Editorial / Editorial

Good practices and educational innovation for improving well-being of migrant and refugee children. Insights from the IMMERSE H2020 research project

Buenas prácticas e innovación educativa para la mejora del bienestar de los niños migrantes y refugiados. Perspectivas del proyecto de investigación IMMERSE H2020

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ABSTRACT

The term "good practice" refers to an innovative and creative solution crafted to enhance the living conditions and, consequently, the well-being of individuals and communities. However, this concept is profoundly contextual. A project, process, or outcome can be deemed "good" or "innovative" only concerning a particular context and its capacity to meet a specific need. Hence, adopting and adapting a good practice originating from elsewhere to a new context must be approached on a case-by-case basis. This article outlines the methodology utilized to analyse the good practices gathered at the European level within the Horizon 2020 IMMERSE research project. In this study, we have combined the primary indicators of migrant and refugee children integration with the conventional criteria for identifying a good practice (such as efficacy, efficiency, and transferability) to identify exemplary practices. Ultimately, the article offers an empirical evaluation to underscore and scrutinize some of the most pertinent initiatives identified, intending to propose a series of policy recommendations geared towards enhancing well-being and fostering successful pathways for the integration of migrant and refugee children.

Keywords: Good practices, migrant children, refugee children, educational innovation, inclusion.

RESUMEN

La noción de buena práctica designa una solución innovadora y creativa diseñada para mejorar las condiciones de vida -y en consecuencia el bienestar- de individuos y comunidades. Sin embargo, este concepto depende en gran medida del contexto. De hecho, se puede decir que un proyecto, proceso o resultado es "bueno" o "innovador" solo en relación con un contexto específico y con su capacidad para responder a una necesidad específica. En este caso, la necesidad de adoptar y adaptar una buena práctica desarrollada en otro lugar en un nuevo contexto debe abordarse caso por caso. Este artículo presenta la metodología utilizada para analizar las buenas prácticas recogidas a nivel europeo en el proyecto de investigación IMMERSE Horizonte 2020. En el estudio se han combinado los principales indicadores de integración de niños migrantes y refugiados y los requisitos tradicionales de identificación de una buena práctica (eficacia, eficiencia y transferibilidad). Por último, en este artículo también se ofrece una evaluación empírica para resaltar y analizar algunas de las iniciativas más relevantes que se han identificado con el fin de proponer un conjunto de recomendaciones políticas con el objetivo de aumentar el bienestar y así promover caminos exitosos para la integración de los niños migrantes y refugiados.

Palabras clave: Buenas prácticas, niños migrantes, niños refugiados, innovación educativa, inclusión.

INTRODUCTION

Innovation is a mutable concept whose meanings change over time and across social, cultural, and political contexts. Over the twentieth century, "innovation" has evolved into a key concept of societal imaginaries and political discourses — think, for example, in scientific research, technology development, and sustainability (Godin & Vinck, 2017).

In close association with innovation, the notion of *good practice* typically signifies an innovative and imaginative solution crafted to enhance the living conditions of individuals and communities. However, akin to innovation, the concept exhibits a degree of ambiguity stemming from its diverse applications and strong dependence on context. Indeed, a project, process, or outcome can only be deemed "good" or "innovative" relative to a specific context and its ability to meet a particular need. Consequently, the imperative to adopt and tailor a good practice developed elsewhere to a new context must be carefully considered and addressed on a case-by-case basis (Moulaert, 2010).

In the context of migration and migrants' integration discourses, the European Union has increasingly stressed the idea of social innovation and the related need to compare/exchange/discuss promising or good practices emerging locally (Hubert, 2010). Several initiatives in the last years have strengthened this trend. Among the most recent ones, it is worth mentioning the systematic collection of good practices on migrants' integration in the EU portal[1] and the parallel initiative for collecting and disseminating promising practices for protecting children in migration[2]. Furthermore, the recent Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 also clearly highlights the need to systematize the most valuable practices[3].

There are different interpretations of the concept of good practice in the EU frameworks and definitions. Nevertheless, a common theme emerges, focusing on

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[1] https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/page/what-are-good-practices_en

[2] https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/protecting-children-in-migration/cim/good-practices-search_en

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/action_plan_on_integration_and_inclusion_2021-2027.pdf

strategies, methods, and/or activities that have been identified through research and evaluation as efficient, effective, transferable, and/or sustainable and that are reliable in achieving the desired results (Rosser Limiñana & Juana Espinosa, 2019).

It is interesting to note that, case by case, a specific reference to the normative basis of the evaluation intrinsic to the EU activity of accepting/selecting a purposed practice as good practice can be found, although this reference is not often put at the forefront. In the case of minors in migration, this normative ground is broadly indicated in the idea of the best interest of the child (Zuber, 2017): through its light validation process to assess whether a proposal is relevant to protect children in migration, the Commission reserves the right to reject practices if they appear to contravene this principle[4].

As part of the research project Integration Mapping of Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe (IMMERSE), a Horizon 2020 funded initiative aimed at mapping integration in schools and other learning environments,[5] a specific phase was dedicated to the collection and analysis of good practices in the partner countries' national territories and at European level.

