

Immigrants in Society: Challenges for Education in Ukraine and Latvia

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the problems which are arising in the process of adaptation of immigrants to educational spaces in Ukraine and Latvia upon their arrival in the country of settlement. Among these problems are the differences in educational systems of the output and input countries, difficulties in mastering languages of a learning process in the countries, overcoming misunderstanding in intercultural communication within and outside of schools, unpreparedness of teachers and trainers to face and to solve challenges that are generating by immigrants and the host societies. The discussion is based on the preliminary results obtained during the implementation of the joint Ukrainian-Latvian project “Immigrants in Society: Challenges for Education” sponsored by Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia.

KEYWORD

Education, Educational Space, Immigrants, Integration, Intercultural Communication

INTRODUCTION

International migration has turned into a significant factor in the development of all countries in the world. In 2017 about 258 million people (3.4% of the world’s population) were moving across their country’s borders due to challenging situations in different spheres of their social life, making countries extremely ethnically diverse (United Nations [UN], 2017). “New sources and destinations of migrants are emerging, and in some cases, countries have become important points of origin, transit and destination simultaneously...,” according to John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division in the United Nations’ Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Europe and Asia combined have nearly two thirds of all international migrants, worldwide. Northern America is another “container” of immigrants, experiencing the fast growth in migrant stock by an average of 2.8% per year (UN, 2013). These movements have great potential for accumulation (first of all for host countries) or loss (mainly for countries of emigration) of social, labour, cultural, and intellectual capital.

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This article will discuss the interconnection of migrant flows with educational contexts in two countries (Ukraine and Latvia) to reveal the main challenges for both immigrants and host societies, and will show the possibilities for overcoming the problems on the way to integration of newcomers into mainstream social life in Ukraine and Latvia.

IMMIGRATION IN UKRAINIAN AND LATVIAN CONTEXTS

The two countries in question (Ukraine and Latvia) recently became important actors in contemporary migration processes. There are three aspects of migration: migration from Ukraine and Latvia; migration to Ukraine and Latvia; and migration inside the countries (especially for Ukraine). Although we concentrate our attention on the second aspect, it is appropriate to give the general picture of the ethnic composition of these two countries to estimate the significance of immigrants in their future development.

According to the All-Ukrainian population census in 2001 and investigations of Ukrainian demographers and sociologists, the ethno-national structure of Ukrainian society is as follows: the Ukrainian ethnos (Ukrainian ethno-nation – 78.0%); ethnic communities, including people with an indefinite status and national minorities (21.0% – Russians, Byelorussians, Moldovans, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Romanians, Poles, Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Tatars, Roma, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Germans, Lithuanians, Slovaks, Czechs); ethnic communities with indefinite statuses, including Gagauz, Karaites, Crimean Tatars, and Krymchaks can be interpreted; and representatives of different ethnic and immigrant groups (2.0%) (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2001; Etnosotsiologiya, 2010).

According to the data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, the population of Latvia on 1 January 2017 was 2,129,320, including 84.4% Latvian citizens, 11.3% non-citizens of Latvia, and approximately four percent were people with permanent or temporary residence permits or foreigners (Pilsonības un migrācijas lietu pārvalde, 2017). The ethnic composition of the Latvian population is as follows: Latvians – 62.0%; Russians – 25.4%; Byelorussians – 3.3%; Ukrainians – 2.2%; Poles – 2.1%; and others – 5.0% (including immigrants from different countries) (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde [CSP], 2017).

Actually, the immigrant component of Ukrainian society today comprises a small proportion of its population. All categories of immigrants referred to in our analysis, according to our estimates, total 300,000 (less than one percent of Ukraine's population). If one considers only the quantitative parameters of immigration, one may get the impression that the latter is not a significant factor of Ukrainian social and cultural development. However, this significance is determined not only by quantitative parameters, but also by other moments; first of all, by an intensification of migration processes in general and active involvement of Ukraine into them. It means that in the future it might have more than a tangible effect on the ratio between the different components of the population, on the nature of the immigrants' resettlement in the country, on changes in the balance of ethnic composition of the population at the regional and especially at the local level, and on the problems of their social and ethno-cultural integration into Ukrainian society, or, at least, on adaptation to new conditions of their stay and their interaction with representatives of traditional ethnic communities of Ukraine. A similar situation could develop in Latvia with one distinctive feature – the internal replacements of the population are not so intensive as the Ukrainian case.

