

Schools at a Crossroads: Integration of Migrant Students in Belize

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Education Division
Social Sector

TECHNICAL
NOTE N°
IDB-TN-02045

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November, 2020

Cataloging-in-Publication data provided by the
Inter-American Development Bank
Felipe Herrera Library

Schools at a crossroads: integration of migrant students in Belize / Emma Näslund-Hadley, Alison Elías, Eduardo Café, Haydee Alonzo.

p. cm. — (IDB Technical Note ; 2045)

Includes bibliographic references.

1. Children of migrant laborers-Education-Belize. 2. Immigrants-Belize-Social conditions. 3. Central Americans-Belize-Social conditions. 4. Belize-Emigration and immigration-Social aspects. 5. Central America-Emigration and immigration-Social aspects. I. Näslund-Hadley, Emma. II. Elías, Alison. III. Café, Eduardo. IV. Alonzo, Haydee. V. Inter-American Development Bank. Education Division. VI. Series. IDB-TN-2045

Jel Codes: I24, I28, J15, O15

Keywords: Central American Migration, Education, Belize

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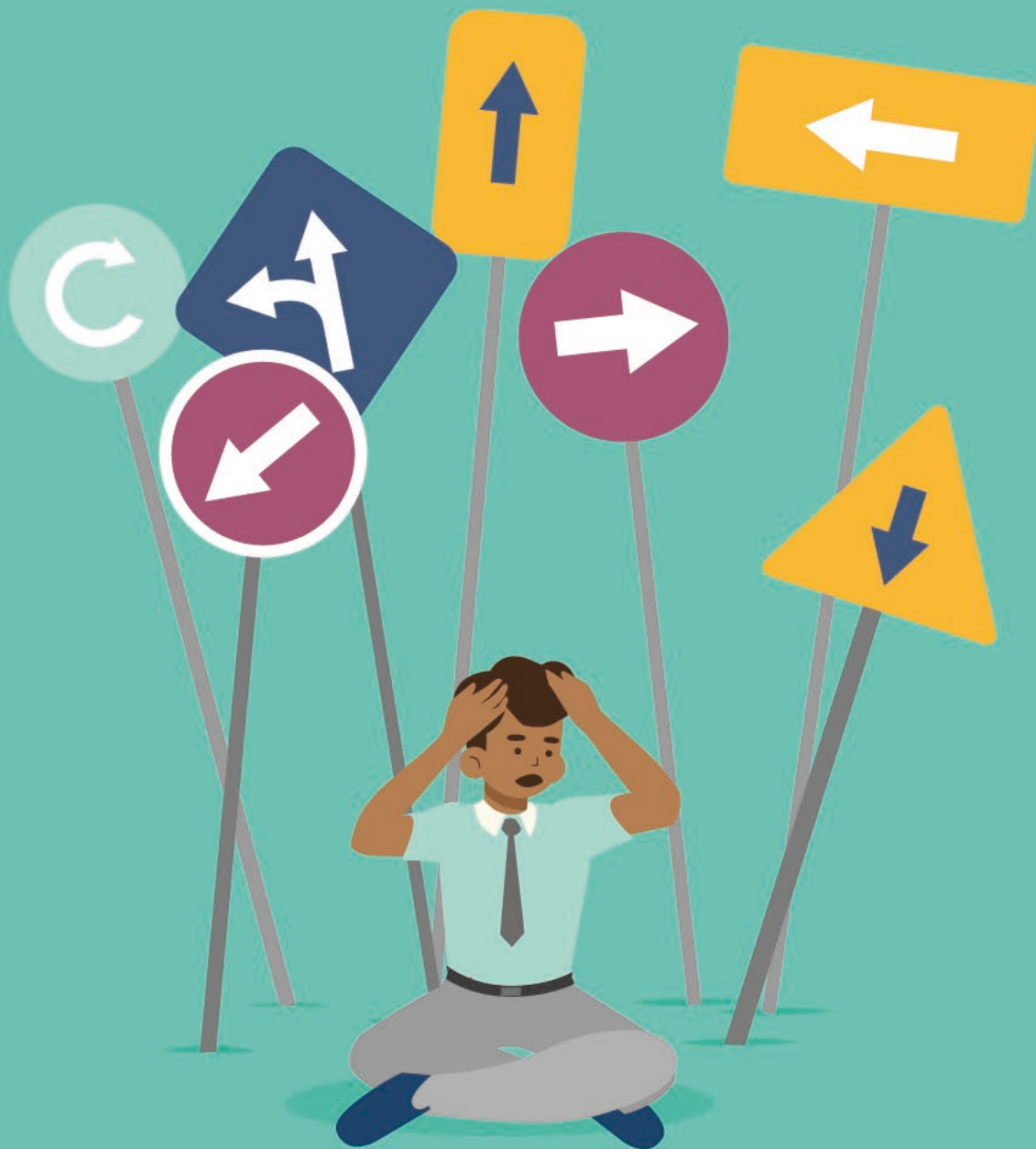
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Emma Näslund-Hadley, Alison Elías, Eduardo Café & Haydee Alonzo

Contents

Preface.....	5
1. In Search of Education Policy Responses to the Migration Crisis.....	7
2. Methodology and Sample Characteristics.....	9
3. Education Challenges and Opportunities	14
4. Belizean Family Attitudes Toward Migrants.....	39
5. Other Challenges Faced by Migrants	42
6. Recommendations	48
References	53
Tabular Annex.....	56

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: The average migrant and native family (%)

Figure 2.2: Migrant Households have a lower socioeconomic status than native households (%)

Figure 2.3: The average migrant child (%)

Figure 2.4: The average school characteristics

Figure 3.1: School efforts to integrate migrant students

Figure 3.2: Curriculum includes intercultural education, but other support is limited

Figure 3.3: Language barriers hamper integration of migrant students

Figure 3.4: Teacher bilingual education training helps integrate migrant students

Figure 3.5: Schools with English as a Second Language (ESL) have lower language barriers

Figure 3.6: Counseling services reduce conflict among students

Figure 3.7: School liaison officers may ease conflict between migrant and native students

Figure 3.8: Principals and schoolteachers need training on multicultural environments and integration

Figure 3.9: Principals and schoolteachers call for better coordination with government agencies

Figure 3.10: Migrant children have lower attendance rates than their native peers

Figure 3.11: Education level of caregivers has a stronger effect on school attendance among migrants

Figure 3.12: Caregiver employment status is more strongly associated with school attendance among migrant children

Figure 3.13: Migrant school-aged children who struggle with the English language are less likely to attend school

Figure 3.14: Migrant children suffer from socio-emotional challenges, affecting their learning and integration

Figure 3.15: Migrant children from El Salvador are less likely to attend school than their Guatemalan counterparts

Figure 3.16: Legal documentation is positively linked to school attendance of migrant children

Figure 3.17: Migrant students are outperformed by native students

Figure 3.18: Migrant children who left their countries due to violence have lower academic performance

Figure 3.19: Migrant and native boys outperform girls in Mathematics at the primary level

