroad has highlighted the ability of children and young people such as those participating in this project to express in a clear and unbiased manner their views and help us develop more appropriate networks of support for them and their families.

Although children were often not involved in their families' decision to migrate, they had a key role as cultural brokers for their families after migration and often mediated their access to services and helped develop social relationships with other families. Also, children's happiness, educational opportunities and well-being were key factors when parents decided whether to return or not to their country of origin. If the Scottish Government is determined to attract high quality migrants to Scotland, appropriate provision of support networks and services for children of migrants is crucial to retain families.

The research clearly shows the need to adopt a more systematic approach to involving migrant children further in decision-making processes about the ways in which services are delivered for them. This process is important to ensure that the right support is available to ensure children's salient transition after migration and also that the services children are entitled to are accessible and are meeting their needs. Children and their families have clear ideas about what they want and how provision could be improved and these views need to be incorporated more systematically in service delivery. It is especially important that migrant children from all socio-economic backgrounds are included in these processes, to ensure that patterns of disadvantage before migration are not reproduced after migration.

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