There are several categories of immigrants in both countries. In this sense, the situation with immigration in Latvia and in Ukraine is different to some degree. In Latvia the categories of immigrants are distinguished: migrants or newcomers from countries of the European Union (EU); migrants or newcomers from third countries; and remigrants who return to Latvia after a period spent outside the country. In Ukraine there are different categories of migrants: immigrants from the post-Soviet space (mainly students); immigrants from countries of Africa and Asia; refugees (from Afghanistan and Syria); and forced displaced persons (internal refugees, from the Crimea and Donbass regions).

This differentiation of immigrants is considered in contexts by developing approaches to overcome challenges that arise, particularly in the field of education.

The reasons for migrating to Latvia and to Ukraine are quite similar: socio-economic (search for job, studies, investments, family reunion, etc.); socio-political (dissatisfaction with local authorities, life threats, escape from war); and others.

According to the data of the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 9,916 people arrived in Latvia in 2017 (8,345 people in 2016). Looking at international, long-term migration by country group, 57% of immigrants in 2016 came from EU countries. An important part (31%) was also made up of immigrants from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In 2016, 71 asylum seekers and 17 refugees were registered in Latvia (CSP, 2017). Sources of replenishment of the immigrant pool in Ukraine include countries of the CIS and Asian and Arab countries: Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Vietnam; Jordan; India; Iraq; Iran; China; Kurdistan; Nigeria; Pakistan; Palestine; Syria; Turkey; and Sri Lanka – a total of about 40 countries. During the period of 2010-2015 an average of 20,000 residence permits were issued in Ukraine. In 2015 there were 250,000 migrants with such a permit (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2016).

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

All these categories of immigrants are facing problems in different spheres of social and public life; in particular in the labour market, in the process of integration into the host country's society, and in the space of interethnic communication, among others. The educational sphere is a special concern for both immigrants and the host society because many serious problems are interlacing here. The cultural and educational experiences of these people vary greatly. Educational offerings are one of the most effective ways of helping people to integrate into the local community and at the national level; in a general sense education is a gateway to the full and active participation of immigrants in social and cultural life. That is the case for both Latvia and Ukraine.

In the following discussion, we try to find and interpret the main challenges. Our discussion will be based on the analysis of the results of scientific research, an expert survey, and focus group interviews acquired during realisation of the joint Ukrainian-Latvian project "Immigrants in Society: Challenges for Education", sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia and by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2016-2018).

In speaking about the problems of immigrants in the sphere of education and trying to build models for their solution, one must consider the immigrants' educational levels and skills after coming to the country of residence. As to Ukraine, the situation is as follows: according to the survey in three big Ukrainian cities (Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odessa – the main destinations for immigrants in Ukraine) over 8.0% had less than secondary level education; over 30.0% – secondary education; 17.0% – incomplete higher education; 34.0% – higher education; and over 9.0% – post graduate (Ph.D. and above) (Unheeded Voices, 2008). It is important to note that more than one third of immigrants were educated in an area of specialisation that did not match their occupation in Ukraine. The figures of 2013-2014 concerning the level of education of immigrants are as follows: higher education – 32.5%; incomplete higher education – 31.8%; secondary education – 21.9%; and secondary vocational education – 11.3% (IOM, 2014). The results of focus groups in 2017-2018 and interviews at the working places of immigrants (mainly at the local market places in Kyiv) arguing the ordering of immigrants concerning their educational level: a large group with higher education (over 30% and incomplete higher education – at the same level). It is important to note that still (as in previous years) more than one third of immigrants were educated in an area of specialisation that did not match with their occupation in Ukraine. This demonstrates a couple things: 1) they have inappropriate application of skills to get a job that corresponds to their professional education and 2) immigrants must re-qualify, meaning that they must acquire new knowledge to fit their new environment. This task can be solved thanks to educational efforts. It turned out that in terms of the last situation two additional problems for