The overall objective of IMMERSE is to establish a new set of indicators on the socio-educational inclusion of refugee and migrant children in Europe. This involves developing an integrated methodology to generate and monitor both quantitative and qualitative data. By combining this data with insights from examining good practices, IMMERSE aims to provide a set of policy recommendations and advocacy initiatives to bring about policy and educational reforms at both national and EU levels.

This article presents and discusses the results of the IMMERSE good practice collection and analysis, which examined 60 projects, programmes, or initiatives in Belgium, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Spain (Fabretti et al., 2022). The article follows this structure: the first section discusses the concept of good practice in the frame of minor migrants' inclusion and social innovation with an analysis of the multiple actors involved and an insight into the space of migrant children's education; the second section focuses on the H2020 IMMERSE project and displays its data collection methodology and good practices analysis through the explanation of the approach, areas, and levels of interest; the third section presents the results of the comparative analysis of good practice, highlighting common features of projects and actions that appear to contribute to the successful achievement of the objectives of social innovation for the inclusion of migrant children in Europe. It also comments on three exemplary cases and inspiring initiatives. The fourth section offers policy recommendations and draws conclusions.

THE NOTION OF GOOD PRACTICES IN SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION

The notion of good practice in the broader frame of social innovation

A good practice is considered a successful initiative that has been found to be fruitful and sustainable in the medium/long term and that can be implemented in different settings, not only at the local level but also at the national or even international levels (Herzog-Punzenberger, 2016). A certain ambiguity of the concept of good practice depends on the multifarious uses of the term and the fact that it is not merely descriptive but implies a normative position. As for the notion of innovation, we should be aware that there might be a tendency to attribute a value to novelties by default. In this context, novelty is often equated with superiority, which fosters a biased attitude towards initiatives. However, it is

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4 https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/protecting-children-in-migration/

5 https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/

crucial to recognise that a project cannot be labelled 'good' or 'innovative' in itself; rather, its merit depends on its ability to meet a particular demand or need in a particular context. In fact, the term "best practices" is also used but, in this analysis, we prefer the use of "good practice" because an initiative cannot be compared to another one without considering the context where they would be implemented and, therefore, it is nearly impossible to conclude which one is the "best" (Peris-Ortiz et al., 2018).

Any initiative aims to develop something different from what we had been doing. That is how innovation could be defined, as the development of a new idea that might be helpful in order to do something better. However, to consider this idea as innovation, we should look into its successful results after its implementation and dissemination possibilities (Serdyukov, 2017). In addition, three *types of innovation* can be observed (Peris-Ortiz et al., 2018): Initially, innovations induce gradual changes in social behaviour. Then, as these innovations accumulate, they require institutional adjustments. Finally, radical innovations with significant consequences emerge (such as the Internet), leading to profound changes in the way society communicates and this, in turn, leads to formal changes in the institutions. The innovation types can also be analysed from the *degree of impact* they cause (Serdyukov, 2017). From this perspective, we can observe specific projects that imply an improvement in a particular process (i.e., making a job simpler, efficient, interesting, or less demanding). However, this type of change should be seen as an evolution rather than a pure innovation, as it does not involve the development of a new tool. Therefore, we must differentiate between improvements and innovations to be consistent when analyzing initiatives. In contrast, there are other projects that modify an already existing procedure and, innovation here can be seen as a substantial change in an already existing methodology (e.g., blended learning). Finally, an initiative can lead to a remarkable renovation of a process (e.g., online learning or the ERASMUS scholarships) and can potentially make a systemic change.

Moreover, innovation can manifest itself and be studied in any setting. However, our focus in this article is on what is known as *social innovation*. This term refers to initiatives designed to address a specific social need and are predominantly undertaken by organisations with social objectives at their core (Mulgan, 2006). In contrast with *business innovation* whose main aim is to improve their profit and is mostly implemented by organizations whose aim is to draw profit from their investments. However, in real projects, the line between social and business innovation can be blurred, as is the case of microfinance or many business projects created in the last decade to employ migrants, refugees, or other populations at risk of social exclusion. Therefore, increasing awareness of the need to solve social concerns may lead to *social entrepreneurship* (Tracey et al., 2011), which is also perceived as a strategy for social innovation.

Moreover, *social innovation* begins with identifying a need or problem that is not being met and an idea of how to solve it. Sometimes, those needs are evident, like homelessness, but other needs might be less obvious, like school failure, racism, or bullying, and a previous step is needed in which an organization report these issues (Tarman, 2016). In fact, *social innovations* are intrinsic to historical progress, and this might happen in *three different ways* (Peris-Ortiz et al., 2018): firstly, social innovations may emerge through historical transformations resulting from more significant societal shifts. In such cases, however, it may not be possible to identify a specific initiative that initiated the change; secondly, social innovations might come from large technological, institutional, or political changes (like the French Revolution or the development of smartphones) that are deliberate and distinguishable innovations; and finally, the third social innovations are those related to major changes in the institutions that shape the beliefs, development and behaviour of the society.

Moreover, when considering public opinion, citizens consider social innovation mainly the public organisations' ability to solve the citizens' demands and the perception of these organisations as reliable from a moral and ethical perspective (Peris-Ortiz et al.,

2018). Therefore, they perceive these organisations as ethically committed to citizens' problems or environmental issues and how they find a balance between seeking profit and searching for individuals' well-being.

