

Experiences of migrant children: At home abroad

May 9 2012

Schools, local councils and professionals need better guidance and training to work with migrant families from Eastern Europe and their children, according to new research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Researchers from the University of Strathclyde found that many children had positive experiences after migration, but a number experienced racism, some struggled with language and some found access to services more problematic than in their home countries. The research looked at the experiences of children who arrived in Scotland from the new accession countries after the expansion of European Union in 2004.

The final report of the study makes a series of policy recommendations:

There should be national guidance for [local authorities](#) to reduce variations in services between different areas, and its implementation should be monitored

Schools need better funding and guidance to support migrant children, possibly through a new 'pupil premium' entitlement

Initiatives aimed at tackling racism should be well-funded and sustained

Professionals working with families need clearer guidance and better training to increase the quality of provision for new migrant groups

The researchers held a series of focus groups and case studies with children and also spoke to parents, teachers and professionals working with the new [migrants](#). Dr Daniela Sime, said migrant families from Eastern Europe were an under-represented group. "This study gave the young participants a voice and recognised that their experiences are shared. It also gave them an opportunity to offer ideas on how provision can be improved to support migrant families with children," she said.

Many children talked about their [resilience](#) in coping with their new lives: "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," a 12 year-old boy named Vladislav from Lithuania said.

Some had [traumatic experiences](#) and found it very hard to settle in. Andrzej, a father from Poland, said his family had been afraid to go out of their flat: "It was terrible. There were drunk teenagers shouting abuse almost every day, banging at our door, drawing swastikas on our door. The police were here almost every week."

Most families had good experiences of the education system, although some said their children were working below their level of ability. However, their views on the health system were less positive. Several had travelled to [Eastern Europe](#) to get treatment. "My child has asthma and they said you need to wait two months for a specialist," said Agatha, a mother from Poland. "So I just decided to take a flight to Poland and see the doctor we know there."

Social and family networks were important, and some participants described feeling lonely, missing friends, family and even pets. "We hardly have anyone opening the door. Back home, the house was always full. So we have to manage and look after the [children](#) by ourselves, which is hard and lonely at times," said Berta, a Polish mother. For most participants in the study, being 'at home abroad' meant a stressful and

challenging time for family relationships and a sense of uncertainty about belonging to their country of origin and their new land.

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

Citation: Experiences of migrant children: At home abroad (2012, May 9) retrieved 30 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-05-migrant-children-home.html>

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