immigrants are arising: 1) whether immigrants want to continue their education and 2) the language of instruction. More than two thirds of the respondents indicated in the survey and during the focus groups that they did not plan to continue education with the aim of adapting themselves to the needs of the local (Ukrainian) labour market. As to the language issue, the overwhelming majority of immigrants (following a trend in all previous surveys and in focus groups) supported the idea of learning and being instructed in Ukrainian. A very interesting detail should be pointed out – over 80.0% of immigrants think that training in Ukrainian should be provided to foreigners and immigrants by the government. But the interviewers did not exclude the payments by immigrants. One of the remarkable findings in understanding their approaches and intentions concerning educational challenges was related to their children's future. A significant fraction of immigrants wanted their children to earn higher education in Ukraine; about 85.0% of children were attending schools in this country in 2008 (both public and private) (Unheeded Voices, 2008), and 66.0% in 2012 (Mizhnarodna orhanizatsiya z mihratsiyi [MOM], 2013).

The data allow us to conclude that immigrants have educational potential that enables their adaptation and integration into Ukrainian social and cultural environments. The willingness to study the Ukrainian language is a good sign of their tolerant attitude toward new conditions. Another point is that the governmental, regional, and local authorities must build the programmes of education considering the readiness level of immigrants to be a part of this society.

To comprehend the processes of the integration of immigrants into the receiving society and the context of their educational needs, one must take into consideration their intention concerning the duration of their stay in the host country. A special survey done for the International Organization for Migration (2013-2014) shows that about half of all immigrants would like to stay in Ukraine permanently, about 21.0% would not, more than 17.0% had not made a determination, and for 11.1% indicated that their decision depended upon different circumstances (MOM, 2014). This is an additional reason to claim that a significant share of immigrants would like to be a part of Ukrainian society and educational programmes must be developed to help them to realise this wish.

During the study of the educational problems among immigrants in Latvia it was found that for 63% of them, knowledge of the Latvian language was a very important skill regarding the issue of the ability of immigrants to adapt themselves to the host country's educational space. It should be noted that the largest number of migrants in Latvia in the age group of 25 to 34 years old totals 2,653 people who must join the labour market and/or continue their education (CSP, 2017). It is not a secret that there are migrants in this age group for whom Latvia serves only as a bridge to other welfare states in the EU (the same situation exists in Ukraine). Therefore, two groups of migrants can be distinguished by their motivation to become part of the local community. In any case, all these groups are aware of the importance of using educational services and developing educational programmes in language learning, professional retraining, and gaining a new profession. Concerning Ukraine, traditionally immigrants have achieved this goal by mastering the Russian language, which is not the state language but is still widespread in the society.

From the survey, it turned out that the differences in educational systems between host and home countries took third place (with 56.0%) in calculating problems faced on the way to integration into Latvian society. The first two were the peculiarities of the national culture (78.0%) and material conditions (78.0%).

To comprehend the current challenges of the migration process in the Latvian educational system, and to find the practical ways of solving the problems, three focused research groups were selected for the focus group discussions, including practicing teachers and management representatives from a school with a national language of instruction, minority schools, and students of pedagogy, i.e. future teachers or other types of educational staff.

Riga Jugla Secondary School (Rīgas Juglas vidusskola, 2018) was selected as a school with a national study language, because it already had experience with students with a migration background. As a minority school, only the Riga Ukrainian High School was selected for the study,

in which Ukrainians living in Latvia have the opportunity to acquire general secondary education, while recognising their ethnic homeland's language, history, culture, and traditions (Rīgas Ukrainiņu vidusskola, 2018). Currently, 80 students are studying at the Riga Ukrainian High School; their families had emigrated from Ukraine to Latvia and had been living there for years. Students of the academic Master's study programme "Pedagogy" represent the students of the future of education at the University of Latvia, and Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Art. The aim of the Master's study programme "Pedagogy" is to prepare students for independent research at an educational institution or other institution related to education (Latvijas Universitāte, 2018).

