



Mentoring migrant children and youth, regardless of residence status

GUIDANCE FROM THE CITY INITIATIVE ON MIGRANTS WITH
IRREGULAR STATUS IN EUROPE (C-MISE), HIGHLIGHTING
THE NIGHTINGALE PROJECTS IN GIRONA AND BARCELONA

Òscar Prieto-Flores, University of Girona

Jordi Feu, University of Girona

Key Points

- Migrant children and youth mentored by university students
- Municipality led; managed by university or NGO in partnership with schools
- Mentoring benefits mentors as well as mentees
- Projects in Girona and Barcelona illustrate what can be achieved

Background

In recent years, the political and social instability in many countries, and the rise of the far right and populism— in its various forms—make it more complex to address one of the most important challenges we have: for all children to be able to realise their full potential. Some commentators hinder this when the image they portray of certain migrant children and their families seeking a better life in a new context is, rather, demonising and stigmatising. However, the number of social movements and institutions which have concerns about the need to act for the social inclusion of newcomers is also worthy to note.

In the current situation, municipalities have to provide responses to the increasing number of migrant children and youth within their territory, including some with precarious immigration status. For example, in Spain, the number of families falling into irregularity has tripled in the last five years.¹ This situation has mostly been conditioned by the high rate of rejection in renewing residence permits or of asylum-seeking applications of the Spanish administration before and during the pandemic.

Bearing that context in mind, we have seen in recent years how local administrations and NGOs have innovated and developed actions to protect migrant children and youth welfare with due respect to their status and being sensitive to their actual life circumstances when delivering some services.

How mentoring can contribute – what it aims to achieve

Mentoring is one of the most common practices in providing informal support to migrant children and youth that involves local residents to achieve aims such as language acquisition, to avoid school drop-out, finding a job, etc.² Recent research³ has shown how mentoring can be critical not only in the first years upon arrival in helping them to learn the language faster and create broader and more diverse networks of friends in school, and develop a sense of belonging to the city they live in. It also benefits children and youth of more established families that acquire an irregular status in providing them with socio-emotional support and social capital as well as capacities for social belonging. These benefits are connected with school engagement and achievement as well as with children and youth wellbeing and belonging.⁴

Although the aim is to work in the best interest of the children and youth, mentoring programmes also have benefits for the mentors, contributing to social cohesion at the local level. Mentors learn how to put into practice empathy, openness, providing support without falling into paternalism or ‘white saviorism’, and intercultural sensitivity. Most of them tend to develop increased intercultural sensitivity toward a greater ethno-relativist worldview and are more aware of their privilege.⁵

Also, as mentors know the reality of recently arrived migrant children and youth, most of them become advocates in shifting public opinion that is hostile to migrants through the conversations they have with their families and friends.⁶

Two different models for municipalities – work with universities (Nightingale Girona) or with NGO partners (Nightingale Barcelona)

The Nightingale project has its origins in 1997 in Malmö (Sweden) and has been recognised as a successful initiative for vulnerable migrants in Europe.⁷ The Nightingale model has been developed in dozens of cities across Europe.⁸

1 Save the Children España (2021). Crecer sin papeles in España. Report retrieved from: https://www.savethechildren.es/sites/default/files/2021-02/Crecer_sin_papeles_en_Espana_SC_PC.pdf

2 Preston, J.M., Prieto-Flores, Ò. and Rhodes, J.E. (2019). Mentoring in Context: A Comparative Study of Youth Mentoring Programs in the United States and Continental Europe. *Youth & Society*. Vol 51(7). <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0044118X18813700>

3 Principales resultados de la investigación Recercaixa *Applying Mentoring* (2021). <http://mentoringapp.udg.edu/es/resultados/>; Feu, J (2015). How an intervention project contributes to social inclusion of adolescents and young people of foreign origin. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 52, 144–149

4 Suárez-Orozco C, Rhodes J.E., and Milburn M. (2009). Unraveling the Immigrant Paradox: Academic Engagement and Disengagement Among Recently Arrived Immigrant Youth. *Youth & Society*. Vol 41 (2). <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0044118X09333647>

