3. Provide flexible education pathways for youth born abroad

WHAT and WHY?

Young people who arrive in the country past the start of primary education require flexible solutions. They face a higher risk of falling behind in the school system compared to their native-born peers and those who arrive at a younger age. In most countries, immigrant students who arrived at the age of 12 or older lag behind students in the same grade in reading proficiency at the age of 15 than immigrants who arrived at a younger age (OECD, 2015[17]). Evidence from Norway suggests that with every year a child spends outside the Norwegian school system before arrival subsequent educational and economic achievement decline (Bratsberg, Raaum and Røed, 2011[27]; Hermansen, 2017[28]).

Language is one key issue in this respect. A more demanding school curriculum requires a higher proficiency in the language of instruction. Those most in need of language support are students who migrate at compulsory school age and need to adapt to a new language of instruction immediately (Heath and Kilpi-Jakonen, 2012[29]). Research indicates that it takes children approximately two years to acquire communicative language skills. Still, it may take up to seven years for them to develop the academic language used in school environments (OECD, 2015[17]). Hence, the 'late arrival penalty' is higher when children migrate to a country where the language of instruction differs from their native language. What is more, in countries that sort students into different educational tracks and schools, recently arrived immigrants risk being sorted into an education track that mirrors their initial language level rather than their cognitive abilities.

Differences between educational standards in the origin and destination country are another challenge: the bigger the gap in the educational standards, the more late arrivals will have fallen behind (or moved ahead) compared to their peers in the destination country (Heath and Kilpi-Jakonen, 2012[29]).

A particular problem arises for youth who arrive towards the end of compulsory schooling age. These youth are at risk of failing to obtain a school leaving certificate in their new country in the limited time that remains. At the same time, they need to learn a new language and adjust to their new surroundings. Yet, for those who have educational credentials from their origin country, the transferral of credentials may also take time, putting these youth at a particular risk. Where late arrival results from restrictive family reunification policies, policy makers must balance the intended benefits of such policies against the costs in terms of lower educational outcomes for the children concerned (OECD, 2017[30]).

WHO?

Youth with migrant parents are a diverse group. The challenges they face as well as the support they may or may not require to succeed depend on many factors. One of them is their age at arrival. Those who arrive in the later years of lower secondary education from countries where the educational standards are lower and the language differs from that of the new country require particular attention. Without targeted

and on-going support measures at school, they may not be able to obtain the basic skills needed to succeed.

HOW?

Countries should ensure that late arrivals have sufficient time to adapt to their new school environment and catch up with the demands of the new education system. The following approaches can mitigate the potentially negative effects of late arrival on educational attainment:

- adjusting mainstream education policy parameters, such as the school leaving age or the age at which students are sorted into different tracks
- establishing specific programmes for recently arrived students without proficiency in the language of instruction, such as time-bound reception or language classes
- providing recently arrived students and their parents with supplementary information and orientation on the schooling system and education environment, including in their mother tongue

Later *sorting into different educational tracks* can yield positive benefits for migrant youth, especially for late arrivals and in countries where ECEC is not well established. Separating students at an early age may lock late arrivals into a lower educational environment before they have had a chance to reach their full potential (Crul and Vermeulen, 2003[31]; Oakes, 2005[32]). In fact, early tracking brings disadvantages for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds more generally, who tend to be disproportionately assigned to lower tracks. This effect can be observed both in education systems that sort students into different schools and in school systems that sort students into different courses within the same school (Chmielewski, 2014[33]). Several OECD countries have raised or postponed the age of first tracking to the end of lower secondary education, to counter the negative impact of early selection. The Nordic countries were among the first to make that change in the 1970s, followed by Spain, some German states and Poland, where postponing the age of tracking in the early 2000s by one year to age 16 significantly raised the performance of students who would have been assigned to lower tracks, without worsening the results of top achievers (Wiśniewski and Zahorska, 2020[34]). However, in cases where it is neither realistic nor appropriate to change the system solely because of the difficulties of one group, higher permeability between tracks and adequate support are important remedies. Indeed, early sorting is less of an issue in education systems where students can change tracks relatively easily.