Figure 3.20: Migrant students tend to drop out and repeat grades at a higher rate than their native peers

Figure 3.21: Migrant students drop out of school due to financial constraints and a lack of parental support and motivation

Figure 4.1: Native caregivers have both positive and negative perceptions towards migrants

Figure 4.2: The higher the education level of non-migrant caregivers the higher they value migrant students

Figure 4.3: The higher the caregivers' education level, the more migrant friends a native child will have

Figure 5.1: Many migrants lack access to a balanced and nutritious diet

Figure 5.2: Migrants need adequate food, shelter, education, and identity documents to improve their living conditions

Figure 5.3: The lower the caregivers level of schooling, the more unmet basic needs migrant households have

Figure 5.4: Some migrants lack access to humanitarian assistance

Figure 6.1. Recommendations for a path forward for school-based integration of migrant students

List of Tables:

Table 6.1: Integration strategies for multicultural learning environments

Table A1: Estimating the probability of sending all children to school (using probit regression models)

Table A2: Estimating the effects on school performance of migrant students (using ordinary least squares regression models)

Table A3: Estimating the probability of migrant children having challenges (using probit regression models)

Table A.4: Estimating the probability that Belizean caregivers feel that migrant students have a positive effect on the school environment and the probability of Belizean children having migrant friends (using probit regression models)

Preface

Human migration, or the movement of people from one region to another, is as old as the origins of humankind. Families traveled great distances in search of better opportunities, safety, and even to secure their survival. A global phenomenon for millennia, migration continues to this day, as people respond to changing conditions at home, in the region, or worldwide. People have migrated to Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) for centuries. It is not a new phenomenon. And over the past decades many countries in the region have experienced massive movements as people flee economic, social, political, environmental or security disturbances. Migration has consolidated as a complex phenomenon in LAC, presenting multiple patterns and distinct migration corridors, several of which are long-standing.

Most recently, the economic and social crisis in Venezuela has generated an unprecedented migratory flow in the region, and one of the largest globally. All these migrants sought better lives in nearby countries, where they hoped to reestablish themselves in economic and personal safety. In recent years, countries across the LAC region have attracted millions of migrants because of their promising social and economic prospects.

The region's recent political and socioeconomic crises mean that more neighboring countries are being called on to open their doors. Over the past decades, Belize has welcomed Central Americans looking for opportunities to improve their lives. A small country, populated by fewer than half a million individuals, Belize has a thriving population of people both emigrating from and immigrating to the nation. In welcoming new arrivals, Belizeans believe that the successful integration of migrants rests on a strong educational experience, yielding a more vibrant country. But effective integration can occur only when policy makers recognize the challenges and needs faced by migrants and their host communities.

This study on Belize forms part of the Inter-American Development Bank's (IDB) Migration Action Framework addressing migration from a development perspective. This framework seeks to identify interventions that accommodate migrants in an orderly and inclusive manner so they become a constructive force for local development. Drawing on data about 50 percent of Belize's school-age migrant children, this paper identifies challenges and opportunities in the integration of migrant schoolchildren into their communities.

The IDB aims to support Belize (and its other recipient countries) through highly targeted loan and grant investments. These are used to support migrants and their host communities in priority sectors to secure better access to health, education, housing, employment opportunities, and other social services. This backing is especially meaningful now, as hard-hit communities address the complex process of national integration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, the IDB is partnering with the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, and Culture (MoEYSC) to invest in school communities that have large migrant populations. Resources include

investments in intensive English-language instruction, teacher training, and socio-emotional support services. We hope this study will be used as a springboard for the policy makers in the Belizean education sector.

Felipe Muñoz Gómez

Migration Unit Chief

Inter-American Development Bank

1. In Search of Education Policy Responses to the Migration Crisis

Throughout their shared regional history, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have welcomed migrants both from the region and elsewhere in the world. Many communities extended their welcome with generosity, receiving families fleeing from violence and economic hardship. Recent numbers confirm what we all know: staggering numbers of migrants are inundating recipient countries. Estimates from 2020 show that 5.5 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees are living outside their homeland (R4V 2020). Migration flows from Nicaragua and the Northern Triangle—Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—have complicated the development challenges for host countries, including Belize.

Belize, the only English-speaking nation in Central America, is both country of origin and host nation for its displaced neighbors, and is one of three main countries accepting migrants from the subregion (OIM 2013). In recent decades, nearly 50,000 non-Belizeans (approximately 14 percent of the country's present population) relocated to this small nation (UN 2019). Belize has the largest number of migrants per native population in the region (OIM 2016). While migrants, on the one hand, make huge contributions to a country's labor market, economic growth, and public finance (OECD/ILO 2018), they have on the other hand created great challenges for the government of Belize. Temporary, permanent, regular, and irregular migrants all require the government's attention, and the education sector is no exception. School communities are vital for acculturating migrants and making full use of their human potential for the good of the nation.

Few social services are more important to children than education, and states are mandated to provide education to all children without discrimination (IOM 2019). All children in LAC have a universal right to an education, and every country (with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago)¹ provides education to children regardless of their legal status. Migrant children, however, face several practical barriers. For instance, migrants who fled under difficult circumstances may not have the official identification papers they need in order to enroll their children in local schools. Also, migrant children may not speak the local language, and their schooling may have been interrupted. These basic realities can impair the educational progress of schoolchildren, especially if they are placed in the wrong grade level or deprived of instruction that can help them catch up to their peers. Additionally, a family's lack of knowledge of the host country's education system might curtail a child's access to high-quality programs or schools. These deprivations are particularly serious for students in the final years of primary education and in secondary education, as they need to bridge the language and subject-matter gaps quickly and earn a degree before aging out of the system (Ahad and Benton 2018). These tasks become even more fraught during crises like natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic we currently face:

¹ Trinidad and Tobago does not provide education to migrant or refugee children who cannot prove their legal status in the country (Selee and Bolter 2020).

resources dry up and the provision of services becomes more difficult. Migrants and displaced populations become even more vulnerable.

We see huge variations in performances between immigrant and native students across countries, regardless of socioeconomic background and country of origin. These variations suggest that policy can play an important role in addressing imbalances (OECD 2019). A school system can respond to immigration in ways that have a tremendous influence on the economic and social development of its recipient communities. When children are supported in developing personal resilience, learning the language and culture, and in assimilating in general, their learning and outcome indicators improve and grade repetition and dropout rates decline (OECD 2003; OECD 2019).

Public policy and public services require data in order to design effective and welcoming multicultural learning environments. Based on approximately a thousand in-depth interviews conducted with migrant and native families, as well as with principals and teachers, this study, ***Schools at a Crossroads: Integration of Migrant Students in Belize***, highlights the challenges, fears, and hopes of migrant students and their families as they assimilate into the Belizean educational system.