5 Prieto-Flores, Ò., Feu, J. and Casademont, X. (2016). Assessing Intercultural Competence as a Result of Internationalization at Home Efforts: A Case Study from the Nightingale Mentoring Program. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 20(5), 437–453. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1028315316662977>

6 Alarcón, X., Casademont, X., Lendzhova, V. and Erdogan, E. (2021). Inclusive Settlement of Young Asylum Seekers in a Rural Region: The Role of Informal Support and Mentoring. *Sustainability*. 2021, 13, 5132. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13095132>

7 <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/latest/practices/mentoring-an-investment-for-s.htm>

8 For more information on where the programme is carried out: <https://nightingalementoring.mau.se/the-members/>

It is a community-based mentoring programme that fosters relationships of trust between university students and migrant children with the goal of promoting their positive development, a sense of belonging to their new context, language acquisition and educational expectations of migrant and refugee children. The meetings, which are held weekly, take place outside school hours and last approximately three hours in which the mentor accompanies the minor in acquiring necessary basic elements, such as language and educational guidance throughout the school year. These mentoring relationships also aim to expand mentees' social support networks outside the school by organising activities with other mentees who are in the same situation in order to help them to discover the cultural and leisure activities that the new environment offers.

The adaptations of the Nightingale scheme in Girona (2006 -) and Barcelona (2010 -) followed different organizational patterns from the Swedish model and took the Catalan name for Nightingale (Rossinyol Girona and Rossinyol Barcelona). Whereas the Nightingale in Sweden connects one university with one municipality (i.e. Malmö University with Malmö municipality and its schools), in Girona, the University manages a network of twelve cities and their respective schools (150 pairs in total). In Barcelona, it is an NGO (Fundació Servei Solidari) managing the programme and connecting different universities in Barcelona city with the municipality (60 pairs in total).

What does the municipality take responsibility for in Girona and Barcelona?

There are two ways for a municipality to carry out the programme with different partners taking on the duties and responsibilities.

In the case of Girona, the municipality meets twice or three times a year with the university to evaluate how the programme is working, share information about the schools and particular cases. Besides these meetings, staff from the municipality are in close contact with schools in order to carry out the selection of the mentees and supervise how the programme is being developed from the mentees' perspective. In the case of Barcelona, the municipality meets once a year with the NGO, although contact by phone or e-mail may be frequent and it is the NGO that carries out the supervision working together with participating schools.

Below, the responsibilities of main participating agents in the programme are described. Both models work well but show differences in the implications for municipalities' staff members, as can be seen.

Distribution of responsibilities in the Nightingale mentoring program

Tasks	Institutional responsibility	
	Girona	Barcelona
Informing and engage schools to develop the programme	Municipality	Municipality
Contacting teachers to agree selection criteria (mentees)	University	NGO
Contacting families and selecting children (mentees)	Schools	Schools
Recruiting, selecting and training university students	University	NGO
Accreditation of the service in ECTS credits*	University	University
Organization of the Welcome & Farewell party at the City Hall	Municipality	-
Organisation of Welcome & Farewell party in the neighbourhood	-	NGO
Supervision of the mentors	University	NGO
Supervision of the mentees and communication with parents	Schools	Schools
Reporting and financing	University	NGO
Annual Progress and financial reports	University	NGO

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Note: * ECTS= European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

How are mentees and mentors selected, trained and supervised?

Each municipality discusses and decides which schools or high schools are invited to participate in the programme. In general, municipalities select specific schools that offer the programme according to their municipal strategic plan. The programme is not offered to all migrant children due to the difficulty of finding enough university student volunteers. Thus, the criteria for selecting the mentees are the following:

- They have arrived recently but are able to communicate enough in Catalan language to start a mentor-mentee relationship.
- They lack relationships with adults in their new environment.
- They would be the first generation in their family to have access to university.
- They do not require the intervention of a professional rather than a volunteer.

Then, primary and secondary school teachers are those in charge of selecting migrant children or youth who will be offered mentoring and discuss their participation with their parents as well as with them.

With regard to the selection of the mentors, given that the protection of young people is critical, this includes a criminal record check through the Ministry of the Interior, an interview or questionnaire in some cases; and, if selected, an intensive **training course of about ten hours** is provided. The training sessions include antiracism, adolescent migrant development, how mentors can develop strategies to foster the aims of the programme in the meetings, as well as the collection and exchange of previous mentoring experiences so that the participants are aware of the challenges involved.

