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## **Equity in Education Policies and Practices in Southern Spain: From Multilevel Analysis to Participatory Recommendations**

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# **Equity in Education for Migrant and Racialized Students in Southern Spain: From Multilevel Analysis to Participatory Recommendations**

This paper aims to analyze equity in education policies and practices in Southern Spain that ensure cultural competence in services and the inclusion of migrant and racialized students. Our model for defining and analyzing equity in education was adapted from the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) and includes five dimensions: (E1) equity in mission/goal, (E2) equity in access, (E3) quality/sensitivity of services, (E4) equity in participation, and (E5) development of partnerships and opportunities. Through transformative mixed methods (i.e., documental analysis of 13 policies, 15 interviews with professionals, one focus group with mothers of Afro-descendant students), the results showed that equity was 100% present in the mission/goal of the Andalusian education system, although there were gaps in its practical implementation, especially in participation and quality/responsiveness. These results were discussed and recommendations for improving equity in education policies and practices are proposed participatively.

Keywords: equity, education policy, education practice, migrant, racialized student, mixed method.

## **Introduction**

Migration is one of the main causes of population change, making the management of diversity a key challenge for the governance and well-being of host societies, such as Spain (Garrido et al., 2019). This situation has focused attention on the capacity of governments to manage ethnic, cultural and social differences in order to build inclusive societies for all, as well as to eliminate inequalities that may lead to discrimination or exclusion of part of their population (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020). Therefore, the analysis and revision of policies and services—originally designed for more homogeneous populations—are fundamental aspects of

the proper functioning of public services in the face of the new challenges and opportunities posed by diversity (Solano & Huddleston, 2020).

In this direction, the education system has been identified as an essential service, not only for the integration of the migrant populations, but also for achieving an inclusive society where diversity is valued as an asset rather than a problem (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020). Education is one of the most important community assets for the well-being of migrant and racialized children and their families, but this requires the development of policies that guarantee values and measures that advance equity, as well as practices that translate them into effective actions in specific contexts (Cebolla-Boado & Finotelli, 2023; Nusche, 2009).

In response, this paper aims to shed light on this challenge by analyzing equity in education policies and practices in Andalusia (southern Spain) that ensure cultural competence in services and the inclusion of migrant and racialized students. Below, we define the concept of equity in education and how to analyze it. Additionally, we present the objectives, the context and the methodology developed in our study in order to explain our results. Finally, participatory recommendations to improve equity in education are shared and discussed.

Equity is understood as the absence of avoidable inequalities between groups and individuals from different social, demographic, economic, geographical, etc. situations, which implies equal treatment of people in similar situations and differential treatment of people with different levels of need (Beauchamp, 2013). When this term is applied to education, it is linked to inclusion, which is seen as a process based on conditions, experiences and pedagogical situations that aim to identify and respond to the diversity of needs of all learners, through greater participation in learning, culture and community, in order to achieve educational success for all learners (UNESCO, 2016).

Thus, we assume that the education system must promote actions that address inequities—which are unjust and avoidable—and recognize/address differences—which are legitimate and should be respected—with a particular focus on those based on cultural and/or ethnic origin (Marmot, 2007). It is also closely related to the concept of cultural competence, which suggests that host societies—particularly in public services and their professionals—should provide effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful services that are responsive to diversity, including beliefs, languages, literacy, and other needs (Garrido et al., 2019).

### ***Moving Towards Equity in Education***

Since landmarks such as the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in the United States, there have been numerous efforts to achieve equity in education and to promote the inclusion of migrant and racialized students in host societies worldwide (Charbonneau et al., 2022; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020). However, numerous research have demonstrated that migrant and racialized children exhibit inferior rates of inclusion and academic achievement when compared to their native peers (Cebolla-Boado & Finotelli, 2023; Newman et al., 2020; OECD, 2015, 2018, 2023). As indicated in the PISA report (OECD, 2023), this "immigration gap" is discernible in fundamental academic domains, with immigrant students persistently attaining lower scores. For instance, there is a 29-point discrepancy in mathematics performance, underscoring considerable disparities. Additionally, they presented high early school leaving behavior and are underrepresented at all post-compulsory education levels (CES, 2019; OECD, 2023).

Several factors have been identified as potential contributors to this problematic situation (Newman et al., 2021; Nusche, 2010; OECD, 2023), including barriers to accessing and utilizing services, special segregation, racism, lack of cultural competence of professionals and services,

and low school participation of migrant families. For instance, the PISA report (OECD, 2023) indicates that the "immigration gap" is determined by not considering communication barriers and socioeconomic status of migrant children. Furthermore, migrant and racialized students often attend "ghetto schools," which are the result of spatial segregation of ethnic minorities in cheaper and excluded areas that limited integration and educational equity (Carabaña, 2012; CES, 2019). Also, migrant and racialized students face additional challenges due to racism which negatively impacts their academic performance and physical and mental health (Pachter & Coll, 2009; Priest et al., 2013; Newman et al., 2021). At school, racism occurs from an interpersonal level (with peers, teachers and other teaching staff) to an institutional and structural level, where policies play a major role (Alansari et al., 2020; Charbonneau et al., 2022).