The multiple actors of social innovation and their interaction

Social problems are complex; in fact, factors related to multiple dimensions of life are interrelated and, therefore, in order to propose effective solutions, these problems must be faced by different disciplines to understand them in all their complexity, integrating multiple research areas and knowledge fields to achieve the integration knowledge in order to advance in the understanding of complex issues (Valero & López Marco, 2019). This need to analyze problems from an interdisciplinary perspective is integrated into the general context of increased demands for interdisciplinarity and the continuously transforming relationship between scientific knowledge and general society, which is becoming more open and explicit. Social innovation appears as a complex phenomenon that is interdisciplinary in itself. On the one hand, social innovation is promoted by different types of knowledge, both internal to the local community where the social need is identified and expert or external (Moulaert, 2010; Mulgan, 2006). On the other hand, social innovation also constitutes a research topic where interdisciplinary approaches play an important role as it might be analysed from different disciplines conforming, in fact, multidisciplinary research communities.

Additionally, the combination of different types of knowledge, regardless of their lay or expert knowledge, has been recognized as important in shaping social innovation. Therefore, from this perspective, knowledge must be understood as *knowledge in practice* and not only coming from the logic of academic research but also through formal institutions (i.e., universities and public organizations) and informal networks comprised of communities and NGOs. All these actors are required in order to bring their expertise and knowledge about social problems to be able to understand them deeply and provide effective solutions (Valero & López Marco, 2019; Van Rensburg et al., 2016). Furthermore, social changes require not only the knowledge of different actors but also the actions of individuals, collectives, communities and organizations, socio-political movements, public policies, etc., and they also require philosophical and ethical debates in order to understand the impact of each proposal to address efficiently all social problems identified (Moulaert, 2010).

Similarly, *educational innovation* requires the active participation and support of all stakeholders, including children and young people, families, educators, school staff, social workers, academics and researchers, and policy-makers (Schaefer et al., 2019; Serdyukov, 2017). The broader society nurtures educational innovation, and it also nurtures society in a mutual enrichment cycle. Each national educational system depends on the society's commitment to effective functioning. Therefore, educational innovation also requires families and the community to address identified needs effectively.

Good practices and social innovation embedded in the space of migrant children's education

Educational innovation could be a new methodology, training technique, pedagogic approach, learning procedure, educational tool, or formal institutional structure that leads to major progress in learning or teaching outcomes. Therefore, educational innovations aim to improve the quantity or quality of learning (Serdyukov, 2017). Specifically, innovation can be focused on improving one or more dimensions like curriculum content, teaching procedures, technological tools, policies, school leadership, theory and

practice, and any other possible educational aspect. From the students' perspective, it includes any initiative that might increase their learning skills, such as motivation, self-efficacy, communication, dispositions, attitudes, performance, and behaviour. From the perspective of educators, it might include any initiative that might help improve their teaching skills, creativity, and work conditions.

Educational institutions must serve the needs of society, and to do so, they must constantly evolve to respond to the social difficulties of the globalized world. This development should be systemic, sustainable, and generalizable (Schaefer et al., 2019; Serdyukov, 2017). Consequently, teachers, school staff, academics and researchers, and policymakers must be able to adapt their procedures in order to respond to those social challenges to guarantee that all children are prepared to face life and work. Migrant and refugee children, in particular, are highly vulnerable, which underlines the need for tailored care upon arrival in the host country and within their school environment. This care is essential to adequately address their needs and provide adequate support (Licardo, 2020). As a result of the language difficulties, migrant and refugee children might find it challenging to understand their teachers and peers, their families might have problems when trying to communicate with the school, and some forms of prejudice might arise, affecting their successful inclusion (Brown & Krŭsteva, 2013). For all these reasons, special attention and creativity should be put into practice when facing the challenges of migrant and refugee children's education. Therefore, it is crucial to identify initiatives being implemented in this field with positive outcomes.

COLLECTING AND ANALYSING GOOD PRACTICES: THE METHODOLOGY ADOPTED BY IMMERSE

Between September 2020 and June 2021, IMMERSE research partners identified 60 good local, national, and European practices. This effort aimed to provide a comprehensive and informative overview of remarkable initiatives in the socio-educational inclusion of children with a migrant background in schools and other educational settings. A specific methodology was designed to identify and analyse these practices, with explicit reference to traditional criteria for identifying good practices, including the IMMERSE Common Conceptual Framework (Serrano Sanguilinda et al., 2019) and the Dashboard of Indicators[6] (Fernández García et al., 2020). In addition, this methodology builds on the concepts of social innovation.

The IMMERSE project, drawing on specialised literature and recurring characteristics in EU policy frameworks, identified the following characteristics as essential for a practice to be considered exemplary: *efficacy, efficiency, reproducibility and transferability, and political relevance* (Table 1).

Efficacy typically refers to the ability of a programme to achieve its intended goals and outcomes. This assessment is rooted in the alignment between the objectives of the practices and the outcomes outlined in the IMMERSE indicator dashboard. The dashboard, in turn, is based on normative assumptions about the social inclusion of migrant children, as outlined in the conceptual framework. Within this framework, *efficacy* is generally construed as an outcome characteristic.