The monitoring process of the mentoring relationship is carried out using a mobile application through which mentors describe the meetings and the feelings they have had, on a weekly basis. University staff in Girona and NGO staff in Barcelona carry out the supervision of these posts students submit after their meetings and are in contact with them to resolve incidences if it is necessary. In the case of the supervision on how the programme affects the mentees, municipality staff in the case of Girona and the NGO in the case of Barcelona are in contact with teachers. School teachers carry out a regular follow-up with children on how mentoring is going and report any incidents that may occur to the programme management.

The primary goal of the programme is to build a supportive friendly relationship that facilitates meaningful conversations. In return for being mentors, the volunteers receive one to four ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits, depending on whether the management of the programme is at the university or at the NGO. For example, in the case of Girona the training is recognized as an academic activity, students are taught by the university and have greater recognition than those programmes managed by an NGO. However, the number of hours of service carried out by the students is similar.

In Girona and Barcelona, those in mentoring relationships are encouraged to speak in Catalan, Basque or Spanish (depending on the language of instruction at school) if this is not an obstacle for communication or for establishing a close relationship. In the training sessions, mentors are recommended to be flexible bearing in mind that the first priority is the relationship. In some cases, if the mentee cannot speak one of these languages the scheme arranges a mentor who speaks their language, if available.

Once the mentors and mentees are selected, they are matched taking into consideration their gender, academic and personal interests. In Girona, municipality staff do a discussion group with university students before the start and match them with mentees in dialogue with teachers when needed.

Through the mentoring relationship, the programme helps to support greater social participation of the minors as it helps to create a safe space, to assist them to make use of social and community resources, such as public transport and the local library. This is especially beneficial for minors who lack confidence or those who feel alone, so that their mentoring relationship provides them with opportunities to reduce their isolation and be more sociable.

Mentors tend to be college students living in the same city or town as the mentees. They can be college students with or without a migrant background who want to contribute.

How does the programme engage and reassure parents?

At the beginning of each academic course, school and high school teachers create a list of potential participating children and youth and contact their parents to explain the aims of the programme. This communication is essential to make sure parents agree. They describe the aims of the programme and emphasize that they do not meet to do homework although mentors may help mentees with some academic tasks if they ask for that help. Once parents agree and their children are enrolled, they are invited to the Welcome ceremony that usually takes place at the **City Hall** where the matching is carried out. Most of the parents come to the ceremony because they want to meet and know the college student who is going to meet with their son or daughter. In that meeting, parents and mentors exchange mobile phone numbers to have frequent communication with them and for mentors to involve them in some specific activities.



Some quotes from qualitative research based on the Nightingale programme⁹

Mentees (migrant children and youth)

"The language was hard for me and I felt discriminated by my peers because we were going to the aula d'acollida [a segregated classroom in the school for EAL learners]. I was not relaxed or accepted; I could speak Spanish but because there is a lot of Dominican jargon they did not understand me. Afterwards, it was way easier. We were friends and hung out, speaking with confidence...since I was with her Catalan was not difficult anymore. Since then, the teacher noticed a big change in my Catalan and they brought me with the rest in the ordinary class."

Oswaldo, 12 years old

"I was like a blind person because I didn't recognize anything, and like a deaf person because I didn't understand the language; it was so different ... it was really hard. I had a terrible time the first two years. I had many conversations with my mentor and we walked around the city a lot. What helped me the most was her advice because I really didn't know what to do in the future."

Cheng, 13 years old

Mentors (university students)

"Nightingale has influenced me a lot; when you meet a boy from another culture it enriches you because it invites you to ask yourself things about his culture and your own, and then you relativize everything. You enrich yourself as a person, and you come away with a richer and more complex perspective."

Marc, 21 years old

"Look, I considered myself to be someone who is tolerant of others, receptive to people from other cultures, etc., but being a mentor made me realise that I had to be even more so, that there were things I had to turn around because unconsciously I acted with an air of superiority, as if I was always right."

