



## Society for Research in Child Development

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European Association for Research on Adolescence

### MISSION STATEMENT

#### **POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF IMMIGRANT YOUTH: WHY BOTHER?**

**Formulated in Hydra, Greece,**

**Experts' Meeting on Immigrant Youth Adaptation and Well-being**

**September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

The meeting was funded by and organized<sup>1</sup> on behalf of the

**Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD)**

**(International Affairs & Racial and Ethnic Issues Committees)**

in collaboration with the

**European Association for Developmental Psychology (EADP)**

and the

**European Association for Research on Adolescence (EARA)**

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<sup>1</sup> The meeting was organized, on behalf of SRCD, EADP and EARA, by Frosso Motti-Stefanidi, Athens University, Greece and by Radosveta Dimitrova, Stockholm University, Sweden.

**Mission statement working group<sup>2</sup>** (presented in alphabetical order):

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**All members of the experts' meeting adopted the mission statement, including**  
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Amina Abubakar Ali, *Lancaster University, UK*

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**Positive Development of Immigrant Youth: Why Bother?**

It is in the best interest of Europe and other receiving countries to have successful adaptations among their immigrant populations. The current refugee influx renders this a particularly timely and pressing issue. However, the successful adaptation of immigrants to new lands is also all the more important in light of increasing life expectancies and decreasing birth rates in receiving societies. As a result, for example, nonimmigrant senior citizens' retirement pensions partly depend on the economic contribution of immigrants. In this context, immigrants are expected to become in the next decades an important force in the economies of receiving societies and also to contribute to the care and support of the aging nonimmigrant, as well as immigrant, populations (Hernandez, 2012). International research suggests that well-

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informed policies and practices are necessary for the successful incorporation of immigrants into new societies.

This evidence shows that:

- Children's positive adaptations and well being provide the foundation for healthy and productive adult lives (Motti-Stefanidi, Berry, Chrysochoou, Sam, & Phinney, 2012; UNICEF, 2013). Investing in childcare, education, and health-related prevention and intervention programs comes with multiple economic and social returns, including more labor participation and reduction of crime (Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Lundberg & Wuermli, 2012). For some host societies without such programs, immigrant youths' well-being and educational prospects may deteriorate as they age and acculturate to their new environments (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2012).
- Providing immigrant families with economic opportunities and reducing barriers to obtain adequate employment equips parents to raise well-adjusted and productive citizens (Stoessel, Titzmann, & Silbereisen, 2011). It has been shown that immigrants in many countries pay more in taxes over their life course than they receive from the social benefits (Dustmann & Frattini, 2013). Without economic opportunities, citizenship documentation, or a clear path to citizenship, children and families suffer in their health and well-being (Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suarez-Orozco, 2011).
- Policies toward immigrants are important for the successful adaptation of immigrant youth (Filindra, Blanding, & Garcia Coll, 2011). However, countries differ in their policies toward immigrants (Helbling, 2013; Huddleston, Niessen, Chaoimh, & White, 2011). Immigrant youth do better in countries with more integration oriented policies; assimilation policies can be counter-productive (Yağmur & Van de Vijver, 2012).
- Immigrant youth adopting the host cultures and languages while also maintaining the heritage culture and language, do better and contribute more to society than youth who learn only one language or cultural orientation (Suarez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, & Marks, 2015; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013).
- Discrimination, racism and exclusion have deleterious effects for positive youth development (Marks, Ejesi, McCullough, & Garcia Coll, 2015) and social cohesion, and are risk factors for radicalization (Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014). In contrast, feelings of belonging and being accepted by the receiving society, strengthen youths' ties to the host society (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006; Motti-Stefanidi, Pavlopoulos, Obradović, & Masten, 2008).

We therefore recommend that policies and practices in receiving countries concerning immigrants should:

- **Be informed** by research and interventions that have been shown to have beneficial results.
- Promote **non-segregated, welcoming environments** and opportunities for intercultural communication and collaboration at all ages.
- Provide **economic opportunities** to ensure that immigrant families do well and contribute to the country.
- Provide **early childcare, education**, and health-related prevention and intervention programs to ensure that immigrant youth have the basis for successful integration.
- **Create public campaigns** that show the contribution of immigrants to the host countries as well as respect to the diversity and needs of various ethnic groups.
- **Incorporate these considerations** as part of choosing **where** to resettle refugees in addition to the availability of spaces.

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