Nevertheless, it is essential to emphasise the process-related aspects of *efficacy*. In this context, *efficacy* should be assessed based on the project's success in catalysing specific processes throughout its development. In particular, in line with the concept of social innovation as collective action, these process-related attributes can be seen in the potential to increase social capital and promote the empowerment of all stakeholders and beneficiaries involved. That is, the increase in people's access to available networks

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6 https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/selection-and-creation-of-dashboard-of-socio-educational-integration-indicators/

and communities and the boost of their active and autonomous commitment to the well-being of the communities in which they participate can be considered as cross-sectional outputs generated by a good practice (Rosser Limiñana & Juana Espinosa, 2019).

This proposal stems from a perspective that sees social actors, especially stakeholders or users, as active participants in shaping innovation processes rather than merely as the 'last link in the chain' or passive consumers. From this perspective, social innovation is most effectively understood as a means to counteract social segregation and poverty by empowering marginalised social groups and *reshaping power dynamics* (Oosterlynck et al., 2013). Critical concepts of such inclusive innovation and 'territorial development approaches' include micro-social capital, civic capacity, trust networks, and collective leadership (Moulaert et al., 2017).

Efficiency considers the judicious use of resources to achieve the project's objectives. This criterion covers crucial factors such as the match between means and ends, internal organisation and reflexivity (including professional resources, teamwork, and willingness to learn by doing), as well as the partnerships established, and the characteristics of the overall governance (such as stakeholder participation and inclusiveness).

Reproducibility refers to the potential of the good practice to be replicated in similar contexts, and *transferability,* which refers to its potential to be replicated in different contexts, is assessed by considering several elements. These include the availability of communication tools that facilitate the effective transfer of experiences and methodologies, the careful identification of pathways and processes necessary for transferability (such as human resources, training, infrastructure, and costs), the identification of challenges and strategies to mitigate them when transferring the practice to disadvantaged settings with limited economic, social and cultural capital, and the possibility of conducting ex-post evaluations of the transfers made.

Finally, the idea of mainstreaming – namely, that an experience achieved at the local level or in a limited field has the potential to be transposed into the general system – was considered in terms of *political relevance*. This aspect of good practices relates to their alignment with the objectives of both local and European policy agendas, particularly those relating to the integration of migrants. It also includes factors such as the existence of agreements with public administrations, the potential acquisition of public funding, the impact of good practices on local governance structures (including the policies of public and private decision-makers and the use of local resources), and the governance and conditions of particularly disadvantaged contexts.

In identifying good practices, the relevance of the project strand to the socio-educational inclusion of refugee and migrant children in society was also considered. For this purpose, the IMMERSE indicator dashboard was used as a key tool, providing a comprehensive list of the most relevant outcomes for successfully integrating children with a migrant background. The dashboard comprises 30 indicators, grouped into 14 integration outcomes and 16 barriers and determinants. The integration outcomes cover five dimensions (as described in Table 2): *access to rights, language and culture, well-being, connectedness, and educational achievement.*

The processes that facilitate inclusion outcomes occur in different settings within the social system, embodying a child-centred approach in terms of proximity to the child. Consequently, the process of collecting good practices has been structured to identify initiatives at different levels of intervention: at the micro level, focusing on the child and his/her family; at the meso level, encompassing the community, services, organisations and institutions closely linked to the child's daily life (such as schools, neighbourhoods, social services and associations); and at the macro level, taking into account the political, economic and social systems of a given society and its policies.

Table 1. Identification requirements for a good practice.

Efficacy *The ability to achieve objectives, supported by thorough validation and evaluation of results.* ✓ Alignment between the objectives of the practices and the outcomes described in the IMMERSE dashboard of indicators. ✓ Potential to increase social capital and promote the empowerment of stakeholders and targets (e.g., access to networks and communities; commitment to community well-being).	***Efficiency*** *The thoughtful use of resources to achieve established goals.* ✓ Consistency between means and ends. ✓ Internal organisation and reflexivity (including professional resources, experiential learning, teamwork, etc.). ✓ Activation of partnerships and nature of overall governance (e.g., stakeholder engagement and participation).
Reproducibility & Transferability *The ability of interventions to be replicated in similar and/or different contexts.* ✓ Availability of communication tools to facilitate effective transfer of experience and methods. ✓ Identification of pathways and processes essential for transferability (e.g., human resources, training, infrastructure, costs, etc.). ✓ Identify risks and strategies to mitigate them when transferring practices to disadvantaged contexts with limited economic, social, and cultural capital. ✓ Feasibility of carrying out ex-post evaluations of the transfers carried out.	***Political relevance*** *The ability of projects to support the implementation of National Action Plans and to be consistent with local, regional, and national policy priorities.* ✓ Consistency with the objectives of local and European policy agendas, particularly those relating to the integration of migrants. ✓ Agreements with public authorities. ✓ Utilisation of public funds. ✓ Influence of good practices on the local decision-making framework (including policies of public and private decision-makers; allocation of local resources). ✓ Impact on governance and conditions in particularly disadvantaged contexts.

The recognition of good practice has been a multi-stage methodological process in which the partners have been actively involved in the framework's design and the in-depth research, analysis, evaluation and reporting of good practice in the socio-educational integration of children with a migrant background.