Iolanda, 24 years old

⁹ Prieto-Flores, Ò., Feu, J., Casademont, X. (2016). Assessing Intercultural Competence as a Result of Internationalization at Home Efforts: A Case Study from the Nightingale Mentoring Program. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 20(5), 437–453. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1028315316662977>

Prieto, Ò., Casademont, X., Feu J. (2019). I Had Him in My Head Reminding Me to persist: The Role of Mentoring in Shaping Immigrant Youth Expectations. *Revista Ciències Socials Aplicades*, 8(2) 3-25. http://dx.doi.org/10.33115/udg_bib/pts.v8i2.22391

Key steps

- Select schools because they want to be engaged rather than because they comply with some requirements.
- Municipality staff, schools and teachers committed to the programme achieve better communication with parents and children
- Select two or three specific aims on which mentors can concentrate (e.g. language acquisition, educational expectations and getting to know the city), not too many.
- Train mentors to develop practical activities connected with those aims. Meetings should be balanced between these activities and getting to know each other, building trust and leisure activities.
- Always have staff available to answer questions and doubts from mentors (someone at the university or at the NGO), or from mentees and their parents (someone at the school or high school) to avoid premature closures.
- Consider the voices of potential participants and their families when analyzing whether their concerns are connected with the objectives of the programme.
- Focus more on the quality of the mentoring relationships rather than the quantity of mentor-mentee pairs (size of the programme).
- Mentoring is not a substitute for the welfare state's responsibilities. The informal support provided by mentors should be complementary to public provision and the formal support of educational and social professionals.

What level of resources is needed?

In the Girona and Barcelona cases, the costs associated per matched pair tend to be around 600€ per academic year including incidental expenses for mentors:

- a) 60% of the costs is spent on the salary of the project manager. In Spain, the ratio in Girona and Barcelona tends to be one person for managing 50 pairs. If the programme has fewer pairs, programme staff can be hired half-time or less.
- b) 30% of the costs is provided to mentors to cover expenses related to their meetings (transport, tickets for theatre, etc.). This is usually around €200 a year.
- c) 10% for other costs derived from the management of the programme.

Where to get further information

[Nightingale Mentoring Network](#)

[Rossinyol / Nightingale - University of Girona](#)

Further References

Jessen, J.T., Gundersen, T. & Hynek, K.A. (2018). *Evaluering av Nattergalen - en oppfølgingsstudie*. Oslo: Nova Institute. Rapport NR 2/18. Available here (in Norwegian): <https://nightingalementoring.mau.se/files/2019/10/Web-utgave-NOVA-Rapport-2-18-Evaluering-Nattergalen-1.pdf>

Prieto-Flores, Ò. and Feu, J. (Ed) (2020). *Mentoring children and young people for social inclusion: Global approaches to empowerment*. London: Routledge.

Sild-Lönroth, C. (2007). *The Nightingale scheme. A song for the heart*. Malmö University. Available here: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1410452/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Ramon Sanahuja, Nina Oepkes and Emmy Chater for their very helpful comments on the draft text of this guidance.

CITY INITIATIVE ON MIGRANTS WITH IRREGULAR STATUS IN EUROPE (C-MISE)

The City Initiative on Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe (C-MISE) is a knowledge-exchange programme supporting European cities in sharing knowledge on city practices and policies responding to the presence of irregular migrants in their territory. C-MISE is facilitated by researchers at the Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity at COMPAS, University of Oxford, is chaired by the City of Utrecht, and partners with the Eurocities Working Group on Migration and Integration. It is informed by extensive research carried out at COMPAS before and during the project, on national, regional and municipal policy and practice in this field. This guidance has been produced under the auspices of C-MISE, following a discussion led by one of the authors at a C-MISE meeting hosted by the City of Amsterdam in 2021. This does not necessarily signify the approval of any individual city for each aspect of the guidance.

www.cmise.web.ox.ac.uk

THE GLOBAL EXCHANGE ON MIGRATION AND DIVERSITY

The Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity is an ambitious initiative at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), University of Oxford, opening up opportunities for knowledge exchange and longer term collaboration between those working in the migration field.

www.compas.ox.ac.uk/global-exchange

ABOUT

This briefing was written by Òscar Prieto-Flores, (University of Girona) and Jordi Feu (University of Girona)

CONTACT

For more information contact

Òscar Prieto-Flores: oscar.prieto@udg.edu