Along the same line of reasoning, some countries provide additional years of schooling beyond the usual school leaving age. Such solutions support immigrant students with limited formal education who arrive towards the end of compulsory education. In New Zealand, for example, late arrivals can remain in secondary education beyond the age of 19. The German state of Bavaria raised the compulsory age for vocational schools from 18 to 21, and in individual cases to 25, in reaction to the high inflows of refugee youth in 2015/16. Lithuania offers an additional year of schooling for late arrivals.

Many late arrivals, however, do not wish to pursue further education but prefer to take up employment, generally of the low-skilled kind. Targeted programmes combining studies with work experience can incentivise late arrivals to stay in education instead of looking for unstable, low-skilled jobs (Box 3.1). Finland's youth guarantee scheme provides an example of such a programme.

Box 3.1. Catch-up programmes for late arrivals outside mainstream education

In addition to targeted support offers in regular education institutions, some countries have developed specific catch-up programmes for recently arrived migrant students as an alternative to mainstream education.

An example is the "Newcomer Schools Program" in the United States, which targets recent adolescent migrants with low levels of literacy, previous schooling, or English proficiency. Based on repeated English language assessments, the programme provides one to three years of first language development and second language instruction, lessons in core academic subjects, leisure time activities, development of skills for self-directed study, career counselling and an "email buddies" scheme linking newcomers with students from local mainstream schools. A further initiative in the United States is the non-profit 'Internationals Network for Public Schools'. The network designs, establishes and supports publicly funded secondary schools and programmes for newly arrived immigrant students who score in the bottom quartile on English language tests, in co-operation with public school districts. Network schools follow the same curriculum and receive the same amount of public per-student funding as other public schools. However, they provide extra resources and support to staff and students, mostly financed through separate fundraising. Students are taught in small groups and learning is structured in project-based activities, portfolios and internships, combining language and content instruction. The regular cut-off age is 21, but evening schooling options are available for working immigrant youth aged 15-24.

Another example is the Young Migrant Education Program (YMEP) in Tasmania (Australia). YMEP provides recently arrived students aged 18-25 with English language training, teaches core subjects and develops general educational skills preparing newcomers for further study and employment. The programme, which also provides individual counselling and career support, is part of Australia's Technical and Further Education system, an alternative to mainstream education with a focus on vocational training.

A further example of a specific programme for late arrivals is the "SchlaU-Schule" in Munich (Germany). The school enables young refugees – mainly unaccompanied minors – to secure secondary school leaving certificates through adapted teaching and individual support in a close-knit school setting. It also provides post-school follow-up into mainstream education.

Some countries initially place immigrant students in specific preparatory reception classes within regular education institutions before entering the mainstream classroom. These classes often focus on language learning and are used in about half of European OECD countries as well as in Japan. The idea is to teach late arrivals a minimum level of the language of instruction and to help them adapt to their new school environment before they transit to the mainstream classroom. Other countries immediately place recently arrived immigrant students into mainstream classrooms but ease their integration by providing additional language and content support beyond the regular curriculum. Poland, for example, provides up to five weekly hours of remedial instruction in Polish language and other core subjects to migrant youth with limited Polish language skills, for a maximum of 12 months following their arrival. Similar schemes exist in Hungary and Luxembourg. In Portugal, for instance, students with Portuguese language needs enrol in Portuguese as a second language classes and schools can benefit from additional teaching staff for this purpose. In cases with less than ten students with Portuguese language needs at a given school, students attend regular classes, but follow a specialised curriculum and benefit from support language classes. Besides, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with schools and the Portuguese Language Cyberschool, has developed distance courses in Portuguese as a second language (OECD, 2018[2]).

