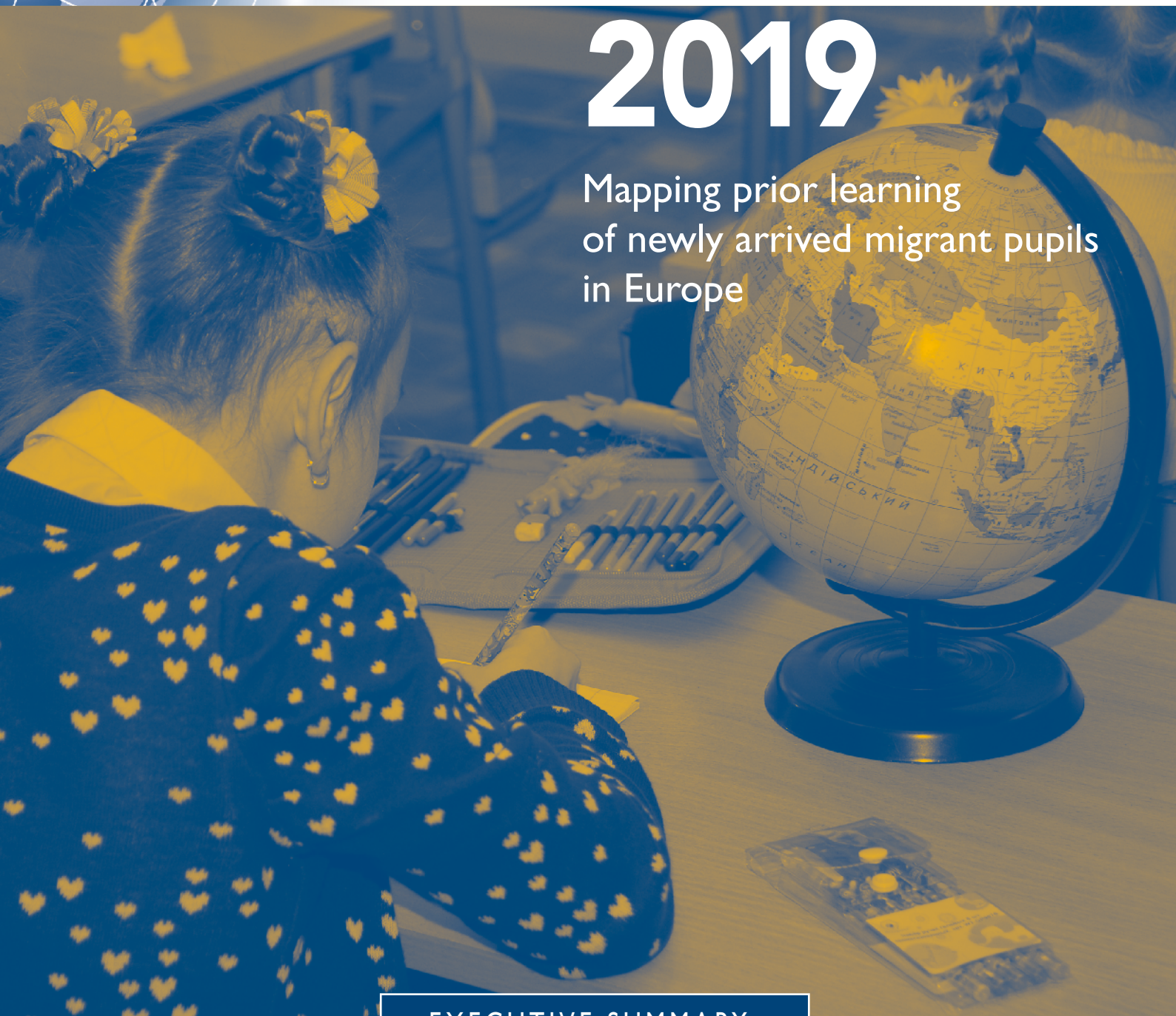




# SIRIUS WATCH 2019

Mapping prior learning  
of newly arrived migrant pupils  
in Europe



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





# Mapping prior learning of newly arrived migrant pupils in Europe

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## PPMi

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## About SIRIUS

SIRIUS is the international Policy Network on Migrant Education, active since 2012 and co-funded by the European Commission. Its overall objective is to support the major education policy debates with evidence by analysing and co-creating knowledge on the main challenges and policy approaches for inclusive education in Europe, by mobilising migration and education policy stakeholders and building the capacity of migrant and grassroots education initiatives.