In addition, despite progress in action-research related to equity in education, there are still factors that require further exploration and improvement. On the one hand, most of the studies have been conducted in the United States, due to it is necessary to explore in other relevant contexts, such as the European southern borders, considering their shorter history of receiving migrants, their lack a coherent framework of integration policies, and their contextual singularities (Cebolla-Boado & Finotelli, 2023; Garrido et al., 2019).

On the other hand, studies often concentrate on students, particularly African descendants, who have been identified as one of the most racially discriminated against ethnic populations (Daniel et al., 2021; Priest et al., 2013). It allowed the identification of limitations and barriers faced by students in order to design services. Nevertheless, focusing the analysis on an individual level may result in developing explanatory models that overlook the socio-political factors that influence the provision of educational services. This approach may legitimize inequalities by blaming the victims and offering solutions that do not address the real causes of these problems,

thus perpetuating the status quo and reinforcing inequities (Steenbarger, 1993). Therefore, it is necessary to develop multilevel analyses that take into account many structural elements to ensure equity in education, such as policy (Nusche, 2009).

### ***How to Analyze Equity in Education Policies and Practices***

We propose a model for analyzing equity in education policies and practices based on the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX, [www.mipex.eu](http://www.mipex.eu)). This international study carried out in 56 countries, examines equity in policies with respect to migrant populations across eight key areas: education, health, labor market, family reunification, access to citizenship, permanent residence, anti-discrimination, and political participation. Hence, the MIPEX index is a useful tool for assessing and comparing host countries' governance.

A recent comparative study based on MIPEX (Cebolla-Boado & Finotelli, 2023) examined the integration outcomes of migrants in Southern and Northern Europe. The study revealed that Southern countries exhibited suboptimal outcomes (including education), with Spain ranking as the least successful. In the latest MIPEX evaluation carried out during 2017-2019 (Solano & Huddleston, 2020), Spain scored 60 out of 100 points, which indicates that migrants face more opportunities than obstacles to integration in general. However, the area of education received the lowest score (43/100) and has remained constant since 2013. These findings may account for the difficulties encountered by migrant and racialized students in Spain, which include low academic achievement, absenteeism, early school leaving, and spatial segregation (Aja et al., 2019; Carrasco et al., 2020; CES, 2019; Grau & Fernandez, 2016; OECD, 2018, 2023).

MIPEX was assessed along four dimensions: (1) access to education and the removal of barriers; (2) targeting needs, such as support for the language of instruction, adaptation of services, and monitoring of students; (3) new opportunities to promote integration, thus avoiding

segregation and supporting parents and communities; and (4) intercultural education for all, including an intercultural curriculum and culturally competent teachers. According to Solano & Huddleston (2020) the main challenges in Spain are related to access and new opportunities.

While MIPeX offers valuable insights, is not without limitations in measuring educational equity, as it focuses on national normative frameworks. Consequently, it fails to consider regional disparities and the manner in which policies are translated into tangible practices (Avci et al., 2023; Cebolla & Finotelli, 2023). A more nuanced understanding can be achieved by focusing on specific contexts and communities, engaging diverse stakeholders, and utilizing qualitative data, such as interviews and focus groups.

### ***Framing the Context***

To address this challenge, this study is focused on Andalusia, which represents one of the main gateways to Europe from Africa (Cubero & Garrido, 2023). It is the southernmost and poorest regions in Spain, exhibiting a low per capita income and high unemployment rates (INE, 2021).

According to the PISA report (OECD, 2023), Andalusia's educational outcomes are considerably below both national and European averages. Key contributing factors include segregation and high rates of grade repetition, particularly in schools with a high concentration of migrants, racialized and low-income students. In this region, the results are consistent with those that place the school performance of migrants behind that of their autochthonous peers (Gómez-Domínguez & Alaminos, 2020; Foces, 2015; OECD, 2023). Nevertheless, no specific studies have been identified that address the issue of policy equity with regard to Andalusia.

The Spanish educational system is overseen by the Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), which stipulates that the governance of education is a shared responsibility between the central government and regional authorities, with fundamental elements consistent across the 17 regions.

First, education is divided between (free) public schools and private schools. Second, education is compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 16. Third, education is distributed into several levels (excluding higher education): Infant Education (0-6 years of age), (2) Primary Education (6-12 years of age), (3) Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO, 12-16 years of age), (4) Bachillerato (academic pathway) or Professional Training Cycles (professional pathway). Finally, the regional governments are responsible for the establishment and administration of public institutions, the planning of the educational system, the hiring and training of teachers, the financing of resources, the adaptation of up to 50% of the curriculum, the promotion of specific programs, and the supervision of educational quality.

Figure 1 depicts the situation of migrant students in Andalusian. While foreigners represent around the 8% of the registered population (National Statistics Institute, 2021), foreign students constituted 5.8% of the total, with 42,823 boys and 41,072 girls, primarily from Africa (38.2%) and Europe (35%). The majority of them are enrolled in public schools (87.9%) and attending primary education (39.8%) (Gómez-Domínguez & Alaminos, 2020).