Postponing teaching of the curriculum until students master the language of instruction is controversial. Critics suggest that immigrant students fall even further behind their non-immigrant peers in such a settling and that language learning integrated in academic education is more efficient (Nusche, 2009[35]; Karsten, 2006[36]; OECD, 2010[5]). However, a certain adaption period is generally necessary for students who do not speak the language and/or face other obstacles. Fixed maximum durations of reception classes and tailored approaches ensure that immigrant students do not get stuck. Reception classes can, for example, start as a full-time support programme and phase out as students gradually integrate into mainstream education. In Sweden, for instance, migrant youth undergo an assessment of their level of academic knowledge within two months of arrival. Based on this assessment, the school decides on the student's grade and placement in either introductory (separate) or regular classes. Further, the school designs an individual education plan covering Swedish language and core academic subjects. The transition to mainstream education follows on a subject-by-subject basis. Foreign-trained mother-tongue tutors or language teachers are more and more common as teachers in reception classes, including recently arrived migrants themselves. This approach, a part of Sweden's 'fast-track' integration pathways for certain professions, enables migrant teachers to obtain employment while their foreign teaching qualifications are being assessed for official recognition. A similar programme exists in Norway.

Outside of reception or language classes, several countries provide targeted support offers of a more generic orientation type. In Canada, schools run school readiness programmes, such as a 'Newcomer Orientation Week' (NOW) for immigrant and refugee high school students and 'Welcome & Information for Newcomers' (WIN) for elementary and junior high school students. The programmes introduce newcomer students to facilities, routines and policies, and provide contacts and support before the academic year starts. Teachers, settlement workers and peer leaders provide mentorship to build relationships, reach academic goals, enhance social and language skills, and connect with the broader community. A similar programme exists in Australia, where newly arrived immigrant students can take part in a peer-led youth orientation called 'Settle Smart'. The programme connects newcomers with peer educators of the same age, who inform about education pathways and social life in Australia.

In addition to language of instruction and orientation support, some OECD countries also enable students with migrant parents to learn their parents' native languages at school. Austria, for example, provides systematic training in some origin languages. Instruction of the language of the origin country of the parents is offered as an optional subject voluntarily at primary and secondary schools and taught between two and six hours per week. In the school year 2015/16, 32 900 students participated in such instruction. The vast majority were in primary school, where more than a quarter of all students with another mother tongue than German attended instruction in the language of parental origin. In Belgium, key origin countries support the extra-curricular language training. The programme 'Opening to Languages and Cultures' (OLC) enables children to study Chinese, Spanish, Greek, Italian, Arabic, Turkish, Portuguese and Romanian two hours per week in addition to the regular curriculum. Courses are open to all students in primary and secondary schooling irrespective of their nationality and cover language and culture of the origin country. Parental origin countries recruit and pay for teachers. This, however, results in limited possibilities for oversight of the host-country educational institutions.

Table 3.1. Specific reception classes for recently arrived youth in OECD countries, 2016

	Yes/No	Targeted educational level / age group	Duration	Criteria for transition to mainstream classes
Australia	No	/	/	/
Austria	No (except in some regions)	/	/	/

	Yes/No	Targeted educational level / age group	Duration	Criteria for transition to mainstream classes
Belgium	Yes	Primary and secondary education (2.5 – 18 years)	1 week – 18 months	If the teacher considers the student ready for transition, an integration council decides whether to integrate her/him in a class according to her/his level
Canada	Not at the national level but most provinces provide targeted support to students (incl. newcomers) with enhanced language or academic needs)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Chile	No	/	/	/
Czech Republic	No (but plan to establish 'strategic classes' for disadvantaged students at primary schools)	/	/	/
Denmark	Depends on municipality			
Estonia				
Finland	Yes	Primary and secondary level	Max. one academic year (900 hours for 6-10 year-olds, 1 000 hours for students above 10 years of age)	Student's progression in subjects taught
France	Yes	Primary and secondary education (6 – 16 years)	12 months	Reaching a certain language level
Germany	Yes	Primary and secondary education	6-12 months	Reaching a certain language level
Greece	Yes	Primary Education	1-3 academic years depending on the education priority zone of school	Following the regular curriculum without language problems
Hungary	No	/	/	/
Iceland				
Ireland	No	/	/	/
Israel				
Italy	Not systematically	/	/	/
Japan	Yes	Primary and secondary education (7-15 years)	Depends on the child's Japanese language ability	Reaching a certain language level
Korea				
Latvia	No	/	/	/
Lithuania	Yes	Primary and secondary education	Up to one academic year	Reaching a certain language level
Luxembourg	Yes	Mainly secondary (12-16 years) but also primary education	One academic year	Reaching a certain language level
Mexico	No	/	/	/