SIRIUS Watch is one of the Network's tools to achieve this objective. It monitors and informs policy development and implementation at different governance levels in the field of inclusive education, with a particular focus on migrant and refugee learners.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## The relevance and aims of the report

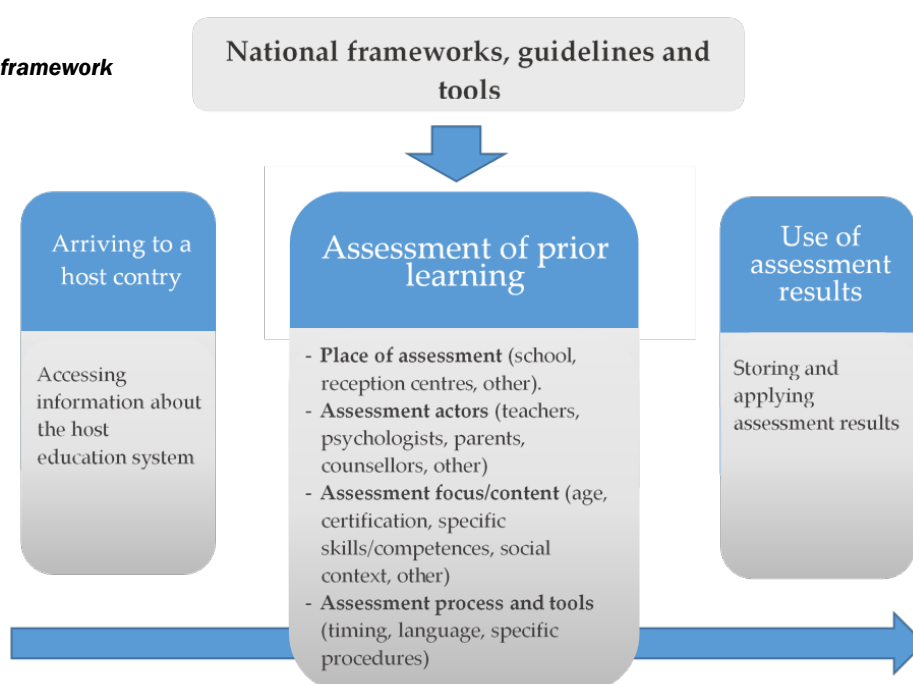
The changing social realities driven by increasing migration and mobility in Europe call for teaching and learning strategies to be adapted, to take account of learners' linguistic and cultural diversity, their previous educational background and capitalise on this potential. In order to ensure that education response of the host country builds on the strengths and already acquired knowledge of newly arrived pupils, schools need to have capacity and tools to map and adequately assess competences these learners already have.

Only few studies have been carried out on the strategies and instruments used by educational stakeholders to determine the competences and talents of newly arriving migrant pupils. Most of the existing research focuses on recognition of migrants' qualifications to facilitate their integration into the labour market or enter higher education, but not at the level of transitions within compulsory schooling. Even though the recent debates and developments on the creation of European Education Area (targeted by 2025) call Member States to further enhance learners' mobility and remove all obstacles to recognising qualifications at (upper secondary) school level, ample work still needs to be done to achieve this goal. It needs to go beyond official recognition of previously acquired

qualifications and certificates, but also provide tools and guidelines on mapping actual skills, knowledge and abilities of a person, be it a short-term exchange student or a learner with a migrant background. Having a comprehensive mapping procedure in place is especially critical in the cases of refugee and asylum-seeking children who often embark on the journey of migration with no documentary proof of their previous educational experiences and achievements. Adequate placement of these children in schools and developing learning plans building on their strengths is a key determinant for their future educational success and therefore their chances in the labour market and society afterwards.

