

# Refugee and Migrant Students between Exclusion and Belonging:

## The Role of Intercultural and Anti-Racist Education

### A Literature Review of Educational Challenges and School Responses

Marianthi Evangelinaki  
PhD Candidate, University of Alicante

#### Introduction

The increasing presence of refugee and migrant students in contemporary schools has brought renewed attention to issues of educational inclusion, social participation, and equal opportunities. Although access to education is a fundamental right, successful school integration extends beyond enrolment and attendance. Refugee and migrant students often face linguistic, social, and emotional challenges that may affect both their educational experiences and overall well-being. At the same time, schools have the potential to become spaces that promote dialogue, respect for diversity, and equal educational opportunities. Intercultural and anti-racist education have therefore emerged as important approaches for supporting inclusive school communities and fostering positive relationships among students from different cultural backgrounds.

#### What Challenges Do Refugee and Migrant Students Face?

Refugee and migrant students often experience multiple and interconnected challenges during their integration into school life. Language barriers may limit communication and participation in classroom activities, while experiences of exclusion, bullying, and discrimination can negatively affect emotional well-being and academic engagement. Many students must simultaneously adapt to a new educational environment while coping with uncertainty, cultural transition, and previous experiences of displacement.

#### Key Challenges

- ✓ Language and communication barriers
- ✓ Social exclusion and discrimination
- ✓ Bullying and racist behaviours
- ✓ Cultural adjustment difficulties
- ✓ Limited participation in school life
- ✓ Emotional insecurity and isolation

#### Social and Emotional Dimensions

The literature highlights that successful school inclusion is closely linked to students' emotional well-being. Positive relationships with peers and teachers can foster confidence, participation, and a sense of belonging. In contrast, persistent exclusion and negative school experiences may contribute to stress, insecurity, low self-esteem, and withdrawal from school life.

#### Intercultural and Anti-Racist Education

Intercultural and anti-racist education are presented as complementary approaches for promoting inclusion in diverse school communities. Intercultural education encourages dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect for cultural diversity, while anti-racist education explicitly challenges stereotypes, prejudice, and discriminatory practices. Together, these approaches support more equitable and inclusive educational environments.

#### Pathways to Inclusion

| Challenges                | Educational Responses   | Outcomes               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Language barriers         | Linguistic support      | Improved communication |
| Social exclusion          | Inclusive practices     | Participation          |
| Bullying & discrimination | Anti-racist education   | Respect & empathy      |
| Emotional insecurity      | Psychological support   | Well-being             |
| Cultural differences      | Intercultural education | Mutual understanding   |
| Limited engagement        | Active participation    | Sense of belonging     |

Figure 1. Educational pathways supporting refugee and migrant students.

#### Key Contributions

- ✓ Recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity
- ✓ Promotion of equal educational opportunities
- ✓ Reduction of stereotypes and prejudice
- ✓ Development of empathy and mutual understanding
- ✓ Encouragement of participation and cooperation
- ✓ Strengthening of inclusive school cultures

#### Inclusion and School Communities

Inclusive educational environments benefit not only refugee and migrant students but the entire school community. When diversity is recognised as an educational resource, students are encouraged to engage with multiple perspectives, develop intercultural understanding, and participate actively in democratic school life. Such environments contribute to social cohesion and foster a stronger sense of belonging for all learners.

#### Inclusion Supports:

- Sense of belonging
- Student well-being
- Academic engagement
- Social cohesion
- Democratic values
- Respect for diversity

#### The Role of Teachers

Teachers play a crucial role in creating inclusive learning environments. Their attitudes, expectations, and classroom practices influence students' experiences of participation and acceptance. The literature emphasises the importance of intercultural competence, sensitivity to diversity, and continuous professional development in supporting refugee and migrant students effectively.

#### Challenges for Schools

- Despite ongoing efforts towards inclusion, schools often face important limitations:
- Insufficient teacher preparation in intercultural education
  - Limited psychological support services
  - Lack of interpreters and linguistic support
  - Limited multicultural educational resources
  - Difficulties in addressing diverse student needs
  - Inadequate support structures for vulnerable students

#### Creating Inclusive School Environments

- Strengthen teachers' intercultural competence
- Promote collaboration between schools and families
- Expand psychological and linguistic support services
- Foster inclusive school policies and practices
- Respect students' cultural identities
- Encourage participation, empathy, and mutual respect

#### Conclusion

The inclusion of refugee and migrant students requires more than access to education. Schools are called upon to create environments where diversity is valued, participation is encouraged, and all students feel respected and supported. The literature suggests that intercultural and anti-racist educational approaches, combined with appropriate support structures, can contribute significantly to reducing exclusion and fostering a stronger sense of belonging.

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