Insert Figure 1

### ***Objectives***

This paper offers a diagnosis of equity in education policies and practices in Andalusia, in relation to ethnic and cultural diversity. It aims to identify in a multilevel and participatory way those elements for improving cultural competence in the education system and the inclusion of migrant and racialized students.

In this direction, the specific objectives are: (1) to analyze equity in education policies that governing primary education in Andalusia; (2) to analyze the extent to which these educational policies are put into practice, listening to the voices of educational professionals and

mothers of Afro-descendant students; and (3) to elaborate recommendations for improving equity in a collaborative way.

## **Methods**

### ***Design and Sample***

This research was commissioned by a Spanish NGO working for the equality and integration of the Afro-descendant population [the third author of this paper]. It was framed within a project entitled “NDER2: Raising the voice of African and Afro-descendant Andalusian citizens”, funded by the Andalusian government. One of the main objectives of NDER2 was to diagnose of the equity in education policies and practices in Andalusia.

We adopted a transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2007), which is characterized on the one hand by mixed research designs that combine different techniques to collect information from different angles and obtain a complex representation of the scenario under study. Namely, documentary analysis, interview with educational professionals and focus group with mothers of migrant and racialized students. On the other hand, through participation, involving the protagonists and stakeholders in different research phases. In this regard, the commissioning NGO was present throughout the research, alongside a Community Worktable (CWT). This CWT functioned as a small-scale community coalition (Wolff, 2001), comprising experts from multiple sectors (i.e., one school administrators, two educators, three researchers, and one volunteer from a migrant NGO) collaborating to address local challenges. It assisted the different phases of the project, particularly in the design (e.g., enabling contextual adaptation and cultural sensitivity of instruments and procedures), and dissemination (e.g., enhancing result transfer).

The documentary analysis included a total of 13 documents (detailed in Table 1). These were selected on the basis of their validity at the time of the study (2021) and their relevance to

the regulation and management of primary education in Andalusia. Special attention was also given to those regulations and plans that included measures specifically aimed at migrant students and families. The researchers made a first selection of these policies, which were reviewed and completed by the CWT, as well as by educational professionals who were interviewed and who work in contexts with a high percentage of cultural diversity.

Insert Table 1

Furthermore, qualitative techniques were used to explore how these policies were being implemented in practice, by listening to the voices of primary education professionals and migrant families. Participants were intentionally selected according to two main inclusion criteria: (1) experience with migrant or racialized students, and (2) active work in a public elementary school settled in a vulnerable multicultural neighborhood from Sevilla (Guariso et al., 2016) and recommended by the CWT because of its high proportion of migrant and racialized students. Five schools agreed to participate in the study, and the professionals were asked to participate, after being informed of the purpose of the study and the terms of the collaboration. Finally, 15 interviews were conducted with different profiles: 12 teachers, 2 counselors and 1 social worker. The age ranged from 25 to 63 years, although most of the interviewees were middle-aged women. Educational experience was also variable (between 3 and 30 years), as well as the time working at the center (most of them over 7 years).

Finally, we developed a focus group with sub-Saharan mothers of children attending the selected schools. These women were residents of Seville for a period ranging from 3 to 12 years, being all of them fluent in spoken Spanish. They came from Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Senegal. They were invited by the commissioned NGO, with which they had previously contact. The aim of the focus group was to explore their experiences as mothers of children studying in public

schools, focusing on our equity dimensions. This focus group then serves as a tool to triangulate the information collected through the document analysis and interviews.

### ***Instruments and Procedure***

An ad hoc instrument was designed in order to measure the extent to which the policies reflected the educational equity indicators and how these were implemented in actual practice. This instrument was an adaptation from MIPEX to our research context and objectives and the CWT participated in its design. It was finally composed by 18 items distributed in the 5 dimensions (Table 2): (E1) Equity in Mission/Aims, (E2) Equity in Access, (E3) Quality/Sensitivity of Services, (E4) Equity in Participation, and (E5) Development of Partnerships and Opportunities. It should be noted that 8/18 items were designed to be answered by their professionals during the interviews. For this purpose, a structured script was designed, consisting of these questions plus five questions asking for recommendations from the professionals on how to improve each of the dimensions (e.g., Dimension E3: “What measures would you suggest to improve the sensitivity and quality of the educational system in relation to the racialized and migrant populations?”).

#### Insert Table 2

The documentary analysis was carried out between November 2020 and May 2021 by two independent evaluators, following the double-blind formula to avoid possible bias. The evaluators, who were postgraduate students native to Andalusia, received specialized training in order to conduct the analysis. For the assessment, the evaluators had to determine whether the policy under analysis included each indicator or not. If it did, they had to copy the fragment of text where it appeared and add it as evidence in the instrument. In this way, percentages were obtained with the total proportion of items in each standard that were included in the current document being analyzed, so that these indicated the overall equity for each dimension and in

total. Each evaluator conducted their analysis individually and then shared their answers with their partner. If there was no consensus on the response to an indicator, the decisions were argued, and the appropriate response was agreed with a third evaluator. Only in 2 indicators on the E5 was there no a priori consensus.

The interviews were conducted from February to June 2021, after prior contact with the center's leadership team and acceptance of collaboration. Before the interviews, the project characteristics and the question script were emailed to this team, who decided which staff member(s) were best suited to answer these questions. Interviews were conducted and recorded on site (after informant consent was signed) and lasted between 50-80 minutes.