The manner in which countries receive migrant children underpins both academic achievement and their civic success so they can thrive as community members. So, this study incorporates the views of native Belizean families as well. Based on these findings, this study suggests policy responses that can ease the ways in which new families connect with their Belizean school communities so all students can grow in academic and social ways. As with all countries, Belize is developing policy responses so its schools and education systems—national, regional, and community—can develop a culture of inclusion that advances the country’s productivity and living standards. The government of Belize continually demonstrates its determination to improve the academic resilience of its immigrant students. The IDB stands poised to support the Belizean government’s policy adaptations to this end.

2. Methodology and Sample Characteristics

This study seeks to identify the key characteristics and tasks faced by migrant primary-school students, their families, and Belizean school communities with the goal of answering the following questions: What administrative policies support migrant students? What are the attitudes of caregivers, teachers, and school directors toward migrant children? Most important, how do these youngsters fit into the Belizean educational system?

2.1 Sample structure

The Labor Force Survey (LFS) (SIB 2018) contains data on levels of education, employment, work hours, and some information on both migrant and native households. It contains little detailed data, however, on migrant students, their schools, and their teachers. In the absence of public records from which to extract a sample, this study focuses on the geographic areas that, according to the LFS, host the highest concentrations of nonnative Belizeans—namely, the Cayo and Belize districts, home to more than half of Belize’s migrant population, in addition to the Toledo and Stann Creek districts, where approximately a third of this group has settled (SIB 2018).

The study takes a twofold approach in identifying migrant households by randomly sampling 45 school communities in four districts. Twenty-five percent of these schools provided the coordinates for the immigrant parents on their rosters. It then took a “snowball sample,” asking these households to encourage their migrant-peer neighbors to provide the same information. This additional canvassing amplified the sample so the study was able to capture 435 households with 979 school-aged children, representing nearly 50 percent of an estimated 2,000 migrant primary-school-age children residing in Belize (SIB 2018). For comparative purposes, the survey conducted a similar random sample of native families within the same communities, sampling 449 households with 1,118 primary-school-age children. The survey took place between October 2019 and January 2020.

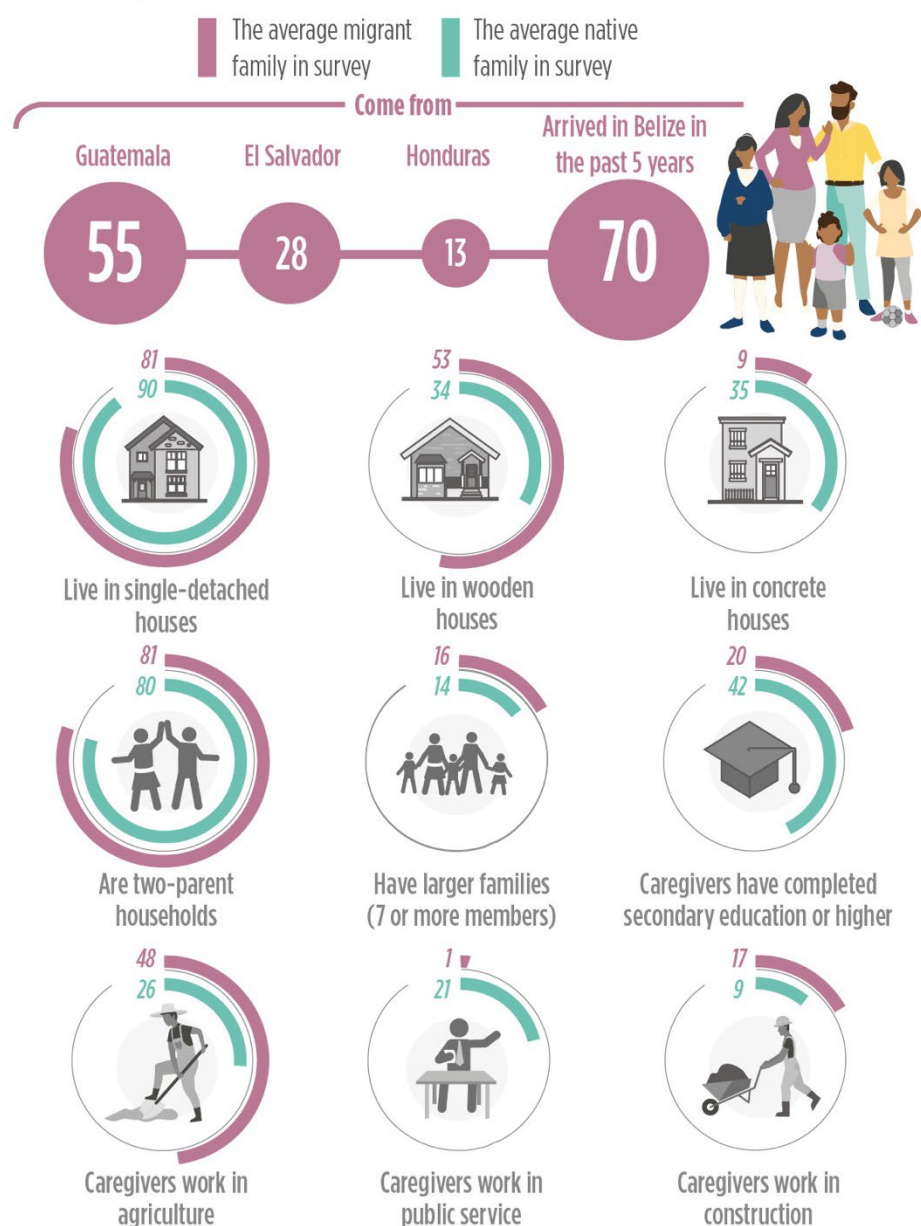
2.2 Sample profile

As shown in figure 2.1, most newcomers’ households enter Belize from neighboring Central American countries—namely, Guatemala (55 percent), El Salvador (28 percent), and Honduras (13 percent). Over 70 percent of these families reached Belize within the previous five years, and around 8 percent arrived within just the past year.

The data reveals that, compared with native families, many migrant families are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and their education levels are lower. One in every five migrant caregivers attended secondary schools or higher, compared with two in every five native Belizean caregivers. Employment differs markedly between the two groups of households. Higher proportions of migrant caregivers work in construction and agriculture; very few work in

government. The lower socioeconomic status of migrant households is reflected in their housing. More migrant families live in wooden rather than concrete dwellings (53 percent vs. 9 percent). Additionally, most migrant families had four to five members, but a slightly larger group had seven or more family members.

