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MIPEX results for Portugal: Great expectations?

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The MIPEX findings concerning the Portuguese data were based mostly on the analysis of the educational public policies concerning the integration of immigrant children and young people in the school system, framed by the National Plan for the Integration of Immigrants (2007) and the legislation and education policies implemented towards the approach of cultural diversity in the Portuguese Education System. That Plan included 120 measures, of which 16 were in the Education field, including specific targets such as teacher training for intercultural education, family involvement, enforcement of local and community organisations and institutions, support for research on cultural diversity, among others.

Based on the common key principles of the European Union in this area, which defines this process of integration as dynamic and multidimensional, requiring a mutual adaptation from both the resident nationals and the immigrants, this discussion examines the results and the challenges that might overcome these.

Portugal is ranked second in overall Policies and fourth in Education. These are surprisingly good results for a country that has received different migratory waves: until mid 1990s mostly Africans from ex-colonies and in the 21st century large numbers of Eastern Europeans (Ukraine, Romania, others), and more recently, large numbers from Brazil and, less significantly, Asians (mostly Chinese).

In 2008 6% of the population were immigrant, including school aged children and young people. The impact on the school system is still to be evaluated but in that year schools registered around 20.000 Brazilians, 12.000 Cape Verdeans, 8.000 Angolans, 4.000 Guineans, 4.000 Ukrainians and many thousand others. In Pre-school there were 10.000 immigrant children (Pires, 2010).

According to MIPEX, the Portuguese migrant education policies, political opportunities, anti-discrimination laws are the best of the 'new immigration' countries, and rank best on access (with the US) and 5th on 'international education' (after UK, NO, NL, SE) as all pupils, regardless of status, have access to school. Nevertheless, as the PISA report (2006) states, language is the first condition for school integration and success and in the Portuguese case, the support for systematic tutoring and monitoring the advancement of the minorities is far from being resolved.

There has been considerable investment in Education to combat the levels of school failure prevalent among immigrant children. Some positive discrimination measures were implemented with TEIP 1 (1996) and 2 (2008) (Education Action Zones), allocating extra human and material resources to schools in deprived residential zones www.oi.acidi.gov.pt/docs/Estudos_OI/OI_30.pd, but more investment is needed to develop teacher competencies in intercultural education. MIPEX concludes that 'where

Portugal falls halfway is targeting new opportunities and needs that migrants bring to schools. They are entitled to learn Portuguese and to some extra support’.

The paradox remains that policymakers are expected to make schools and teachers become inclusive and more competent in dealing with diversity and inequality, but at the same time they lack the confidence and the capacity to develop and engage in collaboration with the communities involved. There is a long way still ahead to fulfill the expectations brought by the MIPEX results.

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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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