The focus group with mothers was held in July 2021. Informed consent was obtained verbally during the session. The researchers assured anonymity and confidentiality of the data. It lasted approximately 2 hours and was placed at the University of Seville, where childcare was provided. A cultural mediator and a project assistant supported the researchers during the group. A semi-structured script of 12 questions was followed, based on the dimensions of equity and the proposal for improvement. For example, "do you think there is racism in schools?"; "what can be done or proposed to make them safe environments"; "do you think the school facilitates the participation of migrant families"; "how could this be improved?"

The information collected in the interviews and focus groups was transcribed to facilitate its analysis. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to organize the multi-stakeholder information gathered and to report on patterns (themes) within it. The analysis was deductive and semantic, as it was guided by the equity dimensions. In the presentation of the results, we have maintained the actual words of the participants—except in the recommendations, which when repeated ideas were integrated.

## Results

The results are presented following the five dimensions of our model of educational equity. In each dimension, the evidence obtained from the policy documentary analysis is accompanied by narratives from professionals (P) and mothers (M). Then we can contrast the presence of equity in policies, but also to their real implementation in everyday spaces of primary education in Andalusia. The overall results of the documentary analysis can be consulted in Figure 2.

### Insert Figure 2

In general terms, we observe equity in all dimensions, since among all the policies analyzed, 55% of the indicators evaluated were addressed. However, there are differences between the dimensions. Although equity is presented as a value and an objective to be achieved (E1, 100%), the development of partnerships and opportunities (E5, 67%) and equity in access (E2, 50%) decrease. This decrease is even greater for the standards related to equity in participation and quality/sensitivity, with scores below the average level of equity at 25% and 33% respectively.

#### ***(E1) Equity in Mission/Aim***

Dimension 1 on the presence of equity in policies obtained a score of 100%, given that all four indicators were present in one or more of the laws and plans analyzed. First, many of the policies explicitly include equity as a principle and value to be followed in the education system. In addition, access to and quality of education are guaranteed for all students, regardless of any individual or psychosocial condition. For example, Article 1 of the Organic Law on Education [LOE] (2006), states that the Spanish education system has as a principle:

Equity, which guarantees equal opportunities for the full development of the personality through education, educational inclusion, equal rights and opportunities, also between women and men, which helps to overcome any discrimination and universal accessibility to education, and which acts as a compensatory element of personal, cultural, economic

and social inequalities, with special attention to those arising from any type of disability, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Spain in 2008 (LOE, 2006, pp. 14-15).

The professionals interviewed also considered equity to be a fundamental value that guides their practice. However, they also stated that they encountered many difficulties in making it effective, such as a lack of resources and personnel.

In principle, the school should mitigate as much as possible these aspects of socio-cultural disadvantages that we have introduced, for example, in our area... To educate in equality and in equity. That is, to give everyone the same opportunities and the same chances and the same possibilities, within the diversity, within the diversity (...) Of course, we would need many more things. Of course, more resources, more teachers (P1)

This school is not sufficiently equipped to meet the needs of these children: more teachers, fewer hours, a lower ratio, these are things that are very necessary to take care of these students, and this needs to be debated, this needs to be worked on [by policymakers] (P2)

### ***(E2) Equity in Access***

In this dimension, 2/4 of the indicators were present in the policies analyzed. There were specific measures to facilitate access for migrant and racialized students and their families and to increase their academic success. For example, the LOE ratifies that students who enter the educational system late, regardless of their origin, should be favored (art. 78). To improve access, various actions have been developed, including plans to combat school absenteeism, economic grants (especially in the post-compulsory stage) or free extracurricular activities. Likewise, the LEA establishes the rights of students:

Accessibility and permanence in the educational system, for which they will receive the necessary assistance and support to compensate for personal, family, economic, social and cultural disadvantages, in the case of presenting specific needs that prevent or hinder the exercise of this right” (LEA, 2007, p. 9)

In addition, Decree 167/2003, of June 17, which establishes the organization of educational attention to students with special educational needs associated with disadvantaged

social conditions, stipulates that it is the municipalities that must request the Regional Ministry of Education to carry out actions in their area to foster the socio-educational inclusion of students. In addition, the Order of September 19, 2005, Monitoring and Control of School Absenteeism includes specific measures to prevent school absenteeism, such as the development and adaptation of curricular materials (e.g., textbooks) and the provision of services (e.g., grants to receive free meals in the school cafeterias). However, this has been criticized by teachers, who pointed out that it is insufficient and depends on the center or the teachers themselves.

The translation of materials is key, we have very vague materials. That alone is not enough, those are pieces of paper that are good, that can be useful, but we lack more resources (P3)

All these processes take time and what we teachers find is that we have a very heavy teaching load and a very heavy bureaucratic workload. If we can increase the resources and increase the number of teachers, we can respond to these needs, it is faster (P4)

Other programs, such as the School Accompaniment Program and the Linguistic Support Program for Migrants, are examples of efforts oriented to improve access and integration. The first program aims to address the needs associated with the development of fundamental competencies in linguistic communication and mathematical reasoning. The second program aims to enhance the teaching and learning processes in the language of migrant students. Both prioritize students enrolled in centers that receive compensatory actions, typically located in vulnerable multicultural neighborhoods ('areas in need of social transformation'). However, participants pointed out that there are many gaps in these resources and that they often need external support, especially from grassroots community organizations.