Figure 2.1: The average migrant and native family (%)



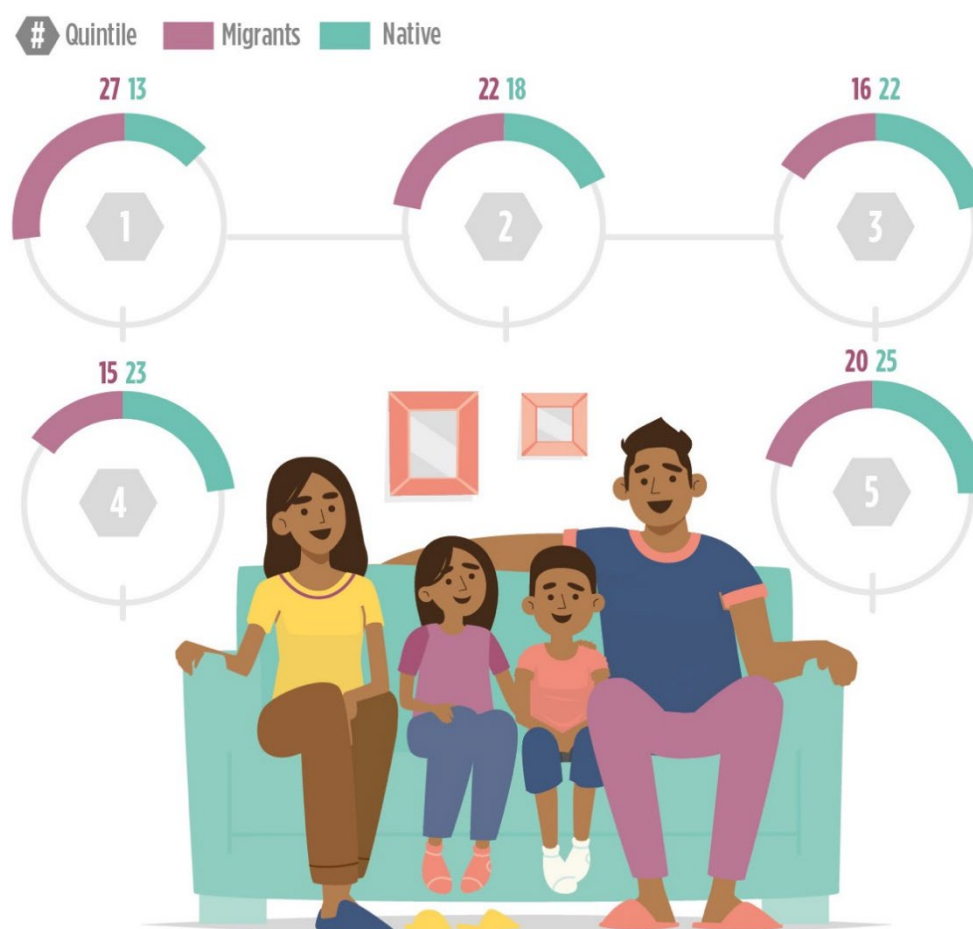
The average migrant family in the survey comes from Guatemala, arrived in Belize in the past 5 years, lives mainly in single-detached and wooden dwellings; few caregivers have completed secondary education or higher and are primarily employed in agriculture.

Source: IDB 2020.

The relatively lower socioeconomic status of migrant households in our sample, compared with their native counterparts, coincides with LFS data showing almost half the migrant families (46 percent) fall into the two poorest quintiles of the wealth index² (figure 2.2). Less than a third of native families share the same quintiles (30 percent).

Figure 2.2: Migrant Households have a lower socioeconomic status than native households

Households by wealth index quintile (%)



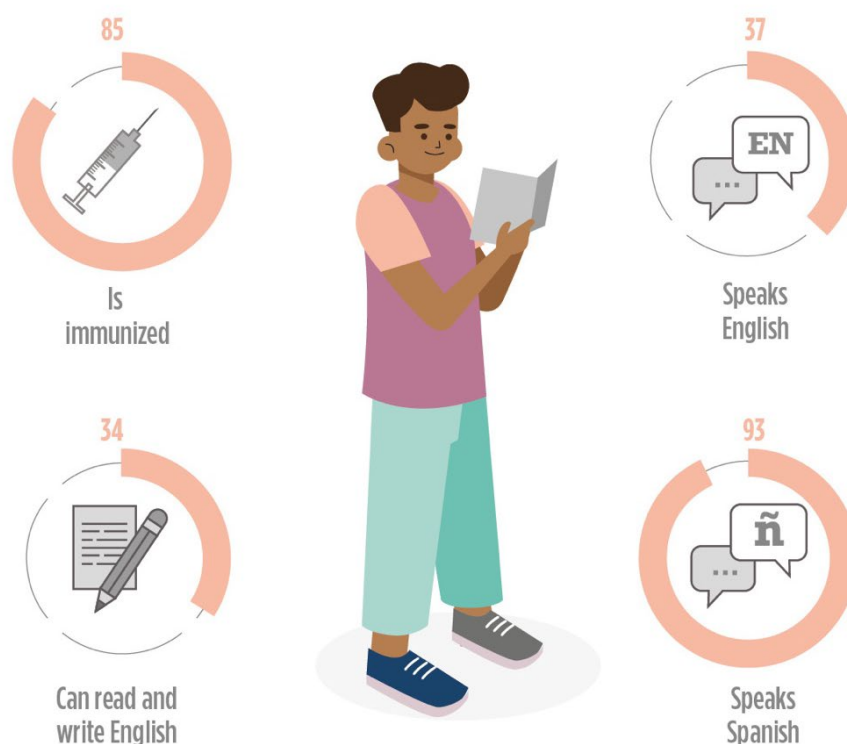
Source: IDB 2020.

The average migrant child in Belize is a native Spanish speaker; only a third are literate for their age (figure 2.3). Slightly more than a third speak English, but their literacy skills in the language are low. The proportion of children able to speak English increases the longer they live in the

² We constructed the wealth index based on LFS data on household characteristics, including appliances, electronics, plumbing, lighting, and construction materials: refrigerator, microwave oven, washing machine, clothes dryer, stove, radio or stereo, DVD player, television, cellular phone, computer or laptop, vehicle and air conditioner, as well as toilet facilities, type of lighting, type of fuel, source of water, source of drinking water, wall material, and floor material.

country. Of children who arrived more than five years ago, 60 percent speak English. Consistent with OECD data, 15-year-old students who arrived more than five years ago outperform more recently arrived peers in reading (OECD 2015).

Figure 2.3: The average migrant child



The average migrant child has been immunized, speaks Spanish, and is unlikely to read, write, or speak English.