	Yes/No	Targeted educational level / age group	Duration	Criteria for transition to mainstream classes
Netherlands	Yes	Primary level	One academic year	Reaching a certain language level
New Zealand	No	/	/	/
Norway	Yes	6-18 years	n.a.	Reaching a certain language level
Poland	No	/	/	/
Portugal				
Slovak Republic	No	/	/	/
Slovenia	No	/	/	/
Spain	No (but existed until 2011)	(Primary and secondary level)	/	/
Sweden	Yes	Primary and secondary level	Up to two years	Student's progression in subjects taught (transition is subject-based)
Switzerland	Yes (but varies across regions and demand)	Varies across cantons	Usually up to one year	Varies across cantons
Turkey	No (but pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education options for Syrian refugee students in temporary protection centres)	/	/	/
United Kingdom	Varies from school to school	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
United States	Yes	Primary and secondary level	Until English language proficiency is reached (not limited)	English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessment, additional criteria may be used, but do not substitute for a proficient score on an ELP assessment

Note: n.a. = information not available; / = not applicable. In many OECD countries such as Germany and the United States, education is predominantly a subnational competence. The measures mentioned here might only apply to some states/entities.
Source: OECD questionnaire on the integration of young people with migrant parents 2016.

Table 3.2. Targeted support offers for late arrivals in OECD countries, 2016

	Targeted support offers for late arrivals	
	Yes/No	Type of support
Australia	No (not at national level, depends on state/ territory governments)	States/territories may fund activities such as: • Intensive English language classes in the first months • Intensive English language schools preceding enrolment in local schools • Bridging support between intensive English language support and mainstream secondary school
Austria	Yes	• Additional German language training and free dictionaries • Learning support including free tutoring, homework support and free private lessons
Belgium	No	/
Canada	Yes	School readiness programs including mentorship, such as the Newcomer Orientation Week (NOW) for newly arrived high school students and Welcome & Information for Newcomers (WIN) for elementary and junior high school students
Chile	No	/
Czech Republic	No	/
Denmark	Depends on municipality	
Estonia		
Finland	Yes	Extra 100 hours of preparatory training in reception classes
France	No	/
Germany	Yes	• Specific reception classes or special transition classes within vocational schools that aim at

	Targeted support offers for late arrivals	
	Yes/No	Type of support
		reaching a minimum school leaving diploma • Recognition of native language to substitute a 2nd or 3rd foreign language • Additional years of schooling if necessary
Greece	Yes	• Reception classes in secondary education • Reception structures for the education of refugees living in refugee accommodation centres • Extra tuition classes in primary education and lower secondary education for students who have attended reception classes but still have problems in attending regular classes
Hungary	Yes	• Additional language training and catch-up lessons in main subjects for one year • Possibility to repeat a grade
Iceland		
Ireland	Yes	Language support for students in need
Israel		
Italy	Yes (not systematic)	Training in Italian as a second language
Japan	Yes	Free of charge enrolment in junior high school for those who have not completed compulsory education
Korea		
Latvia	Yes	• Systematic and obligatory assessment of the language skills, the subjects taken, and the learning achievements of new arrivals at enrolment into primary or secondary education (assessment may include parents, childcare institutions and experts) • Elaboration of a tailored learning programme and support measures for a period of one to three years with a view to enable newcomer students to obtain compulsory education (grade 9)
Lithuania	Yes	Additional year of schooling
Luxembourg	Yes	One to two years of additional support in language, maths and social integration (plans to extend the period of support to three or four years)
Mexico	No	/
Netherlands		
New Zealand	Yes (but not systematic)	• Possibility to remain in secondary school beyond the age of 19 as an adult student as a bridge or preparation for further studies • 1-2 years of additional literacy and numeracy training • English language support for up to 5 years • In-class and one-on-one support from bilingual tutors and liaison officers
Norway	No	/
Poland	Yes	Remedial classes in Polish language and other subjects for up to 12 months
Portugal		
Slovak Republic	Yes	Assistance helping late arrivals to achieve lower secondary education
Slovenia	Yes	Possibility to postpone admission to the first grade for one year and adjustment of teaching and assessment methods for up to two years
Spain	No	/
Sweden	Yes	Introductory education as preparation for upper secondary school or equivalent adult education
Switzerland	Yes (but not systematic)	Varies across cantons
Turkey	No	/
United Kingdom	Varies from school to school	n.a.
United States	Yes	Specific schooling options for newcomer students (e.g. Newcomer Schools Programme or Internationals Network for Public Schools)