In particular, they highlight the figure of the cultural mediator as a key to integration and educational equity. The role of mediator is fulfilled by an external agent from NGOs or municipalities who is funded by grants from the Delegation of Social Affairs to these entities. This agent is not part of the school environment. The Delegation of Education has no

administrative or institutional relationship with the mediator. These entities ultimately determine how to implement intercultural school mediation. The cultural mediator is considered a crucial agent in facilitating the knowledge of migrant families about the Andalusian educational system; due to the scarcity and ineffectiveness of the measures aimed at this purpose, such as those of PIPIA III—as described below.

Regarding the needs and barriers encountered by migrant families, the professionals interviewed pointed out the lack of information, language barriers, cultural differences, and the socioeconomic precariousness of many migrant families. On the other hand, the main barriers for mothers are also language difficulties and the digital divide, especially during the pandemic.

It would be nice if the associations received benefits to be able to organize classes for mothers in order to bridge the digital divide a bit. The basic things, because there are already two divides that come together, the digital and the language divide (M1)

However, these barriers are issues that they claim to be able to overcome with help, unlike the main problem that was unanimously identified in all the centers: the lack of cultural competence of the teaching staff and institutional discrimination and racism—which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

### ***(E3) Quality/Sensitivity of Services***

Equity in terms of quality/sensitivity received a score of 33%, being the only indicator present related to gender equity. Therefore, we found more gender perspective than intercultural perspective in educational policies. For example, training programs for teachers “must include specific training on gender equality” (LOE, 2006, p. 63) and a gender equality plan must be included in the center’s plan in each school. There is no evidence of intersectional approaches. Then, the need to integrate gender and intercultural issues to the reality of the centers—and teachers—was stressed in the interviews for improving their effectiveness.

Regarding teacher training, the LOE establishes that this should be a right and an obligation of all teachers, as well as a responsibility of schools and educational administrations, which will plan the activities to make it effective (art. 102). At the regional level, the III Andalusian Plan for Continuous Teacher Training outlines strategies for promoting cultural diversity and supporting diverse students. Nevertheless, teachers have recognized that there is a lack of training in this area. Further, this training is not mandatory, but depends on the will of the teacher, which can lead to a situation where “those who need it the least are trained” (P5), making this measure ineffective in promoting cultural sensitivity among the staff.

The mothers’ assessment of the cultural sensitivity of their children’s teachers was very varied, although they concluded that there was a lack of training in this area. Most of them reported clear cases of racism against their children by the teachers. All of them also stated that they feel helpless in this kind of situation and do not report it. They simply try to play it down so that their children do not notice, or they remove the child from the activity or even from school.

At my girls’ school last year, in sports she was in tennis. The teacher was very racist, I saw it from the fence of the playground, and then I took my daughter away from there, “you don’t do tennis anymore” I told him. He didn’t give my daughter a chance, he told her to sit here, or he didn’t let her touch the ball... Very strange things... but I didn’t report anything (M2)

Respect for their freedom of conscience and their religious and moral convictions, as well as their identity, privacy, personal integrity and dignity, and protection against any physical or moral aggression appears in the LOE as a right of students. In the analysis carried out, there are mainly two key documents in this direction. On the one hand, in Decree 19/2007, of January 23, which adopts measures for the promotion of the Culture of Peace and the Improvement of Coexistence in Educational Centers, which establishes the obligation of schools to draw up a Coexistence Plan, approved by the school council, which will be incorporated into the educational project (art. 4). The contents of this Coexistence Plan, according to article 5, must

include, among other aspects: “Specific actions for the prevention and treatment of sexist and racist violence and any other of its manifestations” (Decree 19/2007, p.12). In addition, among its objectives are mentioned the promotion of respect for diversity and the prevention, detection and elimination of xenophobic and racist behaviors and attitudes. In order to achieve the actions, set out in the Coexistence Plan, the existence of a Coexistence Commission is mandatory in each school center, whose main functions are the development of initiatives to avoid discrimination, developing positive action plans to improve integration, as well as mediating in conflicts. The Observatory for School Coexistence in Andalusia has been created as a consultative body on school coexistence. In almost all the interviews, these commissions, bodies and protocols were mentioned, as well as their proper functioning in the participating schools.

For its part, the PIPIA III, marks as one of its specific objectives the need for the inclusion in the centers of intercultural education values. However, unlike the specific action protocol for cases of abuse or gender violence, there is no protocol designed exclusively for the intervention of racist or xenophobic behavior. Nevertheless, most of the teachers interviewed did not see a need for it, indicating that the climate in their centers was good and that there were no cases of racism and xenophobia. However, we also found more critical voices who recognized problems in their centers and in the neighborhood.