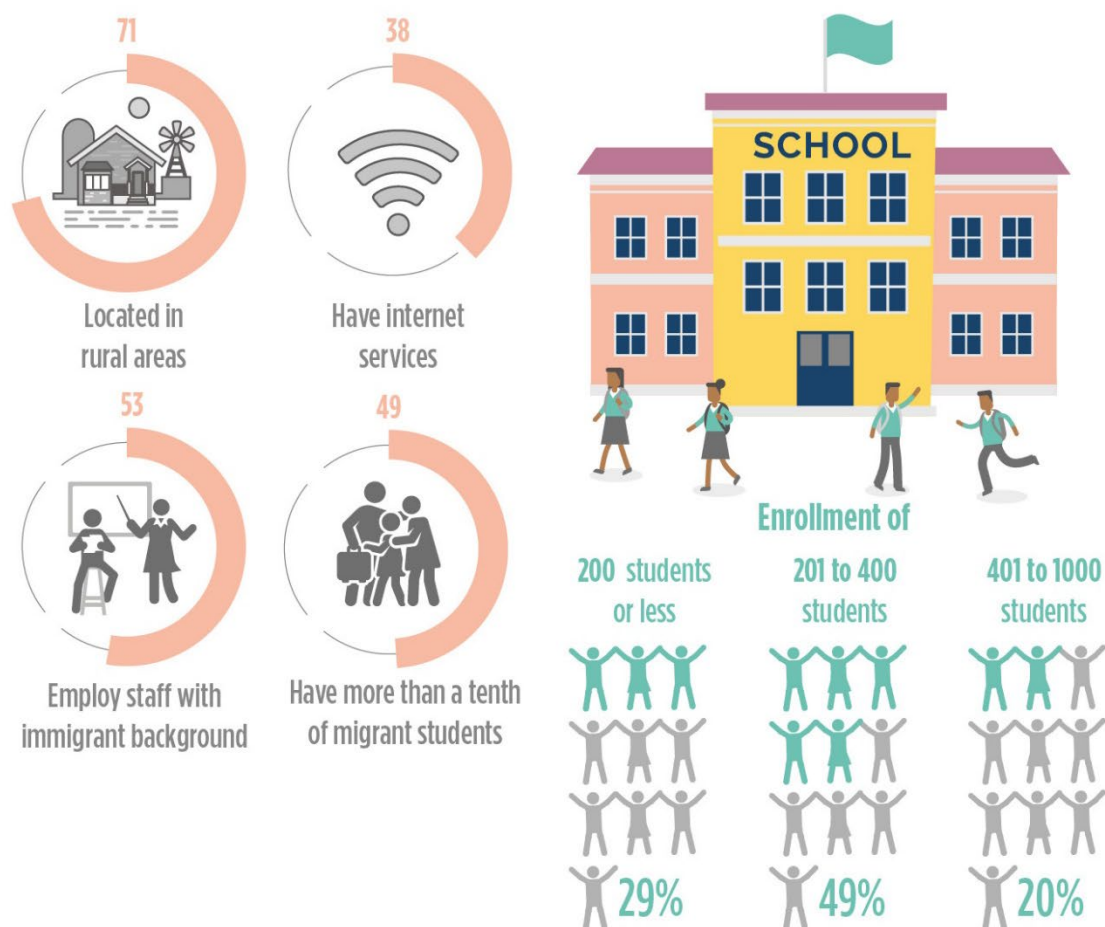
Source: IDB 2020.

2.3 Sampled Schools

Figure 2.4 shows the main characteristics of surveyed schools. Almost half the schools surveyed are medium sized, with 201 to 400 enrollees. Nearly a third are small, with 200 or fewer students; the remaining 20 percent are larger schools with between 401 and 1,000 pupils. Registration of migrant children averages 11 percent of total enrollment, ranging from 2 to 26 percent. Schools are located in communities with low levels of socioeconomic development, where access to internet and other services is limited. Just over a third of the schools in our sample could access internet service, which is well below 77 percent, the national average among Belizean primary schools (MoEYSC 2020). Moreover, over half the schools employ principals, teachers, and support staff who have an immigrant background.

Figure 2.4: The average school characteristics (%)

Characteristics of surveyed schools (%)



The average school surveyed is rural, has staff with immigrant backgrounds, and more than 10 percent enrolled migrant students.

Source: IDB 2020.

3. Education Challenges and Opportunities

In most countries, migrant students' sense of well-being falls far below that of the native born (OECD 2015). Many immigrant children face tremendous challenges at school. They might need to adjust quickly to a different learning environment with different academic expectations, learn in a new language, struggle to socialize with peers, and endure conflicting pressures from family, teachers, and classmates. Of those surveyed in the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), native students outperformed their first- and second-generation immigrant peers. This finding holds true across previous cycles of PISA, and gaps are magnified when immigrants live in poor neighborhoods and attend disadvantaged schools (OECD 2019).

In general, migrant students face challenges in integrating into their host country and face learning difficulties. Both enrollment and learning levels tend to be lower. In Europe, the school systems detect learning gaps between migrant and native groups by the end of primary education (Heckmann 2008).³ In this section, the study first analyzes the school-level policies whereby migrant students enter the Belizean system, followed by findings on accessibility of education and learning among the primary-school-age migrant population.

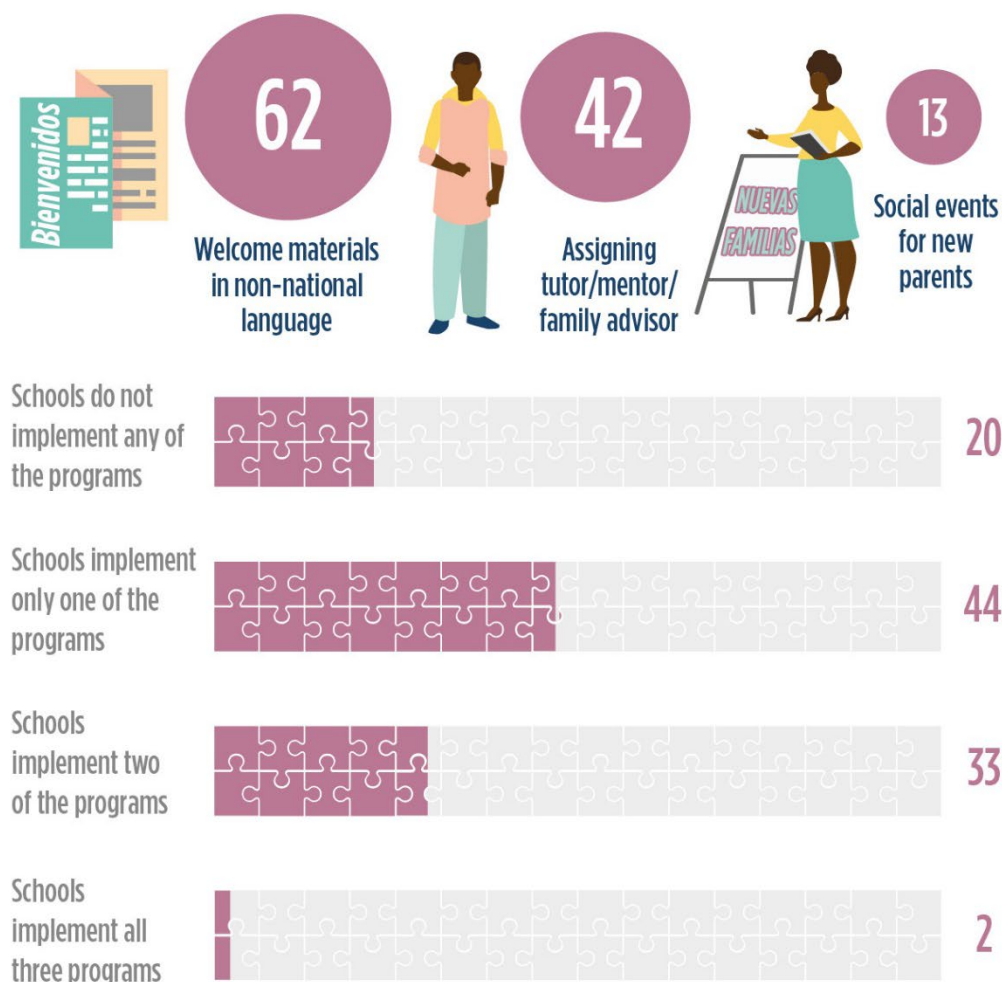
3.1 What current school-level policies support migrant students?