During the discussion, it was confirmed that students with a migration background in the Latvian education system are studying in schools and respondents in their professional activities have come across pupils with different migratory experiences that represent different ethnic and cultural groups. It is not just about newcomers in Latvia, but also about remigrants, i.e. children from families who have once left Latvia, but returned after several years. The first languages of these students are Latvian, Russian, Ukrainian, Italian, Georgian, English, Byelorussian, and Uzbek, among others.

As the study carried out in the framework of the AMITIE CODE project suggests, most Riga Municipality educational institutions currently have experience in integrating children with new entrants and remigrants, and the issues of education for young newcomers and remigrants are common. In 2017 more than 75% of Riga Municipality educational institutions showed that they were working or had been working with such children in the preceding three years (Rīgas Domes Izglītības, kultūras un sporta departaments, 2017).

The participants in all three focus groups confirmed that both the education system and specific educational institutions in Latvia currently face serious challenges created by the migration processes. The participants believe that there is no systemic plan or support from the state in Latvia to fully integrate immigrant students into the general education system in Latvia. In all three focus group discussions, it was mentioned that integration of pupils in the education system of Latvia is a complex phenomenon. It depends not only on the pupil's abilities and talents, but also the support of parents and the motivation of the pupil and his or her family to learn Latvian and to integrate into Latvian society. As an essential prerequisite to integration, both the student's emotional self-awareness and the attitude and understanding of other classmates were mentioned. Therefore, the discussion indicated that students with a migratory experience in schools would need support staff, such as a mentor who could provide advice and emotional support.

One of the main challenges for immigrant students is the acquisition of Latvian language skills. The lack of Latvian language skills makes it difficult not only to communicate with pupils, but also creates learning difficulties if the pupil does not understand the terms of the task. Therefore, schools in Latvia use intermediate languages to work with students who recently lived in a different country and have not learned the language.

It is not a secret that many families from the former USSR republics chose Latvia as a transit country, with plan to move to another EU state. Latvia was chosen as a temporary home because it is possible to speak Russian there. Thus, for children who have moved to Latvia from the countries of this group, the Russian language is used as an intermediate language in school. And since these families do not intend to stay in Latvia, the acquisition of the Latvian language is not their priority. However, it is undeniable that for families from the post-Soviet countries who want to stay in Latvia, the motivation for these families to learn Latvian is serious. Generally, families who move to Latvia from this region have chosen minority schools for their children.

Therefore, teachers and management of the Riga Ukrainian High School in the discussion were more optimistic than the other participants in the focus group discussions; the school is specific, and their integration experience is longer and more extensive (out of 320 pupils at the school, there are currently 80 pupils with a migratory experience). It is common practice to use 4 languages – Latvian, Ukrainian, Russian, and English. Nevertheless, representatives of this school also acknowledged that support from the state and local government would be necessary.

For students with a remigrant background, English is used as an intermediate language in school. However, the English language, considering the ages, cultural, and historical experiences of educators working in schools in Latvia, often presents serious difficulties for teachers, themselves. Therefore, the idea of a new function in the English language teacher's work was mentioned in the discussion. A teacher of English is often the one who undertakes to be a representative of support staff for a student with a remigration experience.

The discussions also mentioned occasions where the pupil does not speak a language known to any teacher, so it is important to apply the educational system and develop support measures to satisfy the educational needs of migrant pupils. It should be noted that the background of the migration may not be the only aspect in which the student needs support. Focus group participants emphasised that support measures are needed not only for pupils, but also for teachers. "No one teaches us "how"!"; the teachers concluded in one discussion. Methodological materials, digital teaching materials, operational guidelines in certain situations, and counselling opportunities would be required. Teachers believe that it would be very valuable to collect good practice examples for integration of pupils with a migration background into the Latvian educational system. As a positive example, the Latvian Language Agency's study materials for learning the Latvian language are mentioned as a support.

