The right to education is a basic right endorsed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and the Refugee Convention of 1951. At the same time, UNHCR’s Global Strategic Priorities recognise that access to free primary education remains elusive for many refugee and asylum-seeking children. In 2007, out of 2.6 million refugee children at school-age globally, only an estimated 67 per cent were enrolled in primary and secondary schools, leaving a third (around 900,000 children) without access to education. According to UNHCR policy documents, even when access to education is secured, the educational integration of children is marred by obstacles such as extra fees, language barriers and lack of training for teaching personnel. At the same time, special attention needs to be given to refugee children from vulnerable groups, and educational programs need to take into account their specific needs.

The EU has provided the basic legal foundation for granting access to education of these children under Council Directive 2004/83/EC, yet further progress is needed in identifying and disseminating practical initiatives. Indeed, the performance of migrant pupils of the same origin varies between countries with similar patterns of migration, which suggests that educational policies, the structure of the educational system, and the interaction of stakeholders can have a significant impact on RASC educational attainment. For instance, a NESSE Analytical report found that the extent to which migrant vs. native students’ achievements are related to social origin greatly depends on the national context, with migrant students’ attainment being comparatively high in countries with a well developed system of preschool education and late selection of students to different ability tracks.

Clearly, EU Member States have varying levels of success with and experience of accepting and integrating refugees in their societies. Old Member States are traditional destinations for refugees and host the

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1 UNHCR, Draft Global Strategic Priorities, April 2009, p. 13.
3 Ibid., p. 19.
7 Heckman, F. (2008), NESSE Analytical Report 1 for EC DG Education and Culture, Education and the Integration of Migrants: Challenges for European Education Systems Arising from Immigration and Strategies for the Successful Integration of Migrant Children in European Schools and Societies.
largest share of such populations in Europe, while the New Member States of Central and Eastern Europe have only recently started experiencing greater migration pressures on their territory than they are accustomed to; according to UNHCR, 20,000 refugees enter the EU via CEE each year. While Old Member States have experimented with various integration programs in the field of education, housing and employment, New Member States have yet to develop effective policy responses.

Indeed, a variety of EC-funded projects and initiatives have sought to promote and showcase best practices in the educational integration of immigrant and refugee and asylum-seeking children. Examples include projects led by the Pharos Foundation aiming to identify good practices in mental health and social care for refugee children at school and transfer those to other countries; the 2001 – 2004 CHICAM project aiming to identify the potential of new media technologies to promote social inclusion at schools, with the specific needs of migrant/refugee children taken into account. Another EC-funded project – EMILIE – reviewed the educational challenges posed by cultural diversity and migration in several EU Members States, yet just as with previous initiatives those were mostly Western European countries.

It is important to note that integration policies and initiatives in the field of education rarely target refugee and asylum-seeking children specifically, and instead the latter are subsumed under the category of “newcomer” or “immigrant” children. This is the case with the handbook entitled Educating immigrant children, in which refugee and asylum-seeking children are not the main focus of attention. Moreover, while this publication reviews policies, practices and initiatives in a comparative manner and in a wide array of countries, it has a thematic focus rather than review the situation and/or initiatives in individual countries. On the other hand, the OECD itself has recently produced high quality country reports on migrant education, yet again those are limited to just a limited number of OECD members in Western Europe, and refugee and asylum-seeking children are again rarely the focus of discussion.

Having identified the gap in relevant initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe and building on the experience of the project partners in promoting the rights of vulnerable groups, the INTEGRACE project team has aimed to identify and assess best practices in developing educational
integration programs in all EU Member States. The project team has sought to build upon many of the previous initiatives in this field, in which a number of INTEGRACE experts and partners have in fact taken part. The project’s review of best practices in the integration of refugee minors at school has encompassed an unprecedented number of MSs, which has also enabled the project team to generalise regarding overall developments in policy in practice in the EU and regarding the types of policies may work under various conditions, or at least to develop a methodology for testing whether and under what conditions a specific good practice may be transposed into new environments or other countries. The CSD-proposed methodology for “mirror” evaluations and impact assessments consisted of first conducting program evaluations of already implemented best practices in Western European countries, and then conducting mirror social impact assessments of their possible implementation in two Eastern European countries (Slovenia and Bulgaria). The goal of this methodology is to identify, on the one hand, the key factors that have led to the success of a best practice in one environment, and on the other, features that may need to be modified in order to make the practice more easily transferrable to new environments.