Designing education policies to address migrant students' needs is not easy, but it is key to overturn the barriers that usually make it difficult for migrant students to thrive at school. As education has become more universal, the main challenges occur not at the entry point but afterwards, as school systems and educators make decisions about assistance or programs to help immigrant students reach their full potential. In general, Belizean schools make efforts to facilitate the enrollment and integration of migrant students (figure 3.1). According to principals, four in every five Belizean schools provide at least one orientation or induction program for new arrivals and/or their parents, programs that encourage enrollment and integration. Since English is the primary language used in schools for instruction, 62 percent of Belizean schools distribute welcome packets in Spanish and other languages. About four schools in every ten assign a "welcome buddy" (a tutor or bilingual classroom assistant) to ease the transition. And only 2 percent of schools in the sample provide all three types of programs.

³ By the secondary level in OECD countries, the average difference in reading performance on the PISA exam favors native students by 41 points. The difference drops to 24 points when controlling for socioeconomic status (PISA 2018).

Figure 3.1: School efforts to integrate migrant students

Orientation programs provided to newly arrived migrant students and parents to facilitate enrollment and integration (%)



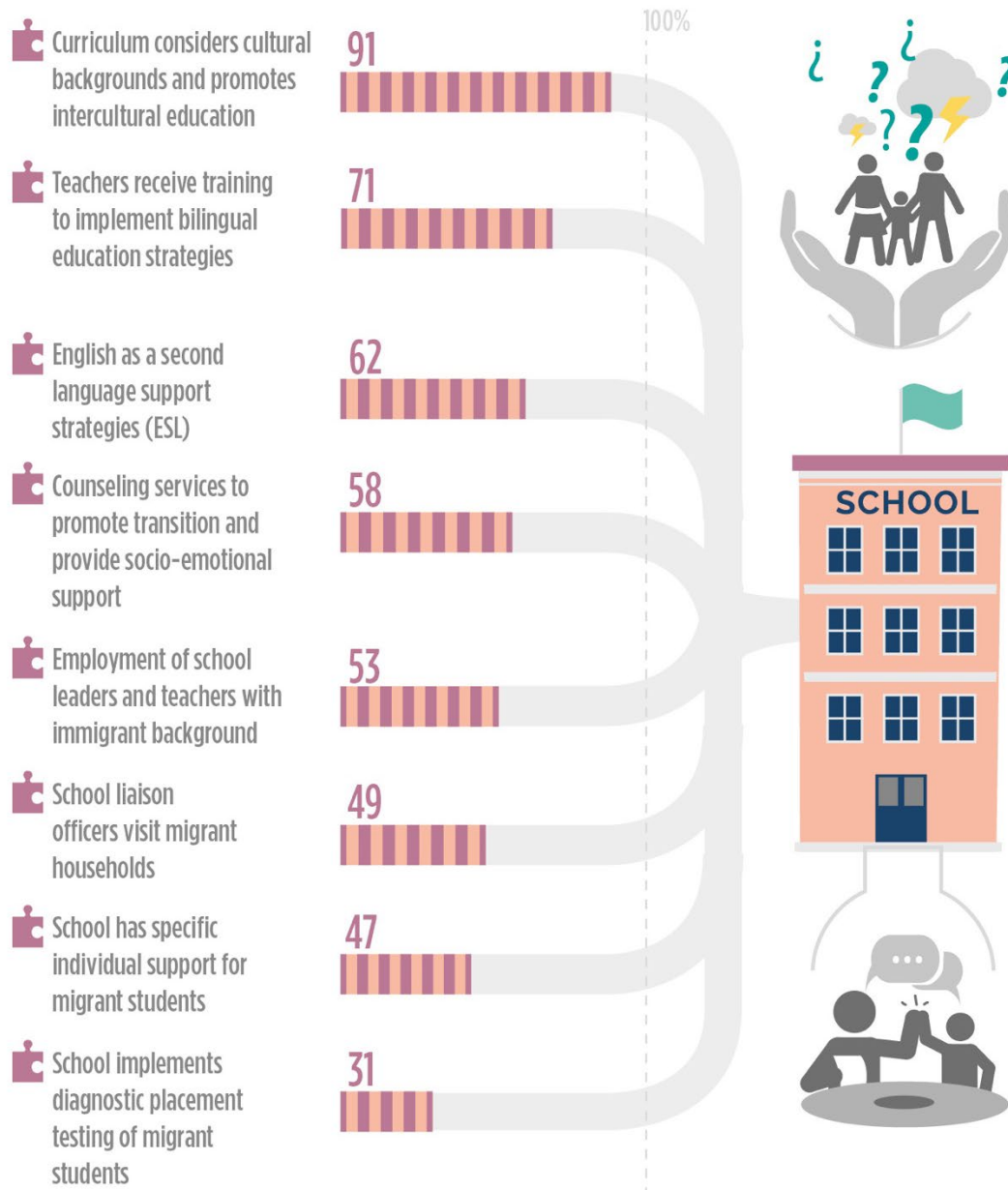
Source: IDB 2020.

In assessing possible policy responses, the study found four in particular were effective in schools receiving immigrant children. These policy responses are: (1) providing language support for migrant students with limited proficiency in the language of instruction; (2) building specialist knowledge for training teachers to tailor their instructional approaches for diverse and multicultural student populations who need support with second-language learning; (3) hiring more teachers with ethnic minority or immigrant backgrounds to reflect their multicultural student population and diversify the largely homogeneous native teacher workforce; and (4) providing guidance and extra support for parents, such as home visits, to encourage participation in school and educational activities, and specialized liaison staff to improve parent-school communications (OECD 2019).

In Belize, schools report offering several services to support integration (figure 3.2). For example, approximately 91 percent of schools design their curricula to promote intercultural education. Over two-thirds of principals report that their administrative staff and teachers are trained in bilingual education strategies and 62 percent implement English as a Second Language (ESL) in their schools. More than half the schools assign experienced instructors to teach in intercultural settings, and they hire administrators, teachers, and support staff with immigrant backgrounds. Also, nearly half the schools deploy liaison officers to vulnerable households. Yet schools fall short in implementing individualized support, and less than a third of the schools in the sample conduct academic screening. Unprepared children are, as a result, often placed in regular classrooms.