In an attempt to understand how such assessment is done and could be further improved, the SIRIUS Watch report provides a map of existing policies and examples of institutional-level practices when it comes to assessing newly arriving migrant children's prior learning. It covers the first stages of reception of newly arrived migrant children starting from children's arrival to the host country (to document the moment in time when the mapping and assessment of child's previous learning takes place) to the process of assessment itself and child's integration into the mainstream schooling.

**Figure 1 Analytical framework**



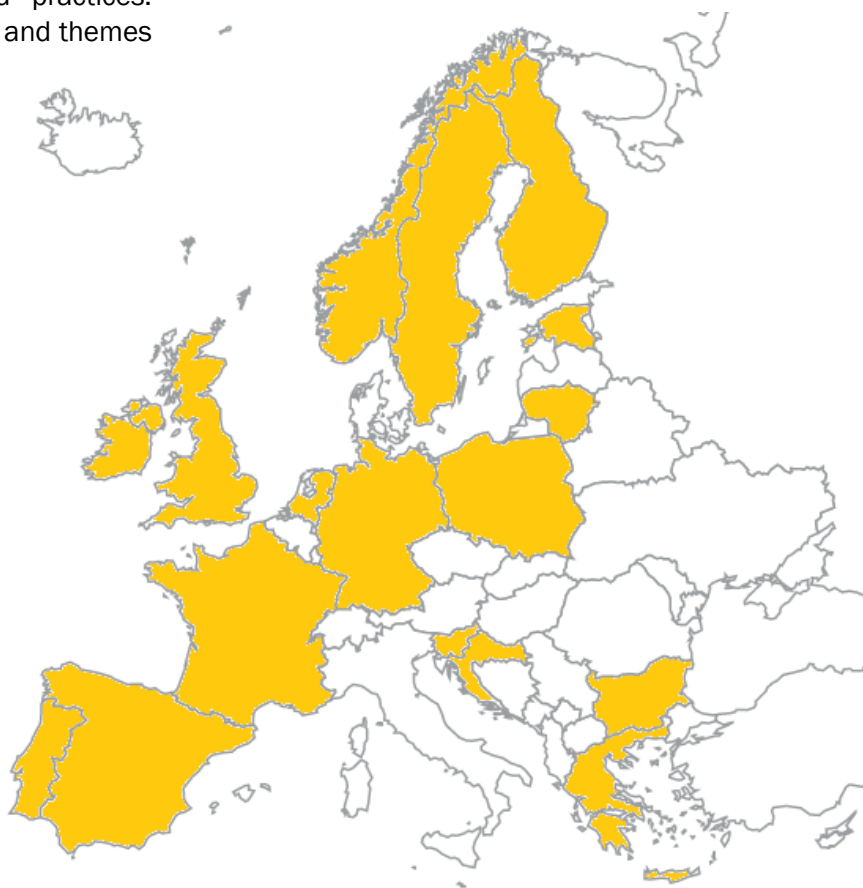
## Methodology

This report is based on the analysis of research evidence available in literature and 17 SIRIUS Watch country briefings prepared by SIRIUS national partners. In each of the 17 European countries covered by this report, experts from SIRIUS partner countries carried out desk-based research and interviews with relevant stakeholders to explore practices for assessing migrant children's previous education experiences on the ground. It should be acknowledged however, that the national reviews cannot be considered exhaustive. They rather aim to provide a picture on different arrangements that are practiced in various Member States at different levels. Some of the examples described in this report are the initiatives of particular regions or cities, rather than nationally mainstreamed practices. The study team synthesised key issues and themes

arising from these country briefings; as well as other evidence and reports from national, regional and international organisations. The synthesis was complemented with the relevant results of SIRIUS National Round Tables and Peer Learning Activities, review of recent literature and policy developments at the EU and national level, and research work on the topic by SIRIUS partners. Finally, the draft findings were validated by SIRIUS national and network partners.

Given the exploratory nature of this report, there are also certain limitations to comparative analysis of policies between countries and regions covered by this report; however, the research team attempted to provide generalisations whenever it was possible.

**Figure 2 Geographical coverage**



### Key focus and scope: summary

**Focus:** assessment of prior learning of newly arrived migrant children

**Target group:** all children and young people with migrant background (6 – 18 years old), including regular and irregular migrants (accompanied and unaccompanied), refugees and asylum seekers, returning nationals.

