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Migrant education: the Lithuanian case

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Lithuania is small country (preliminary 2011 census: 3 million), with fewer than 1,000 immigrant children. Therefore only a few schools are directly involved in educational practices in the field. In Rukla and in Pabrade two schools have the main curriculum task of introducing the national language. If immigration was because of refugee status, these two schools (especially Rukla) will be the main actors. If the immigration was because of family re-unification, temporary work contracts or diplomatic work, then schools in Vilnius will be the main actors (such as Ozo high school).

Lithuanian teachers have to work to the State Curriculum Competences (1996, with newer editions, most recently February - May, 2011). Lithuanian teachers also have to have pedagogical education. They have to work towards learning standards that are the same for all students, and the teachers are (mostly, with a few exceptions) highly qualified and competent. With such general high quality of teachers' performance comes a focus on minimal research skills. The curriculum is normally individualised to an extent for each pupil (in primary and compulsory education), because of the variety of their prior learning experiences.

Teachers provide additional support for children, but this is common practice: teachers help all children. As the Decree of Minister of Education states (On the compulsory and High Curriculum for 2009 -2011, 15 May, 2009, No. ISAK 1027, Article 10.55 and No ISAK-1800), teachers should follow the specific explanation of the General curriculum. Teachers' work consists of 18 hours teaching, and an entitlement to two hours for additional education (which might provide consultations for pupils who need support), 3½ hours for preparing for teaching, and one hour for assessing homework.

As there are few immigrants, in practice there are few schools with educational provisions for them in place. This is not so in higher education, where students are either encouraged to take Lithuanian language course and then follow regular study programme, or, in some of universities, follow courses in English for immigrants who came to Lithuania specifically for learning purposes (especially, in medicine). Compulsory or primary education is provided mostly in the capital city in several schools which have the state language course, and where the teachers are experienced in helping children in the new situation. Parents of these children are expected to get involved into child's education, as are all parents. According to the Lithuanian Education Act (1991 and later editions) and the Guidelines for Educational Strategy (Valstybinis svietimo gaires 2003 - 2012) it is a parents' duty to ensure their child attends compulsory education, which means ten years of schooling to the age of 16 years. Class teachers thus have a responsibility to inform and consult parents on their child's learning. Immigrant families are also entitled to the support of social workers and/or immigrant officials who both provide necessary consultations. In the case of children of those seeking refugee status, usually for the whole family comes to school at first, and later the father monitors a child's/teenager's progress. In Lithuania children are provided with financial support (at

the modest level of 125 Lt: that is €36.3) at the beginning of the school year to acquire learning aids and books. Children with low levels of family income are also entitled to a free lunch. Almost all children of refugee seekers are entitled to such meals, because the level of their family income is so low.

As Lithuania does not have a specific legal act on the education of immigrants, activities are regulated through special decrees. Thus while on one hand educational provisions remain rather fragmented and dependant on teachers' and social workers' competence, on the other hand, in Lithuania, which is still not a major state for immigration, the more coherent regulation of the educational provision remains a task for the future.

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¹ The references provided here pertain to the symposium as a whole rather than to the individual paper.

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