Figure 3.2: Curriculum includes intercultural education, but other support is limited

School policies in place to integrate the needs of migrant students (%)

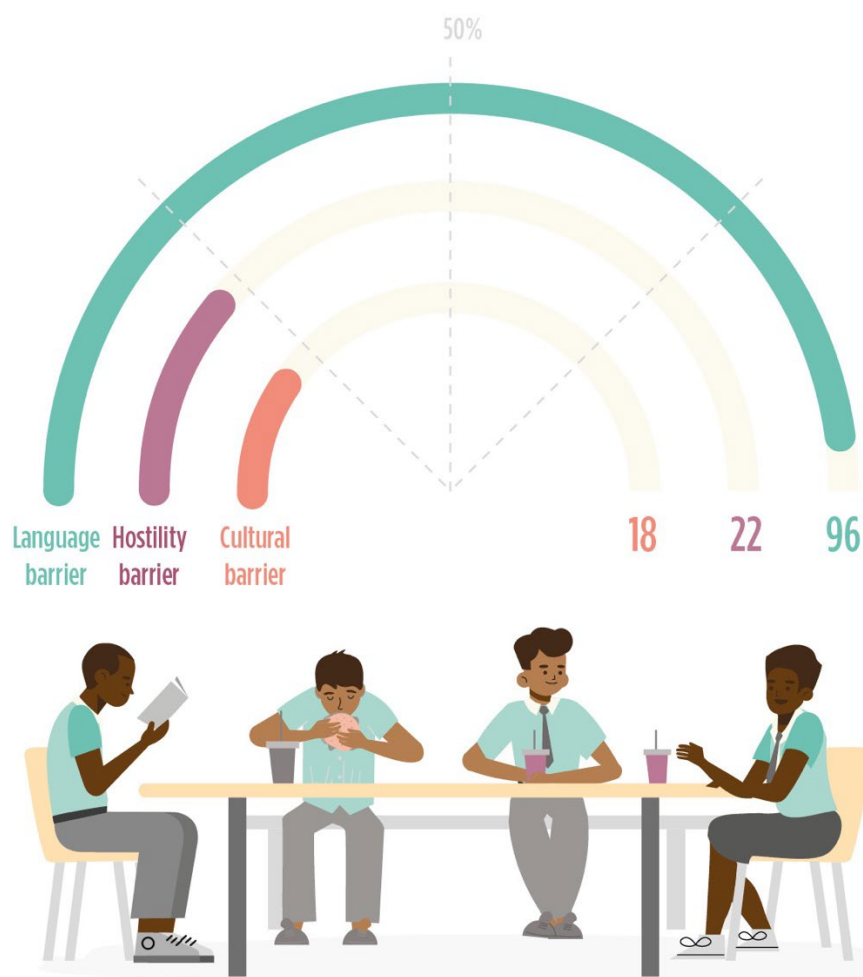


Source: IDB 2020.

Principals are quick to recognize that integration is hindered by language barriers in the classroom (figure 3.3). Communication barriers between native Belizeans and more recent arrivals are more common. Most migrant children (80 percent) who have arrived in Belize within the past five years struggle to learn English. More than half the children who arrived more than five years ago remain challenged by the language. One in five principals believe cultural barriers, beyond language, also preclude integration and create grounds for conflict.

Figure 3.3: Language barriers hamper integration of migrant students

Integration barriers between migrant and native students (%)

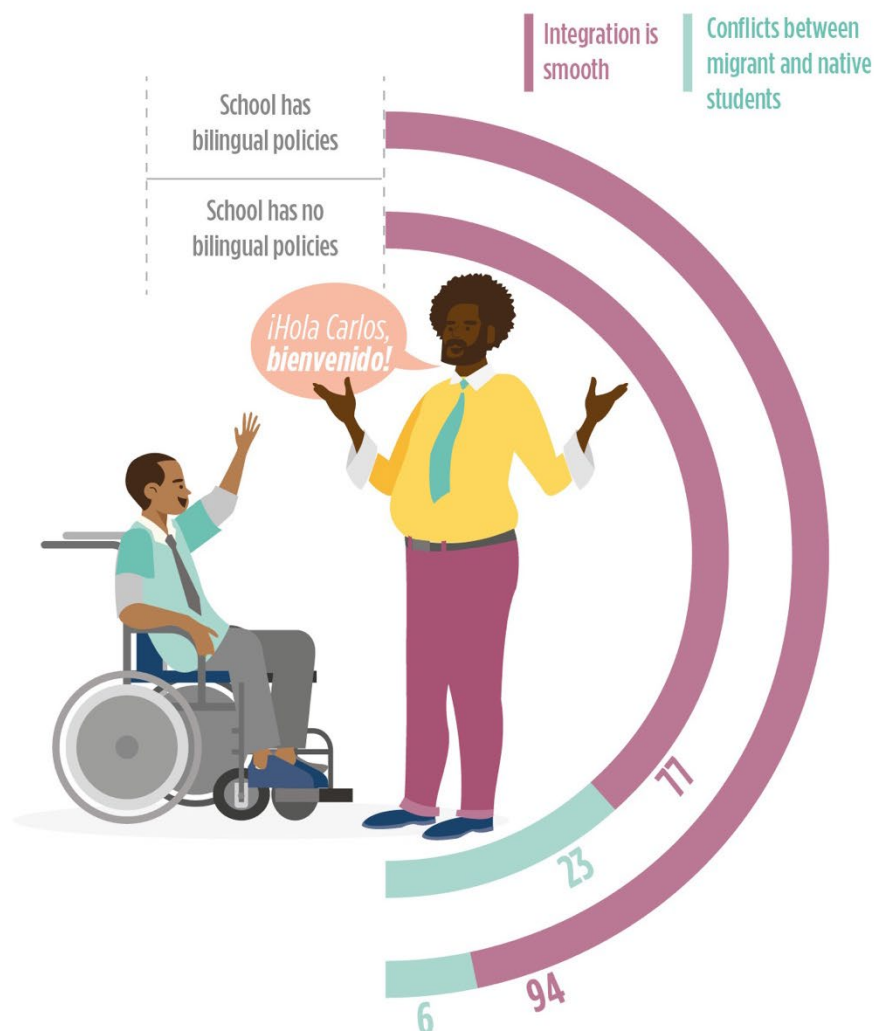


Source: IDB 2020.

Schools providing staff with some bilingual experience see smoother integration processes (figure 3.4). Among those schools with bilingual education strategies, only 6 percent report conflict among migrant and native students, far less than conflict seen in schools without bilingual policies (23 percent).