**Education level:** primary and secondary education

**Level of analysis:** national or regional (for federal and highly decentralised states) with specific local (city or school) level examples to illustrate the implementation of existing policies

## Findings and recommendations

**Key finding 1.** Only a handful of countries provide national level recommendations and criteria on assessment of prior learning and have developed comprehensive assessment instruments to grasp variety of competences of newly arriving learners. Even fewer of those are mandatory to use by schools and external assessment centres.

While progress is being made in the recognition of foreign diploma and certificates (mostly at the upper secondary education level and higher as part of the vision towards European Education Area), countries across Europe lack clear strategies, guidelines and tools for the assessment of prior learning of migrant children upon their admission to the host education systems. Few regulations and policies exist, and, where they do, they focus mainly on the process of enrolment (e.g., admission to preparatory classes

vs mainstream education; enrolment based on catchment area vs free school choice; age vs cognitive ability as a main criterion for enrolment). Where national provisions on assessment exist, they rarely define the scope and content of assessment, but merely indicate that such assessment is recommended. As a result, schools are often left to rely on their own experience and best judgment on how the mapping of prior learning should be done and learning continuity should be ensured.

### Inspirational examples of national level recommendations and toolkits on assessment include:

- ✓ **Finland:** by law, all immigrant children need to be interviewed when enrolling into schools to determine literacy skills, Finnish and Swedish language proficiency, learning skills and individual strengths, as well as previous educational background. The Finnish National Agency for Education provides comprehensive guidelines to schools all around Finland.
- ✓ **Sweden:** There are national guidelines and the assessment of prior learning is mandatory for primary and lower secondary education. The materials can be used for upper secondary level as well, but it is not mandatory. Guidelines and regulations for the assessment/mapping of prior educational experiences and schooling are developed by the National Agency for Education and are provided to the municipalities and school management. All the assessment materials, as well as links to helpful websites, research, training courses, supporting documents are available on the website of the National Agency for Education.
- ✓ **Germany:** several German lands have developed regional guidelines and tools for mapping prior learning of newly arrived migrant students. Baden Wurttemberg has developed quite detailed materials and is conducting training seminars for schools in the implementation of the '2P – Potential and Perspective' testing.

**Key finding 2.** Even though access to compulsory education is usually guaranteed by law in all EU countries, not all the migrant groups enjoy equal access to schooling in practice. Not all the countries set maximum time limits within which migrants should be enrolled into education. Refugees, asylum-seekers and irregular migrants can be delayed or denied access to education. Furthermore, the information provisions on educational opportunities in the host country is not always transparent and accessible to all migrant groups.

The right to access compulsory education is usually guaranteed by law in EU countries. However, the European **regulation that requires that children entering a Member State should be included in education within three months (article 14 (2) Directive 2013/33/EU ) is not fully put in practice** in some EU countries due to prolonged procedures (multiple relocation, time lag in finding a school place, etc.). **It may take up to six months for children to enter a stable school setting and in some cases**

**even longer than that.** In some countries, for example the Netherlands, Italy and Belgium, education is compulsory for all school age children regardless of their status, whereas in other countries, for example Sweden and Germany, some groups of refugee children (in Sweden refugee children whose asylum procedures are still ongoing or who do not yet have a residence permit, in Germany children in reception centres and unaccompanied children in preliminary care) are under no obligation to attend school.

Empirical evidence also reveals that **information on available educational opportunities is not always accessible to all newly arrived migrant families**. In some countries it is provided only in the national language of the country and no guidance and support is always available to explain how the

system works. While such explanations are usually provided to refugee and asylum-seeking children in reception centres in a more systematic way, other migrant families find the communication system non-transparent and difficult to navigate.

**Practice shows that information provision, guidance and advice to newly arrived migrant families is more accessible and transparent when:**

- ✓ **it is provided centrally** – by Migration office which collaborates with the Ministry of Education (as in Slovenia), by municipality (as Stockholm START programme in Sweden), by regional academic reception centres (such as CASNAV in France), by national or local integration centres (such as National Support Centre for Migrants Integration (CNAIMs) or Local Support Centres for Migrant Integration (CLAIMs) in Portugal).
- ✓ **there is a network of support services, which can provide further explanations and support** (as NGO support network in Greece or Bulgaria).
- ✓ **it is provided in multiple languages** (e.g., information prepared by the National Parents' Committee for Primary and Lower Secondary Education in Norway is provided in 21 languages).