Another innovative feature of the INTEGRACE project relates to the cooperation, with respect to the integration of refugee children, of NGOs, universities and experts from Western Europe with non-governmental organisations and researchers from Eastern Europe. In this manner, the experience of Western partners in researching and promoting policies aiming to integrate refugee children was imparted to their CEE counterparts, thus improving the coordination between Member States and consolidating the approach for addressing common issues with respect to the social integration of refugees, and quality of EU initiatives aimed at refugee children specifically. The Handbook Integrating Refugee and Asylum-seeking Children in the Educational Systems of EU Member States will thus hopefully be a stepping stone towards improvements in two main areas of EU policy making – the consolidation and standardisation of norms and policies concerning child protection and education, and the further development and improved implementation of the common EU asylum policy in Central and Eastern Europe as well as throughout the Union.

The large number of countries where project research was conducted made it possible to generalise about common themes, typologies, developments and challenges in the integration of refugee and asylum-seeking children in Europe. This is the main focus of the comparative country report by Professor Anna Krasteva, Member of the Project Advisory Board and one of Bulgaria’s leading experts on migration research. Chapter I of the Handbook also contains the reports for all countries where the project team conducted research, and which are the subject of Professor Krasteva’s comparative analysis.

Out of consideration for the environment, given the rather large volume of the Handbook, the paper edition only contains select country reports and evaluation/social impact assessment reports, while the rest are
contained on a CD included with the hard copy. An electronic version is freely available for download on the web sites of all project partners, both as a single volume and as a collection of individual reports. The paper edition contains all country reports prepared by the project partners, followed by select country reports; the attempt was made for those select reports to be as representative as possible of Europe various regions.

The country reports, while retaining the characteristic style of the respective author(s), have followed a standard format in presenting each country’s key migration-related issues, policies (including as they relate to migrant/refugee education), and progress in or experience with integrating minors of refugee background. The reports’ main focus is on showcasing successful best practices in the educational integration of refugee and asylum-seeking children in each country, or, where those are lacking, in presenting an overview of the status quo. In all cases, attempts have been made to suggest areas for improvement. A detailed outline of the structure of the country reports and various methodological considerations are contained within the Methodological guidelines for good practices identification (Appendix 1). Notably, the guidelines contain an extensive discussion of what sort of policies, procedures, practices and initiatives were considered to constitute good or best practices for the purposes of the INTEGRACE project. They also contain suggestions for desktop as well as primary research, i.e. interviewing stakeholders, conducting field visits, etc. It is hoped that these guidelines would continue to inform future research in the field by the project team as well as others.

Having reviewed, discussed and analysed numerous good practices, the project team was very cognisant of the fact that what may be a successful initiative in one environment may not be suitable or practicable under different circumstances, or at least that either the practice itself or those circumstances may need to be modified. This is of course no novel observation, yet the specific contribution of the INTEGRACE project was to successfully test a methodology for making such conditionalities explicit via primary as well as secondary research techniques. Perhaps for the first time in the history of social science, the techniques of program evaluation and social impact assessment were used to first assess the degree to which a good practice has been successful and the key factors for that success, and then to assess the conditions under which the transposition of the same best practice could be achieved successfully in a new environment. Chapter II of the Handbook starts with a comparative evaluation and impact assessment report which provides a summary and analysis of the INTEGRACE evaluation and SIA exercises. The chapter also contains three evaluations of best practices in RASC educational integration from three Western European Member States (Austria, Italy and Sweden), and two impact assessments of their transposition into new environments in two Eastern European countries (namely, Slovenia and Bulgaria).  

14 Chapter II only contains the evaluation of the Italian good practice and the impact assessment of its transfer to Bulgaria in the paper version, while the other evaluation/SIA reports are included in the CD.
and impact assessments, including guidelines on stakeholder identification and primary research (i.e. interviews) is presented in Appendix 2.

Finally, the CD attached to the paper edition of the Handbook contains standardised outlines of select best practices in most of the countries where best practices were identified and described. The format of these “inventory tables”, as the project team termed them, facilitates the identification of the main features of the good practices, as well as comparison. The project team hopes that they too can aid future research in the field of RASC educational integration by forming a sort of mental map and basic point of reference in the comparative analysis of best practices.