First, a common theoretical framework was formulated to establish a shared understanding of good practice, and a methodological work plan was developed to provide a clear timeline and toolkit. In particular, a bespoke form with both closed and open-ended questions was designed to capture key project details relating to objectives, targets, activities, stakeholders involved, methods and outcomes. The form was designed in a way to balance, on one hand, the standardization required for the comparative analysis and, on the other hand, the flexibility necessary to highlight project specificities. Using this form and following a process of active participation, stakeholders' empowerment, and network building, partners have carried out research to locate those projects, initiatives, and forums related to the issue of migration, children's education, and integration, which could nourish IMMERSE, be of interest to create a network of experts on the subject, and, at the same time, identify innovation elements. Every month, the six research partners nominated a relevant practice according to the shared criteria for ten initiatives per partner. To enrich the available information, in some cases, partners enclosed initiatives' official materials and documents and contacted project representatives to overcome some difficulties, such as the limited availability of information. Overall, the data collection process revealed variations in the consistency, quantity and level of detail of the practices identified. These variations were because the practices were developed over different periods, and the information was not always publicly available or easily accessible. In some cases, IMMERSE partners translated project descriptions into English to overcome language barriers.

Table 2. IMMERSE Dashboard – Integration outcomes of

O1. Outcomes in access to rights	Access to rights	Access to compulsory education
		Access to healthcare

* The outcome "Access to legal rights" was excluded from the final dashboard but remained included in the analysis.

O2. Outcomes in language and culture	Host language	Children's competence in the host language
	Interculturalism	Children preserve their cultural identity while adopting new cultural values and developing intercultural skills

* The outcome "Children's competence in their mother tongue" was excluded from the final dashboard but remained included in the analysis.

O3. Outcomes in well-being	Subjective well-being	Children's life satisfaction/happiness
		Children's belonging

* The outcome "Children's self-esteem" was excluded from the final dashboard but remained included in the analysis.

O4. Outcomes in connectedness	Interconnectedness	Friends and peers (support)
		Friends and peers (bridges)
		Teachers
		Institutions
O5. Outcomes in educational achievements	Academic skills	Children's academic abilities
	Levels and types of education attained	Children fulfil compulsory education
		Children continue in (formal) education beyond compulsory levels / Access to (formal) non-compulsory education
		Types and levels of (formal) non-compulsory education attended

The 60 good practices were reported and exhaustively mapped in a database, which became the basis for an in-depth comparative analysis. The comparison looked at various aspects, including the type of intervention, the target population, the level of implementation and various quality criteria. This analysis aimed to provide valuable insights into the common features of successful practices that contribute to achieving objectives and inspire implementing lessons learned. The elements examined included integration outcomes, monitoring and evaluation, expertise and professionalism, networks and partnerships, communication and dissemination, replicability and transferability, and funding and resources. These elements are measurable indicators for identifying effective practices (such as efficacy, efficiency, reproducibility and transferability, and policy relevance). They should be seen as dynamic processes with the potential to generate positive impacts during their development, such as enhancing social capital and empowering stakeholders as social actors.

The database of 60 good practices and the comparative analysis also enabled the detection of a limited quantity of remarkable projects, two per partner, selected according to their compliance with the requirements for a good practice, their heterogeneity concerning the Dashboard outcomes, the availability of complete information, and the proposal of innovative approaches to the inclusion of children with a background of migration. These case studies were in-depth studies conducted through interviews with a project representative and, in some cases, with another relevant actor, stakeholder, or

beneficiary. To this purpose, all necessary indications on conducting an interview were shared, and an interview track was developed to provide a common structure suitable for collecting the specificities of some practices. The interviews aimed to collect holistic information about the initiative and a story of success, underscoring the essential components that are the basis for the project's classification as good practice.

Identifying and sharing good practices and promoting innovative and effective initiatives of inclusion contribute to IMMERSE's main focus, which is to develop a series of policy recommendations and advocacy initiatives to promote policy and educational change at the national and EU levels. Within the IMMERSE framework, this activity is closely connected with the results of the complementary research activities and the stakeholders' strong engagement promoted during the project implementation.

The analysis results and the description of the 12 case studies were collected in a project deliverable (Fabretti et al., 2022) after being reviewed by partners and approved by the IMMERSE technical committee. The report was lastly uploaded to the EC online platform and disseminated through communication and advocacy initiatives[7].

THE RESULTS OF THE GOOD PRACTICES ANALYSIS

A comparative view

Through an examination of the collected good practices, a preliminary comparative analysis of common features across projects is outlined here to provide insights into the factors contributing to successful social innovation for the inclusion of migrant children in Europe. The findings reveal a diverse range of actions within the good practices, ranging from language teaching and curriculum development to extracurricular activities, vocational training, educational programmes, school model design, networking and advocacy initiatives.