Note: "n.a." = information not available; "/" = not applicable. In many OECD countries such as Germany and the United States, education is predominantly a subnational competence. The measures mentioned here might only apply to some states/entities.
Source: OECD questionnaire on the integration of young people with migrant parents, 2016.

Table 3.3. Training of origin country languages at school in OECD countries, 2017 or latest available year

	Training in origin country language at school		
	Yes/No	Education level or age group aimed at	Part of or additional to regular curriculum
Australia	Yes (for certain languages including Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Modern Greek, Spanish, Vietnamese, Turkish)	Up to grade/year 10	Part of regular curriculum
Austria	Yes	Compulsory schools and academic secondary schools (lower and upper level)	Optional subject, additional to regular curriculum
Belgium	Yes (for Chinese, Romanian, Spanish, Greek, Turkish, Italian, Portuguese, Arabic, but not systematic)	All levels	Additional to regular curriculum
Canada	Not systematically (but exceptions in certain provinces, such as Vancouver)	/	/
Chile	No	/	/
Czech Republic	No	/	/
Denmark			
Estonia			
Finland	Yes (52 languages, not systematic)	Basic and general upper secondary level	Optional subject in addition to regular curriculum (not systematically provided)
France	Yes, international teaching of foreign languages (EILE) and teaching of language and culture of origin (ELCO)	/	/
Germany	Yes	Primary and secondary level	Optional subject, part of regular curriculum
Greece	No (not on a systematic basis)	/	/
Hungary	No (except at schools for national minorities, foreign schools and bilingual schools)	/	/
Iceland			
Ireland	Yes (for certain EU languages, Russian, Arabic and Japanese)	Secondary level	Optional (non-curricular) subject in leaving certificate examinations
Israel			
Italy	No (not systematic)	/	/
Japan			
Korea			
Latvia	No	/	/
Lithuania	Yes (for national minority languages such as Russian, Polish and Belorussian)	Primary, lower and upper secondary level	Part of regular curriculum
Luxembourg	No	/	/
Mexico	No	/	/
Netherlands	Yes (Turkish and Arabic)	Secondary level	Optional subject additional to regular curriculum
New Zealand	No (but some schools run afternoon sessions in students' native languages if community provides funding)	/	/
Norway	Yes	Age 6-18	Part of regular curriculum
Poland	Yes (not systematically, organised and financed by foreign diplomatic establishments or cultural organisations)	Age 6-16	Additional to regular curriculum
Portugal			

	Training in origin country language at school		
	Yes/No	Education level or age group aimed at	Part of or additional to regular curriculum
Slovenia	Yes	Basic and upper secondary schools (and pre-schools for Italian and Hungarian minorities)	In addition to regular curriculum
Slovak Republic	No	/	/
Spain	No	/	/
Sweden	Yes	Primary and secondary schooling	Instruction in origin country language is an extracurricular offer but can in certain cases replace a second foreign language
Switzerland	Yes (on a voluntary basis and not systematic)	Grade 1-9 / primary and lower secondary level (may vary across cantons)	Additional to regular curriculum
Turkey	Yes	n.a.	n.a.
United Kingdom	No	/	/
United States	No (but high school equivalency exams can be taken in Spanish)	/	/

Note: “n.a.” = information not available; “/” = not applicable. In many OECD countries such as Germany and the United States, education is predominantly a subnational competence. The measures mentioned here might only apply to some states/entities.
Source: OECD questionnaire on the integration of young people with migrant parents, 2017.