Adjusting to new types of migrant pupils in France: the case of Bulgarian Roma and Syrian refugee children in urban versus rural contexts

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The study:

• Three schools in an urban neighborhood receiving many Bulgarian Roma children representing a relatively new and freely mobile intra-European economic migration (2013). (Ethnographic study)

• Schools in six small to medium rural towns each welcoming one resettled family of Syrian refugees since 2016. (Interviews and group discussions)
Illustrating the contrast:

• An elementary school « submerged » by Bulgarians: 5 migrant students per class with limited resources and a lack of help from local authorities.

• A small town prepares for over a year to welcome one resettled Syrian family with 5 children: a political and humanitarian commitment supported by the municipality.
Several issues:

• How do different perceptions of newcomers influence expectations for educational inclusion?
• What are the effects of local contexts on the types of support provided to children?
• How do institutional and non-institutional actors collaborate to welcome these children in school?
Two types of newcomers: Syrians and Bulgarian Roma

- Economic migrants versus vulnerable refugees
- Spontaneous chain migration versus hyper-selected refugees
- The « the adoptee » versus the « hot potatoe »
- Rural versus urban context
- Dispersion, isolation and dependency versus concentration, collective identity and mobility
The similarities:

- Linguistic and cultural obstacles to communication
- Children previously unschooled
- Experiences of residential insecurity
- Gender norms viewed as different from the host society
Perceptions:

• With the Bulgarians: « We just can’t make it work »: a losing battle

• With the Syrians: « We must make it work »: a mission
Practices:

- Syrians in rural schools: a host of mobilized actors but few special provisions. Integration as a collective project in a context of full immersion.
- Bulgarian Roma in urban schools: a series of specialized actors and facilities which adds to the existing concentration.
Conclusion:

- An effective system of immersion with non-institutionalized support and collaboration but which places high demands on the Syrian children.

- Specialization and segregation as a «comfortable» solution which places low demands on Bulgarian pupils and teachers.