If I had a problem of xenophobia in my classroom and I quickly realized that this was the cause, and I also saw it during recess, and I found out that someone was also being mistreated by another person in the street, then we would have to bring it to the attention of the entire teaching staff, hold a meeting of the faculty, discuss it, and give a solution through all the parameters we have, pull the coexistence plan, pull the coexistence classrooms, pull the parent associations, and use all the means we have to talk about it and give a solution through all the parameters we have (P6)

This second discourse, which is more critical and recognizes the existence of racism, is in line with the one presented by the mothers in the focus group. They denounce the existence of

racism in schools at different levels: structural, organizational, and among peers and their families. They emphasize it as one of the major problems that their sons and daughters have to face inside and outside school. They are concerned about the rise of hate speech and its impact on their children. As with the cases of racism previously presented by teachers, the mothers indicate that they feel alone in these situations and do not report them.

We don't usually denounce anything, especially the parents because there are times when you notice that they are not in favor of immigrants and that they are racist. I was lucky with my son because he knows how to defend himself, and he is proud of his color (M3)

One mother in the focus group shared her experience of reporting a racist attack on her child to the school administration as good institutional practice, which encouraged her to do so as she felt supported by the school and its staff.

#### ***(E4) Equity in Participation***

Equity in the participation of students and their families in the center obtained a score of 25%, finding only 1/4 indicators analyzed in the educational policies: the provision of linguistic support. Some of these programs are, for example, the linguistic support program for immigrants, detailed in the Instructions of October 9, 2012, of the General Directorate of Participation and Equity or the Temporary Classrooms for Linguistic Adaptation (A.T.A.L.) that develop a Spanish learning program for foreign students. The A.T.A.L. are teaching-learning programs of Spanish as a vehicular language which allow the integration of migrant students in the center and their incorporation into the rhythms and learning activities of their own level of schooling (according to age and curricular competence). These programs should be carried out, as a priority, in the regular classroom, although groups can be organized outside if required.

In the interviews, we found that these measures are widely known and considered to be a good support resource. Nevertheless, one highlighted problem was that the A.T.A.L. are planned before the start of the school year, so that the government can determine the provincial

allocations of the necessary teachers, which does not effectively address late enrollment in the centers—a common occurrence among migrant students. Furthermore, many interviewees openly criticize the minimum inclusion criteria required to access these services:

[The student] has to meet very specific requirements. A student with ATAL is not supposed to spend more than two years with this help, because he has already learned everything he should learn. And then it has to be from the age of 8, before that he has to learn on his own. And it also has to have a number of students, if the child comes alone, his needs alone are not enough, it has to be a small group, otherwise it is not productive and no one is sent to you. So it is for show, but it does not exist. (P2)

On the other hand, the participation of families in the educational process of their children is a right stipulated in article 29 of the LEA. The main mechanisms for participation in schools is the Associations of Mothers and Fathers of Students (A.M.P.A.), which aim to collaborate in activities, promote family participation in management, and provide assistance to parents regarding their children's education.. Another proposed mechanism for involving families is the Coexistence Commission, as proposed in the Order of June 20, 2011. This commission requires two members to be parents of a student at the center.

Despite the existence of mechanisms for the participation of parents in the center, nothing is considered in relation to the difficulty of the participation of migrant families in these mechanisms, as well as their representation in them. Only PIPIA III includes the promotion of some interesting measures in this regard. Among these measures, the interviewees mentioned only the A.M.P.A. (mostly composed exclusively of native families) and the figure of the cultural mediator, who sometimes comes from a social institution in the neighborhood. They suggested that it should be included in the center's own staff to be always available, at least in areas with a high migrant population.

Similarly, the interviewees highlight the multiple barriers that migrant families face in order to participate in schools (i.e., lack of time, language and cultural barriers, low

socioeconomic level, perceived discrimination, etc.), as well as some measures that have been developed in some centers to eliminate or reduce them. The mothers recognized the lack of participation of migrant families in the centers and identified some of the barriers pointed out by the educational community, such as lack of time and language and cultural barriers. They emphasized that it is usually them and not their husbands who participate in the centers, and sometimes they do not feel comfortable or included in these spaces.

The problem is that sometimes we are not considered smart enough to join that group or AMPA. I have been asked many times, but I could not because of my work, but it is true that many times they do not ask. There are things that they don't even ask if you want to join or not. They usually say that we don't have the level [socioeducational], but it's not that, it's a problem of time and language, not that we don't know how to do something (M1)

#### ***(E5) Development of Partnerships and Opportunities***

The development of alliances and new opportunities scored 67%. The promotion of intersectoral collaboration from the policies was found to coincide with community collaboration networks in the centers evaluated. Regarding the evaluation of the performance of the centers, the policies included tools to evaluate the gender perspective, but not the intercultural perspective, highlighting it as an aspect to be improved in the centers.

The legislation governing the Andalusian and Spanish education systems provides for the promotion of intersectoral cooperation between education centers and other community organizations. For instance, the LOE states that schools are part of the community, so that their proper functioning depends on “the joint efforts of students, families, teachers, centers, administrations, institutions and society as a whole” (LOE, 2006, p. 15). Particularly, Intersectoral cooperation is emphasized for the prevention of school absenteeism, and its maximum exponent is the Comprehensive Plan for the Prevention, Monitoring and Control of School Absenteeism—investing significant resources into financial planning and evaluation.

