

## Positive development of migrant children and youth

**Review: Cabrera, N. J. and Leyendecker, B. (Eds.). (2017). *Handbook on Positive Development of Minority Children and Youth*. Cham: Springer.**

In recent years, research in the social sciences has shifted from children's risky and problematic behaviours to their positive development. How parents and society raise healthy children (both mentally and physically) and how young people develop skills that enable them to function successfully in society are topics that affect all children; however, these issues are even more important for migrant communities, which face obstacles due to many challenges. A significant proportion of migrant children and youth grow up in families with low socioeconomic status and face prejudices and stereotypes, while communication in a foreign language presents an additional challenge. Among other challenges, researchers have also identified compliance with social norms and values that may differ from those that they had previously known. Of course, it should be noted that not all migrant children and young people are under threat of deprivation. However, such circumstances represent a burden and a barrier, while also bringing some cognitive and social advantages. In addition to the usual indicators of positive youth development (the 5 Cs), this handbook proposes two additional criteria with respect to migrant youth, namely, flexibility towards acculturation factors (e.g., learning characteristics of the new country and developing a positive national identity) and psychological well-being.

This handbook on the positive development of migrant children and youth is divided into six chapters or thematic sections. These address the practical challenges and opportunities faced by researchers working on the positive development of migrant children and youth through theoretical and methodological tools. The organization of the thematic sections resembles the child's placement in a complex network of interconnected systems. However, this does not mean that the authors do not expound upon questions of intersectionality; indeed, the authors reflect on the extent to which migration status is an isolated factor that influences the process of positive youth development.

The first chapter focuses on conceptual and methodological approaches (the chapter addresses the relevance and validity of instruments for and indicators of positive youth development when studying migrant youth) that gradually lead the reader to individual factors specific to migrant children and youth. Among these, we can identify cultural identity development and bilingualism. The third chapter focuses on the family or parental perspective (e.g., family resources to promote positive development, family structure, and the role of language or bilingualism in the positive development of children). We should point out that all cases in this chapter are drawn from research conducted in North America and Europe. In the fourth chapter, the reader is introduced to the characteristics of peer groups and friendly relationships (e.g., the establishment of interethnic friendships and peer

exclusion). This chapter concludes with a paper discussing the positive development of young people belonging to the Roma ethnic minority. The penultimate chapter focuses on early childhood and the role of school and the classroom, while the final chapter focuses on policies, interventions, and programmes that focus on the positive development of children and young people, the equal status of migrant youth, and their civic participation.

The collected articles shed light on the link between social and cognitive competencies and risk and protective factors. Above all, they show how migrant children and adolescents develop a sense of belonging in a multilingual environment. Such an environment requires that migrants both combine and keep separate the cultural knowledge received in their host country and that received in their country of origin. Family relationships, interactions with peers, the school environment, and the wider community have important roles in adapting processes and in achieving mental well-being. The authors present a diverse set of protective factors that promote successful integration into society. At the forefront is the question of whether migratory status is a risk factor for the adolescent's ability to adapt and develop positively. Special attention is paid to language; in migrant families, parents may speak to their children in a language they do not know well, or children may not speak the language used by their parents. Such language variations can reinforce a sense of parental insecurity, and the latter affects the child's positive development.

In each chapter, the handbook aims to acquaint the reader with a historical overview and theoretical perspectives, address current research issues, and present the methodologies and mechanisms of positive development that are generally present or specific only within a certain culture. In some chapters, policy recommendations are included. The contributions are insightful in terms of which migrant children adapt most successfully and why and how children's adaptive systems (e.g., language, self-regulation, and social skills) and their relationships with parents and legal guardians contribute to their positive development. The handbook states that children who form strong bonds with their parents while at the same time successfully navigating between the two cultures have the best chance of using the available resources in ways that allow for the most successful adaptation. The book, despite dealing only with cases from Europe, the United States, and Canada, does not lack reflection on the extent to which general findings can be applied to migrant youth who have different cultural backgrounds or who do not come from the so-called WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) countries. Moreover, the importance of migrants' legal status is highlighted. Two papers identify the benefits of growing up in a bilingual family for the well-being of migrant children and parents, as well as the educational experiences of migrant students and students with minority backgrounds. Their experiences demonstrate how educational strategies and practices that address the needs of these students have positive impacts on the learning outcomes of migrant learners. When discussing the self-esteem of migrant students, it was found that class composition, level of perceived support, discrimination, and multicultural education are among the factors associated with the positive development of young migrants. Regarding multicultural education, the handbook highlights both positive (positive evaluation

of differences) and negative (emphasis on differences between groups, leading to exclusion) characteristics.

Research on migrant youth has a long tradition in North America, but such a handbook presents a necessary and valuable tool for European society, especially considering the European refugee crisis that took place in 2015 and sparked research interest. Since then, European countries have been intensely confronted with the question of how to include migrant children and youth and educate them, while also ensuring their mental well-being and respect for their original cultural identity. Although in some places, this handbook contains findings that can be applied to any group of children and young people (e.g., that positive development of children requires a supportive environment made up of parents and other responsible adults), it does not lack insights that are more specific to migrant children and young people. In line with the general concept of the positive development of young people, this approach represents a welcome departure from the focus on the problems and risks faced by migrant youth (e.g., low academic achievement), as it focuses on their strengths and opportunities. The handbook provides arguments regarding which aspects of growing up in a migrant family are universal and which need to be interpreted and understood within a specific (cultural) context. An additional strength of the handbook is the chapter concerning policies, interventions, and programmes. The latter addresses the short- and long-term effects of social policies, as well as offering practical tools and examples of how to approach migrant children and youth. As one of the authors writes, young people who belong to vulnerable groups do not need special treatment; instead, there need to be equal and accessible basic conditions for the positive development of young people.

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