During the discussions, it was found that in Latvia the duties in working with children who have the experience of migration require schools to use existing support staff, whose functions are joined by a new function. In Riga Jugla Secondary School, there is a specialist who works with pupils with learning disabilities on a daily basis. Specialists with children with an immigration or remigration experience work with the same methodology as with children with learning difficulties. In turn, at the Riga Ukrainian School these duties are assigned to a social pedagogue whose duties have been supplemented with the function of socialisation. A proposal was made for the inclusion of this actual job function in the education of special and social pedagogues, as well as in general, to strengthen the tools for tackling the challenges posed by migration problems in teacher education, as it is clear that these processes will strengthen and expand in the country.

The participants in the focus group discussions indicated that the systemically-developed plan for educational institutions, additional funding, pedagogical improvement of teachers, support staff and consultations, as well as the exchange of experience, would be most needed for work improvement.

A new issue was also raised – the integration of remigrant children into the education system in Latvia. This problem has already been highlighted in the study "AMITIE CODE project", which also addressed the possible solutions that schools can use to work with remigrants. It is advisable to use these solutions in dealing with immigrants in Latvian society, and they are also relevant in Ukraine in the case of an internal migration, because the country is large and complicated circumstances in the Crimea and Donbass have forced people to transmigrate and to adapt themselves to those new environments. In contradistinction to Latvia, these environments are familiar for the settlers because they previously lived in the same country and the languages (Ukrainian/Russian) used in the previous territory are not foreign to them.

The study "AMITIE CODE project" indicated that schools are formally ready to host immigrants, but the survey and focus group discussions showed that schools and teachers are not ready for communication, cooperation, and interaction with immigrants or remigrants, although there are positive examples. The teachers (experts) who participated in the survey were of different ages, from different subjects, from different regions of Latvia, from educational institutions with different levels of education (primary school, elementary school, secondary school, and higher education), and with different experiences in working with immigrants or remigrants.

An expert survey in Ukraine (30 teachers, specialists of immigrant issues, and managers of educational process) revealed several problems that immigrants may face in education. It is worth noting that these are similar to the situation in Latvia, with the exception of the size of immigrant groups and exclusion of re-immigrants (there are only single exceptions in Ukraine). Concerning the question about the problems affecting the educational integration of immigrants into Ukrainian

society, experts specified differences in educational systems (16), materials (10), peculiarities of national culture (7), and ideology practices (7). The majority of experts considered the possibilities of the Ukrainian social environment as generally favourable for adaptation of immigrants in education. Experts point out that immigrants influence mainly positive the economic developments in the country; they enrich its cultural variety (immigrants are inclined to perceive the new culture and traditions) [Empirychnyi analiz problemy, 2018]. However, it is ambiguous to think about whether life improves in a country with the arrival of immigrants. By the way, a majority of Latvian experts have assumed that immigrants positively influence the interethnic and intercultural communication in their country, too.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis presented above, we can make preliminary conclusions:

1. In both countries, the atmosphere for integration of immigrants into educational space is rather favourable;
2. The school systems can adapt the foreigners who wish to master the official language of the host country to improve their professional skills or to get new professions. The attitudes of the population of the host countries toward immigrants are rather favourable, and this is a good ground to realise their integration into the educational space of the countries. Here, the special features of different categories of immigrants must be taken into consideration (immigrant from EU, from countries of the former Soviet Union, Asian and African immigrants, refugees, displaced persons, and re-immigrants);
3. Special trainings for teachers working with immigrants are needed to acquire knowledge of immigrants' cultures, traditions, and behavioural patterns, which will stimulate mutual understanding in the process of teaching;
4. More attention must be paid to creating an atmosphere of interethnic tolerance in the school environment to improve the process of communication between different categories of actors, including teachers, students, and school management. This is why the position of the special pedagogue (social pedagogue, social psychologist) who promotes communications between pupils of different ethnic origins and assists them in adapting to new circumstances must be introduced in schools that children from an immigrant environment attend;
5. Exchanging experiences (positive and negative) between schools inside the countries and outside the countries will be of great value;
6. Solving the problems in the sphere of education will promote the problem-solving of other issues immigrations face in the process of their social, ethno-cultural, psychological, and behavioural adaptation, and of their communication with an ethnically-diverse environment.

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