Language skills, in particular, are seen as crucial to integration, with 25 out of 60 projects offering language classes to develop skills in both the mother tongue and the host language. Socio-educational integration efforts are supported by extracurricular activities, with 55% of practices offering homework help and leisure activities such as sports, music, art and dance classes. Almost one in three projects offer vocational training opportunities, including youth work experience, internships and specialised courses for teachers and school staff. Mentoring and tutoring programmes complement these activities. Support services such as legal and educational advice, psychological and family interventions and initiatives to promote parental involvement are also included (28.3%). Notably, a significant number of practices include research activities to develop manuals, toolkits, and online platforms (15%), as well as training methodologies and specialised courses (8.3%). In addition, some case studies (36.7%) focus on promoting networks, exchanging good practices on inclusion, and conducting dissemination events and advocacy initiatives to raise awareness and formulate policy recommendations for the educational and political sectors, which are essential for promoting and achieving inclusion.

Most examples include multiple targets, with 95% of projects targeting different groups. Among these, two-thirds of projects target first and/or second-generation migrant children (70%). In addition, many initiatives target specific groups, including newly arrived migrant children (73.3%), refugee and asylum-seeking children (60%) and unaccompanied and separated minors (56.7%). Almost half of the projects also target migrant families (53.3%), teachers and school leaders (56.7%) and social workers and educators (45%), all of whom play a vital role in the social and educational advancement of children. Educational authorities and policy-makers are the focus of 40% of initiatives, while a few projects

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7 The good practices identified are uploaded in the IMMERSE Online Digital Database (ODD): https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/on-line-digital-database-of-good-practices-and-resources-in-social-integration-of-refugee-and-migrant-children/

(28.3%) target 'other' groups, such as non-migrant children, young adults, professors, researchers, associations and the wider community. The fact that most projects involve the participation of multiple targets shows the increase in the adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach in social innovation in general and the field of migrants' integration.

Almost half of these initiatives are carried out at the local level. The remaining projects are being replicated in different regions at the national level or are being implemented at the European level. The IMMERSE research partners have compiled a database of 25 local initiatives (41%) and 19 national initiatives (32%) that fully illustrate this approach. Some of these initiatives are small-scale projects, while others are tailored to the specific needs of a particular context or are community-based programmes. The remaining initiatives are at an international/European level (27%).

According to the adopted methodology and the identification requirements already mentioned, IMMERSE examined some quality criteria to provide notable findings about the transversal characteristics of the good practices collected. These fundamental features (Table 3) are critical quantifiable indicators of *efficacy, efficiency, reproducibility and transferability, and political relevance.*

Table 3. IMMERSE operational parameters and indicators to detect a Good Practice

Parameters	Indicators
Efficacy	Capacity to meet IMMERSE outcomes
	Ex-post evaluation (if available)
Efficiency	Professional involved
	Network and/or partnership activated
Reproducibility & Transferability	Activation of communication tools
	Transferring to similar or diverse contexts
Political relevance	Type of funds
	Networking or partnership activated with governmental or administrative authorities

However, it is essential to recognise that each indicator should also be seen as a multiplying mechanism capable of stimulating specific processes during development. Indeed, these overarching outcomes promote social capital and contribute to all stakeholders' empowerment. Therefore, the elements studied have the potential to generate positive effects that may be more difficult to quantify but that are fundamental to explaining the success of socially innovative initiatives. This perspective is consistent with the notion of stakeholders as active participants in shaping innovation processes. With this perspective in mind, we summarise the main findings on the effectiveness of social innovation for the inclusion of migrant children in Europe.

Efficacy

In terms of *efficacy*, each proposed good practice is aligned with one or more indicators in the IMMERSE dashboard of indicators, demonstrating its ability to fulfil different outcomes. This underlines how the candidate projects' multidimensionality reflects the socio-educational integration processes' complexity as outlined in the IMMERSE dashboard of indicators. In addition, half of the case studies aim to ensure access to compulsory education for refugee and migrant children. Almost 80% of the initiatives aim to improve

children's academic skills, while around 65% aim to complete compulsory education, followed by almost 60% to ensure children's access to (formal) non-compulsory education. Furthermore, the significant prevalence of language teaching among the identified projects, alongside the importance of language as a tool for integration, illustrates that 7 out of 10 initiatives aim to improve children's proficiency in the language of the host country. Furthermore, given that integration processes should not lead to assimilation, it is essential to note that the majority of initiatives seek to ensure that children maintain their cultural identity while adopting new cultural values and developing intercultural competences. In particular, the indicator *"Children's competence in their mother tongue"*, although not included in the final dashboard, highlights that 1 in 4 projects aims to improve the language skills of migrant and refugee children.

Regarding the social dimension of integration, about 60% of the case studies focus on improving children's integration by improving their relationships with friends and peers, while almost 70% focus on their interactions with teachers and their trust in institutions (e.g. schools, police, hospitals). Notably, 90% of good practices aim to improve children's sense of belonging, and around 85% emphasise children's happiness and life satisfaction. Although not included in the final dashboard, the self-esteem indicator confirms this trend, with 53 out of 60 good practices prioritising this objective. Remarkably, these integration outcomes underline that the collected projects primarily address issues that are difficult to assess with traditional integration indicators but are identified by civil society as fundamental elements for successful integration, including a sense of belonging, identity and happiness.

Furthermore, evaluation is critical in defining to what extent an initiative can be considered successful. Of the 60 projects reviewed, 70% have either conducted or will conduct an evaluation, resulting in internal or external reports, research articles and other resources. Furthermore, of these 42 projects, 30 have made their evaluation reports publicly available, thereby increasing transparency and accountability. However, around 30% of projects have not made their evaluation reports publicly available, limiting the dissemination of these initiatives.