However, it should be noted that PIPIA III is the only document that specifically includes the development of community partnerships to address the needs of migrant and racialized students and their families. In practice, teachers highlighted the benefits of working with community organizations to address the needs of this group both inside and outside the school.

We are not only dealing with absenteeism! [Intersectoral collaboration] is very useful for many other issues. When we put the pieces of the puzzle together, we have a lot of information and we can act much better (...) We even have a lot of links with health centers, which seem very unknown, but which give us real clues to many problems that exist, both among migrants and non-migrants (P3)

Teachers also noted the bureaucratic difficulties for centers to formally participate in external activities, which can result in a decrease in such collaborations or the pursuit of unofficial actions that are not documented for evaluation purposes. Sometimes proposals can generate discomfort and demotivation among professionals who propose or support them:

External alliances... Many and the more the better... It is like walking on a blurred line, that you are not inside the school, because nobody outside the school can intervene inside the school, it is a very complex protocol, with a lot of regulations, a lot of bureaucracy. So whenever we have worked with associations and others, they have entered through the back door of the school without anyone knowing at the beginning and have done a lot of activities without normalizing them at a bureaucratic level. What happens then? Well, the paperwork and the bureaucracy is terrible (...) The inspection says: "If it's not there, you can't put it in". So the school is left without these projects, if it is left without these projects, the school loses its life and the school loses its seal and its identity, right? (P7)

With regard to the evaluation of publicly funded schools, the LEA states that the Andalusian Agency for Educational Evaluation will be responsible for developing and implementing evaluation plans that "take into account the socio-economic and cultural situation of families and pupils, the environment of the center itself and the resources available to it" (LEA, 2007, p. 30). Nevertheless, there are no specific measures to implement these evaluations in relation to equity and diversity, with the exception of gender equality—which is included into the II Strategic Plan for Gender Equality in Education. Despite PIPIA III advocates the

evaluation of the impact of educational services on the migrant integration, its proposal is limited and not mandatory. Moreover, where it has been applied, results are not available.

### ***Collaborative Recommendations for Improvement***

Table 3 includes the recommendations for improving equity in made by the stakeholders during interviews and focus group. Generally, professionals insist on increase resources in schools and specific services for migrant children and their families. For their part, the mothers highlighted measures against racism inside and outside schools, as well as improved staff training.

Nevertheless, in the presentation of the results, we have combined the suggestions made by mothers and teachers, with the intention of giving equal value to all stakeholders.

#### Insert Table 3

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This research based on transformative mixed methods (i.e., documental analysis of 13 policies, 15 interviews with professionals, one focus group with mothers of Afro-descendant students) explored equity in education policies and practices in Andalusia, taking into account five dimensions based on MIPEX framework: (E1) equity in mission/aim, (E2) equity in access, (E3) quality/sensitivity of services, (E4) equity in participation, and (E5) development of partnerships and opportunities. Furthermore, it presents participatory proposals developed by diverse stakeholders that facilitate the transfer of our contextualized diagnosis into actions in concrete communities.

Our results are consistent with the last Spanish MIPEX evaluation (Solano & Huddleston, 2020) and other studies developed in Southern Europe (Cebolla-Boado & Finotelli, 2023), and in Spain (Arroyo & Berzosa, 2018; Carabaña, 2012; Carrasco et al., 2020; CES, 2019; Grau & Fernandez, 2016; Foces, 2015). The highlights are discussed below, accompanied by some recommendations for enhancing the assessed dimensions.

First, good policy design/formulation stands out, as equity in mission/goal (E1) receives the highest possible score. Laws ensure equal rights and responsibilities for all students, highlighting equity and inclusion. Nevertheless, specific attention to cultural and ethnic diversity is rare, and when it does appear, it is through compensatory measures (Grau & Fernandez, 2016), as School Accompaniment Programs or Linguistic Support Programs. Then, as previously indicated by a Delphi study comprising 100 experts (Arroyo & Berzosa, 2018), there is a discrepancy between the theory and the segregate nature of many of the measures implemented in practice. In this direction, it is recommended to address cultural diversity beyond its inherent challenges, highlighting its richness and potential (OECD, 2015, 2018).

Second, according to previous research (CES, 2019; Grau & Fernandez, 2016; Fernandez & Rodriguez, 2018), our research points to numerous barriers that migrant students encounter in terms of access and permanence in the educational system (E2), such as language barriers, cultural differences, socioeconomic precariousness, lack of cultural competence among services and professionals. In addition to these difficulties, there are those stemming from the covid-19 pandemic (Arango et al., 2021; Garrido et al., 2023), for which participants reported that schools have been an important support in overcoming them. To counteract this, it is suggested to increase resources—especially linguistic ones—and providing more individualized and face-to-face attention (OECD, 2015). As an illustration, Arroyo & Berzosa (2018) propose a reconsideration of vehicular language learning based on the contributions of bilingual programs. Besides, there is an international call for developing more research in specific contexts—such as this one—that identify concrete barriers for migrants and offer solutions from community resources.