**Key finding 3.** A child's age in primary and lower secondary education, and evidence of previous schooling at upper secondary levels are the usual criteria for determining the school grade of new arrivals. However, in practice children can be placed in grades lower than their age in some countries if this is not explicitly regulated at the state level.

Most countries indicate that **age is a key determinant** for the placement of a child in a suitable grade. The skills mapped during the assessment (if such assessments are conducted) and the evidence of prior learning or years of schooling are of a supportive nature in this regard. However, regardless of the good practice of placing children into grades corresponding

to their age, many systems still place children into lower grades in practice due to potential knowledge gaps (often ill-assessed due to the lack of appropriate assessment tools). **Some countries do set limits** though (e.g., in Bulgaria a child cannot be placed in a grade which is more than three years below their age).

**Key finding 4.** Since assessment of prior learning is not required by education laws in most countries, it happens inconsistently and on ad hoc basis. In such cases, schools are the ones to perform it and they usually do it right upon enrolment into preparatory/reception class or mainstream class.

Although the responsibility of the **assessment of prior learning is typically in the hands of the schools**, there are some countries where this is not the case. For example, in Bulgaria the regional education authority is responsible for the assessment, while in Slovenia, school counselling services at secondary level and the teachers of the given school in primary education are tasked with assessment. In France, the responsible actor is the Academic Centre for the Schooling of Newly-Arrived Allophone Students and Children from Traveling Families and Travelers (CASNAV).

In most of the cases when, **assessment is not done continuously, but at one point in time – before enrolling**

**into school or right upon enrolment**. Such practice is often questioned by educational stakeholders, as it does not allow comprehensive observation of children's abilities and potential and might not reflect the actual competence level due to various factors (such as emotional state of a child at the moment of assessment, language proficiency, etc.). Furthermore, despite the rather significant role teachers and school staff have in the process of mapping of prior learning, **available training generally does not provide teachers with the tools and competences** to monitor migrant children for the purpose of identifying those in need of additional support.



Practice shows that assessment of prior learning is more effective and beneficial for schools' planning and migrant children's further learning development, when it is done:

- ✓ **by a team of well-trained professionals** (involving specific subject teachers, social and health workers, psychologists, etc., which comprise assessment committees) as in Sweden and some schools in Portugal and the Netherlands.
- ✓ **continuously** over a certain period of time, which allows grasping academic, learning and emotional skills and well-being of newly arrived migrant children as in Sweden and some schools in Estonia.

**Key finding 5.** In cases when assessment of prior learning is conducted, it usually focuses on the proficiency in the language of instruction and in fewer cases on basic literacy skills and specific subjects. Almost never this assessment is culturally and/or linguistically sensitive.

The content and focus of assessment vary greatly across, and within, countries in the EU. In many countries, this aspect is left to the discretion of schools, which means that the **content of assessment depends on individual school practice and vision of integration**. In many countries, the assessment of newly arrived migrant children revolves mainly around their **knowledge of the official language of instruction**. Only in a few countries language assessment also includes the ability to communicate in other languages, including

mother tongue of a child (e.g., Estonia and Norway). In some countries assessment also includes other subjects (e.g., France, Spain, Bulgaria). However, often **tests are not adapted to children with a different mother tongue** and do not take into consideration their level of proficiency in their mother tongue or potential cultural peculiarities. Aside from basic knowledge, elements of **behavioural, social and emotional skills** sometimes are also included in assessment (e.g., some schools in the Netherlands and Portugal).

Practice shows that assessment of prior learning is more effective and beneficial for schools' planning and migrant children's further learning development, when it:

- ✓ **is culturally and linguistically sensitive.**
- ✓ **takes into account resources of migrant children** – such as linguistic resources of children, including their mother tongue (as Estonia or Norway).
- ✓ **covers multiple aspects of children's development** – e.g., combination of linguistic competence, basic literacy, well-being, learning skills, talents and motivation (as in Sweden, some schools in the Netherlands and Portugal).
- ✓ **involves several assessment methods** – tests, interviews, observations, games and play therapy, etc (as in Portugal and Sweden).