Efficiency

In terms of the efficiency of the good practices identified, the majority of initiatives involve several categories of professionals, mainly from the educational, academic, research and social sectors, thereby activating a diverse network of stakeholders, including national and local authorities, school communities, NGOs, universities and research centres. The involvement of experienced professionals is crucial to the projects' success, ensuring a qualified and high-quality intervention through the involvement of individuals from different backgrounds.

Given the focus of the IMMERSE project and the scope of this collection of good practices, education professionals are mainly present in the projects' database, with 93.3% of the initiatives involving teachers and/or educators. In addition, professionals from different fields are often involved (e.g. psychologists, cultural mediators, legal experts and researchers). More precisely, half of the practices involve cultural mediators, and about 1 in 4 projects work with a psychologist. In addition, legal experts are involved in fewer initiatives, while academics and researchers are involved in 30 out of 60 projects. Other professionals mentioned in the initiatives include youth and social workers, vocational experts, health professionals, artists, sports trainers and public operators. Indeed, the involvement of qualified experts is even more critical when professionals from different backgrounds work together. In this respect, almost 70% of the projects involve two to four types of professionals, and more than 23% involve five or more different professionals.

Reproducibility and transferability

Regarding *reproducibility* and *transferability*, almost all projects used appropriate communication tools to facilitate the dissemination of the project and the effective transfer of experience and methods. These tools include handouts, newsletters, manuals, books, toolkits, training materials, research papers, videos and apps. In addition, almost all initiatives have either been replicated or demonstrate the potential to be transferred to different contexts.

Political relevance

In terms of *policy relevance*, the initiatives receive funding mainly from European and governmental sources, while private funding (from foundations, donations, etc.) is less common. In addition, about half of the projects have multiple sources of funding. Furthermore, most of the good practices collected involve networking and partnerships with political or administrative authorities, with local authorities being more involved than national and supranational bodies.

The good practices are highly heterogeneous and multidimensional. In particular, they focus primarily on addressing nuanced aspects of young people's integration processes, such as forms of belonging and identity, which often receive less attention. Furthermore, a multi-stakeholder and multilevel approach is widely used. Overall, social innovation in the field is increasingly driven by the need to address different features and domains of inclusion processes.

Exemplar cases

Embracing Diversity, Nurturing Integration: Learning for Life[8] (EDNIP) is a project started in 2017 in five primary schools in Limerick City, Ireland, in response to the growing diversity of student populations and the escalating demand for school support in the promotion of the inclusion of migrant children.

The project promotes integration by modelling effective governance based on a very clear inclusive and transparent management scheme and effective communication strategies. EDNIP includes several control levels: the Project Management Committee (PMC), which supervises the project and is comprised of the principals, national representatives, and child welfare local agents, and the School Integration Committees (SIC), which guides project activities in each school and is formed by principals, school staff, a preschool manager, a public health nurse, parents, and students. Their composition varies according to the context, network and critical issues affecting each school.

This multi-stakeholder approach is vital to the EDNIP project, with public institutions, universities, education centres, school staff, parents, and children actively involved through an effective interagency process. The EDNIP project's main actions encompass listening to and learning from stakeholders, supporting parents, enhancing the capacity of school staff, and encouraging community engagement both within and beyond schools. These efforts aim to cultivate strong relationships and promote mutual understanding between schools and the community.

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8 https://www.mic.ul.ie/ednip-2020?index=0

In this regard, the vision that inspires the project, therefore, is emblematic of how the school system's management structure should be questioned to enable full inclusion. This reflection occurs in a scenario where the transition from a centralized and vertical to a broader and horizontal kind of school governance has characterized various educational systems in European countries in the last decades (Benadusi & Consoli, 2004). Schools acquire more autonomy and functions to respond in a more targeted manner to the needs of their communities. One of these functions is the possibility of establishing partnerships with other schools and institutions that can contribute to achieving specific educational goals. This intensification of horizontal relationships is accompanied by a greater selectivity regarding the objective to be achieved. The EDNIP project mainly responds to the idea of democratic governance (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007), which is widely recognized as more suitable to recompose through multi-stakeholder collaboration and multidimensional responses to the multifaceted needs of which students with a migratory background are an expression. In this context, community members engage in interactions, negotiations and collective decision-making processes in which neither party has absolute control over the other.

Including Children Affected by Migration Programme[9] (ICAM) is a second practice that deserves attention. At the heart of the ICAM project is the concept of "convivencia", a Spanish term meaning 'living together in harmony', which underlines the importance of school climate in shaping children's well-being. The initiative spans six European countries and aims to promote inclusion and enhance children's learning. It promotes awareness of their rights and protective legislation while providing additional support in both school and home contexts to promote their social and emotional learning (SEL) and overall well-being.

To achieve this objective, the project creates communities of schools across Europe based on a comprehensive coaching and training programme. ICAM partners in each country train national ICAM facilitators, who, in turn, provide training sessions to communities of 10-20 school ICAM leaders to implement the programme for the whole school's inclusion of disadvantaged children in their schools. This cascade of coaching and training within the school system is supported by comprehensive training manuals, lesson plans, handbooks, parent workshops, and a wide range of additional resources, readily translatable into any language. As a result, school staff is better trained to support the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) of children affected by migration and their families.