Third, while compensatory measures are useful, they can also contribute to the segregation of migrant students and create negative perceptions of them (Arroyo & Berzosa, 2018; Grau & Fernández 2016). To address this, it is crucial to prioritize adequate intercultural training for teachers (E3), but this is currently scarce and not mandatory. It is not only important in the Andalusian context, but also at the European level (Cebolla-Boado & Finotelli, 2023), to provide ongoing training on cultural competency. This will enable teachers to better support migrant students and develop more inclusive practices. To address this requirement, experts have recommended the implementation of experiential and active methodologies with a focus on fostering awareness and attitudes, rather than knowledge (Garrido et al., 2019; Sorensen et al., 2019).

Additionally, the mothers identified racism as one of the main problems of educational systems in Andalusia. This has been informed by many other studies globally (Alansari et al., 2020; Charbonneau et al., 2022; Cubero & Garrido, 2023; Priest et al., 2013), which warn that structural and daily racism affects students' educational development and their life experiences in the long term (Newman et al.2021). It is therefore imperative create safe spaces for migrant and racialized children and anti-racist practices for “improving attitudes towards immigrants in their host countries and making schools more welcoming of diversity” (OECD, 2023, p.217). A recent development in this field is the Strategic Framework for Citizenship and Inclusion against Racism and Xenophobia (2023-2027) by the Spanish government. Furthermore, an increasing number of good practices are being recognized, as evidenced by the Guide to Good Antiracist Practices in Andalusia (Bastante & Gómez, 2024). It identified the key elements of these

practices, including a focus on racialized people, acknowledgment of systemic racism, avoidance of assimilation, assurance of accessibility, and an intersectional approach.

Fourth, equity in participation (E4) was identified as the weakest policy dimension, which is aligned with other studies (Solano & Huddleston, 2020; Nusche, 2009). This presents a challenge at both the macro level—increasing citizen participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies—and the organizational level—increasing the participation of families in schools (Avci et al., 2023; Grau & Fernandez, 2016; OECD, 2018). In this way, stakeholders suggested alternative culturally sensitive participation mechanisms, such as intercultural encounters, beyond formal ones like A.M.P.A. In this vein, Avci et al. (2023) indicate that participation should be based on opportunities for contributing to the curriculum and school community (e.g., tutoring, parent support groups, school representation) and for building social networks between migrant and native families. Complementarily, it is needed to design multisectoral interventions aimed at combating segregation in host communities and ensuring migrant rights to sociopolitical participation. Participation remains a significant challenge in most European societies (Solano & Huddleston, 2020), particularly in the South (Cebolla-Boado & Finotell, 2023).

Lastly, although the dimension about development of partnerships and opportunities (E5) is well scored, as highlighted in some previous reports (CES, 2019). Nonetheless, stakeholders insist that the actions taken are insufficient and these should be strengthened to develop multilevel and multisectoral actions (Cebolla-Boado & Finotelli, 2023). In this way, digital technologies represent interesting tools for offering flexible virtual spaces for intercultural exchange and learning (Fernandez & Rodriguez, 2016).

These can help to overcome spatial, temporal and language barriers, by promoting capacity building and the engagement of all stakeholders in decision-making regarding education.

Finally, in order to facilitate future research, we would like to conclude by noting the principal contributions and limitations of this study. Mainly, we adapt MIPEx tool to examine educational equity at the sub-national level. It offers a more detailed and complex understanding of local realities, resulting in insights that are more relevant and actionable. It reveals gaps in policy implementation, highlights the diverse community challenges and addresses the root causes of inequities. For example, after studying a highly diverse urban area, it would be valuable to explore policy implementation in less diverse communities and examine urban-rural discrepancies. Moreover, this approach provides granular data that reveals the unique needs of underserved groups and disparities within regions, allowing for comparative analyses and cross-regional learning about best practices. To achieve progress, it is crucial to strike a balance between contextual adaptation with standardized indicators to facilitate comparisons at national and international level.

Furthermore, our study employs a mixed-methods approach and encourages the participation of key stakeholders—including professionals and families—to facilitate more accurate, collaborative, and effective diagnosis and policymaking processes. Future research should continue to consider the integration of information from different sources and how the translation of research results into actionable community-oriented initiatives. Besides, more research on integrating outcomes from policy, practice and its impact are needed, specially from longitudinal approaches.

It is important to consider the limitations of the study. Firstly, the selection of policies and participants was purposive, and therefore they cannot be considered

representative. Secondly, the interviews and focus groups did not use social desirability controls, which could have led to biases such as overestimation of strengths. Thirdly, this study encountered numerous difficulties derived from COVID-19, particularly delays in conducting the interviews, which may have influenced the results. Ultimately, despite the attempt to use intersectional approaches, our evaluation focused only on cultural and ethnic diversity, particularly on migrant students, without a comprehensive examination of its diversity. Therefore, future research should integrate broader intersectional factors, such as socioeconomic status, gender or sexuality.

Hence, much progress remains to be made in the study of equity in educational policies, with a particular focus on its concrete translation in contexts with a high migrant presence, such as European borders. It is also suggested that mixed and transformative methodologies be used, aimed not only at research but also at action. Research that leads to real improvements in the integration of students and their families, and thus to better coexistence and social welfare in host societies.

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