**Key finding 6.** In cases when assessment of prior learning is conducted, it usually serves as complementary information when deciding on the placement of a child (in preparatory or mainstream class) and provision of additional linguistic and/or academic support.

Practice shows that the results of assessments can be used for various purposes, but it depends on particular educational setting. Ideally, the results inform the teacher about the strengths and challenges of a child, based on which the teacher, and other staff, can determine the best, individualised educational pathway. Therefore, **the more comprehensive the assessment procedure**

**is, the more detailed the learning programme and additional learning support arrangements for the child are.**

**Practice shows that mapping of prior learning of migrant children serves best for their further educational career when:**

- ✓ the assessment results become part of the child's **individual portfolio** – a physical or digital folder which includes all relevant academic and personal information of a child and can be used to track progress over a longer period of time and which can be accessible to different professionals working with the child along his/her educational journey (as in some schools in France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway).
- ✓ schools use the assessment results to develop **individual learning plans** for migrant children. However, due to limited scope and lack of standardised practice these are not always informative enough to design a suitable learning programme for newly arrived students.

This review demonstrated that assessment of prior learning of migrant children in school education is not yet systematically implemented across Member States, is often too narrow and does not

provide necessary information to ensure learning continuity of migrant children in Europe. In this light, SIRIUS recommends the following to policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders:

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Policymakers</b>	<b>Practitioners (school staff and other professionals)</b>	<b>Community (NGOs, Business, etc.)</b>
<b>Recognise and develop consistent strategy and guidelines</b> Education authorities need to commit and invest into the development of comprehensive system of assessment of prior learning to support schools “and other professionals” to perform such assessments consistently in order to ensure continuity of learning for newly arriving migrant children.	●		
<b>Transparently and effectively communicate available educational opportunities</b> Effective communication channels (information toolkits, support stuff, interpreters) need to be in place so that newcomers are immediately and sufficiently informed and guided about educational opportunities in the host country.	●	●	●
<b>Speed up enrolment processes</b> Governments should minimise the time periods when migrant children (refugees and asylum-seekers in particular) are out of school and ensure their immediate access to learning.	●	●	
<b>Engage different stakeholders in the design and establishment of the assessment and validation system</b> It is key that guidance and support is available to schools and other educational settings on the time, scope and content of assessment. For instance, mobile assessment teams (who provide guidance and assistance in assessment) can be organised. Partnerships between schools and non-formal education providers can be crucial for taking non-formal learning into account (when initially assessing and when developing individual learning plans)	●	●	●

Recommendations	Policymakers	Practitioners (school stuff and other professionals)	Community (NGOs, Business, etc.)
<b>Design innovative and culturally/linguistically sensitive tools</b>  Existing assessment toolkits need to take into account potential cultural and linguistic biases. Countries could further explore the potential of modern technologies to make assessment more comprehensive, child-friendly and personalised by investing more in assessment research and innovation, cooperation with IT companies and representatives of sending countries.	●	●	
<b>Train professionals</b>  Host countries should aim to equip school stuff and other professionals with necessary skills and knowledge to perform culturally sensitive assessments. Such trainings should be provided both at ITE and CPD levels. Assessment professionals need to have tools and resources to deal with any type of learner, whatever his/her background and situation might be and be able to provide suitable educational pathway based on the results of APL.	●	●	●
<b>Systematise knowledge and experiences and promote collaboration within and between countries</b>  Countries should invest in creating or using existing platforms and exchange portals and encourage and support knowledge exchange, peer support, developing new tools and practices and storing effective approaches at the national level and EU level. Such platforms need to be available to multiple stakeholders (incl. policymakers, practitioners, integration workers, businesses, NGOs) to ensure effective cross-sectoral collaboration.	●	●	●
<b>Monitor and evaluate</b>  Education authorities and schools need to constantly monitor the effectiveness of existing mechanisms and practices in order to understand success, progress and needs at institutional level and continuously improve and innovate to make sure that educational response meets the needs of learners.	●	●	●



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