This cascade model promoting a school climate of *convivencia* is fully scalable and adaptable to different contexts. The effectiveness of the training sessions and the programme is evaluated annually by the school community using a jointly developed evaluation tool. In addition, ICAM incorporates parent training to provide additional support to families and promote ongoing SEL practices at home. At the heart of this practice is the focus on improving school climate by promoting new competences in school leadership and a positive teacher-student relationship; both are recognized as critical elements for cultivating healthy educative environments (Bear, 2020). As also indicated in the theoretical framework and empirical analysis developed for IMMERSE (Fernández García et al., 2019), concerning including students with a migrant background, the provision of a clearly inclusion-oriented school configuration is essential, and it requires an investment in the vital role of school leadership and teachers in strategic roles.

Finally, a third initiative, based on the Canadian school experience, Europe, and the USA, is the project *L'AltRoparlante*[10] , which promotes a translanguaging turn in six Italian schools to favour inclusion and children empowerment. This approach focuses on incorporating all students' languages and dialects in the curricular actions, considering a multilingual and inclusive learning approach. In fact, migrant children often feel

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9   https://www.icamproject.eu/

10   https://cluss.unistrasi.it/1/116/153/L-AltRoparlante.htm

marginalised and uncomfortable when using their mother tongue at school. The project aims to alleviate this discomfort and shame by adopting a child-centred approach that prioritises the child's cognitive and linguistic competencies in the didactic planning process.

The child's language repertoire is positively recognised and seen as an asset to the whole class, allowing the child to express themselves freely in their mother tongue. As a result, the child feels included, communicates more confidently in their mother tongue, actively participates in class discussions and proudly shares stories about their heritage and family background. This stimulates curiosity and enrichment in all students and fosters stronger peer relationships. Embracing their mother tongue promotes a deeper understanding of their own identity and facilitates intergenerational dialogue between children, grandparents and other relatives in their countries of origin, strengthening bonds across borders. In addition, the project advocates a redefinition of the role of the teacher, as educators partially relinquish their traditional authority to empower students.

In addition, the children work together to design translanguaging activities that are integrated into the curriculum using a bottom-up approach. This active participation promotes sharing and trust, empowering children as key actors in the inclusion process and transforming the traditional relationship between teachers and students and among peers. The need for more explicit recognition of multilingualism as a resource for all the pupils in public education is clearly suggested by the studies on minor migrants' inclusion (Fisher et al., 2018) and a key result of the IMMERSE project research activities (Fernández García et al., 2019). In Italy, in particular, experts highlight the need to counter the risks of school segregation by enhancing a favourable consideration of multicultural schools: classroom work should be set up in order for the presence of a large number of pupils with migrant origin to become a transformative element of teaching and enrichment for all students, also in terms of multilingualism (Ongini, 2019).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering that these projects have been developed and implemented in different and complex settings, these identified findings provide valuable insight to incorporate some of these results in future policies. Therefore, we will briefly present some policy recommendations aimed at educational and political change at the national and EU levels. Projects and educational innovation for improving the well-being of migrant and refugee children practices should:

1. Include a wide range of initiatives, curricular and extracurricular activities, covering language teaching, vocational and educational training programmes, the design of school models, the creation of networks, and advocacy initiatives.

2. Involve the participation of multiple targets to increase the adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach in social innovation in general and the field of migrant children's inclusion.

3. Address multiple dimensions to reflect the complexity of socio-educational integration processes, including ensuring migrant and refugee children's access to compulsory education; seeking to ensure that children maintain their cultural identity while acquiring new cultural values and intercultural competence; and seeking to increase children's sense of belonging, happiness and life satisfaction.

4. Include several categories of professionals, primarily from the educational, academic, research and social sectors.

5. Activate a diverse network of stakeholders, including governmental, political, administrative and local authorities, school communities, universities, NGOs and research centres.

6. Activate proper communication tools to promote the dissemination of the project and the effective transfer of experiences and methodologies.

7. Have the potential for replication and transfer to different contexts.

8. Ensure funding from European and governmental sources, stressing the importance of earmarking budget allocations specifically for improving the conditions of migrant and refugee children in the host country.

CONCLUSIONS

The collection and examination of 60 remarkable initiatives across Europe provide a compelling insight into a diverse range of socio-educational efforts to integrate migrant and refugee children in the region. The extensive contextual data and common features, together with the detailed narratives of 12 highlighted case studies, present a rich tapestry of inspiring, innovative and impactful efforts that can inform strategies to enhance the inclusion of migrant children in European societies.

Finally, the study revealed some challenges related to the current social innovation scenario. These can be identified in the scarcity of publicly available detailed information on projects or materials translated into English. These recurring lacks hinder the possibility of assessing both the efficacy and transferability of these initiatives.

To conclude, this analysis allows us to hypothesise that, while social innovation in the field of migrant children inclusion tends to be refined along more sophisticated approaches – deeply consistent with the IMMERSE framework – the possibilities of exchange and distribution of good practices advocated by national and European institutions still seem to require some promotion.

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