Figure 3.4: Teacher bilingual education training helps integrate migrant students

Smooth integration of students by whether the school implements bilingual policies (%)

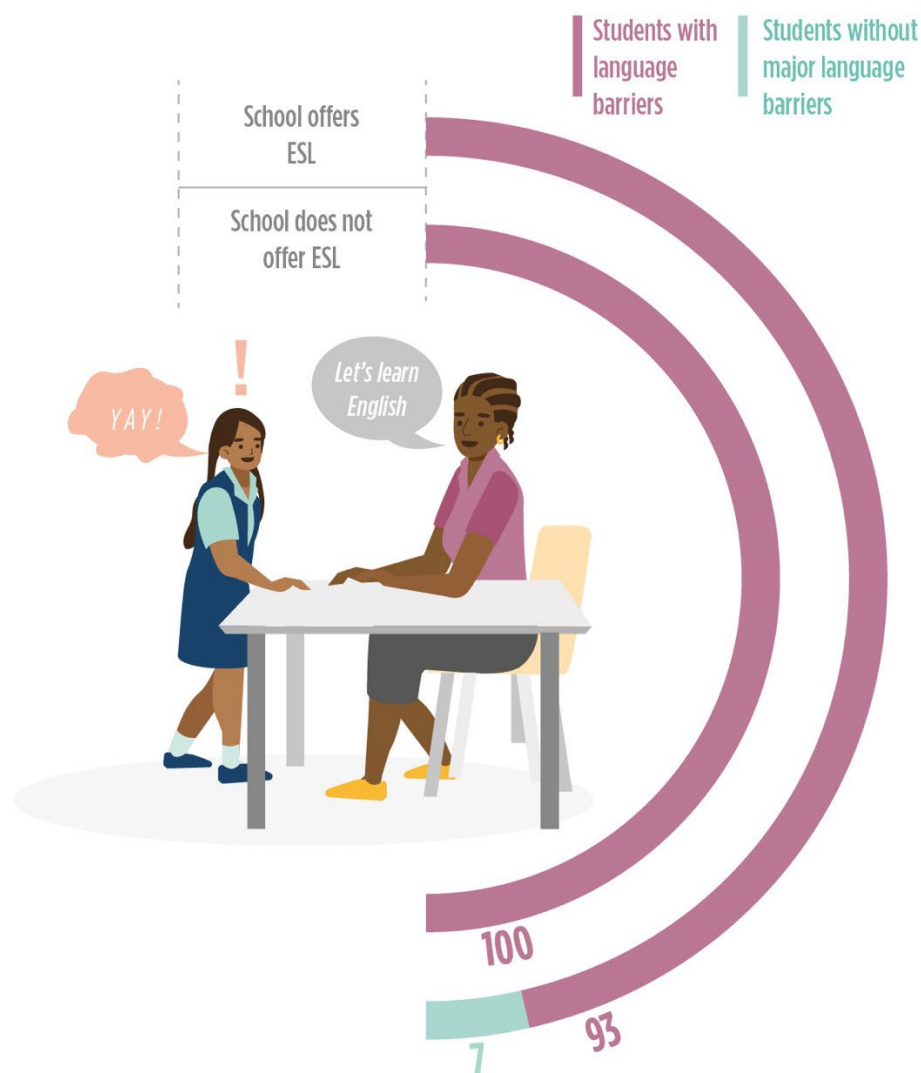


Source: IDB 2020.

Successful language-support programs offer sustained language training across all grade levels, centrally developed curricula, teachers trained in second-language instruction, and a focus on academic language that combines language with content learning (OECD 2019). Additionally, ensuring close cooperation between language teachers and classroom teachers is essential for success. Schools in Belize claim to implement both bilingual training of staff and ESL (figure 3.2). Almost all schools struggle, however, with language barriers (figure 3.3), and those without any ESL strategies observe more pronounced language-barrier issues between migrant and native students (figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: Schools with English as a Second Language (ESL) have lower language barriers

Language barriers between migrant and native students by whether the school implements English as a Second Language (ESL) (%)

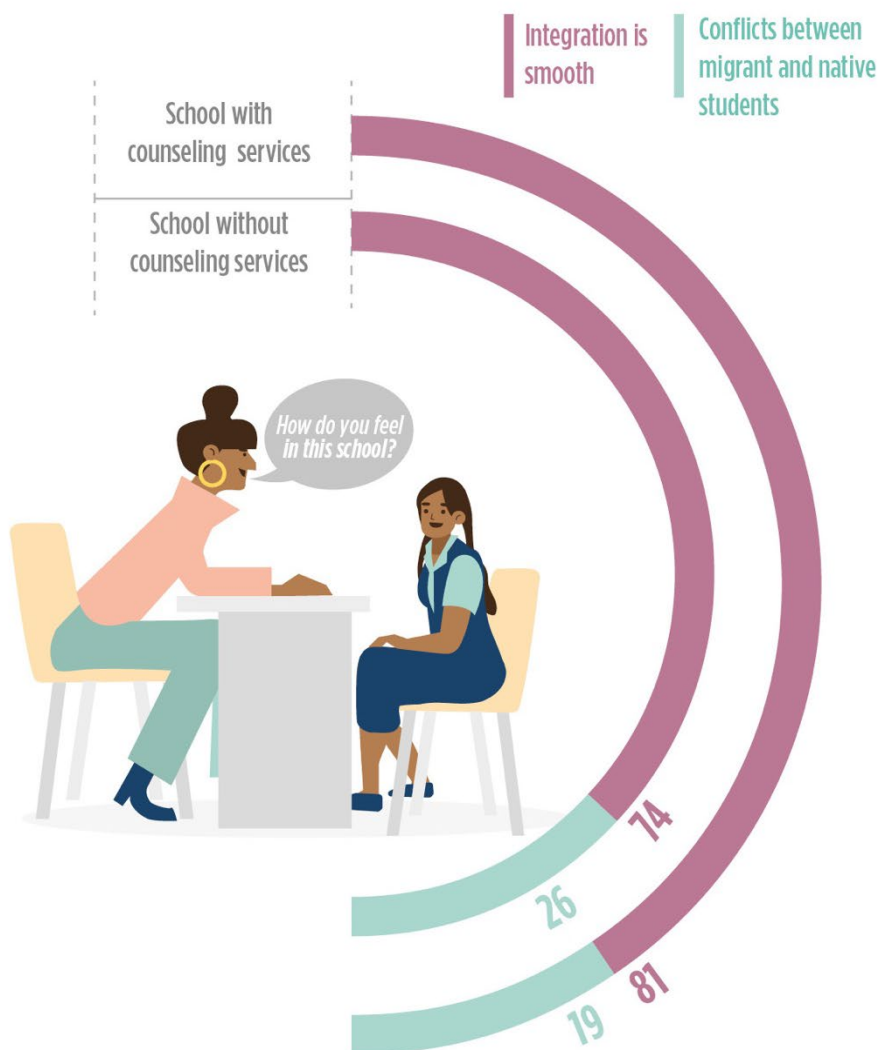


Source: IDB 2020.

In the schools that offer counseling services (58 percent; see figure 3.2), migrant students receive socio-emotional support and the school community is trained to help relieve intercultural pressures. Some schools develop their own intercultural education programs and assign experienced instructors to teach them. This support helps reduce the potential for conflict among students; schools without counseling services report higher incidences of antagonism. In schools without counseling services, 26 percent of principals report finding assimilation difficult, leading to heightened tensions (figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: Counseling services reduce conflict among students

Difficult integration of students by whether the school provides counseling services (%)

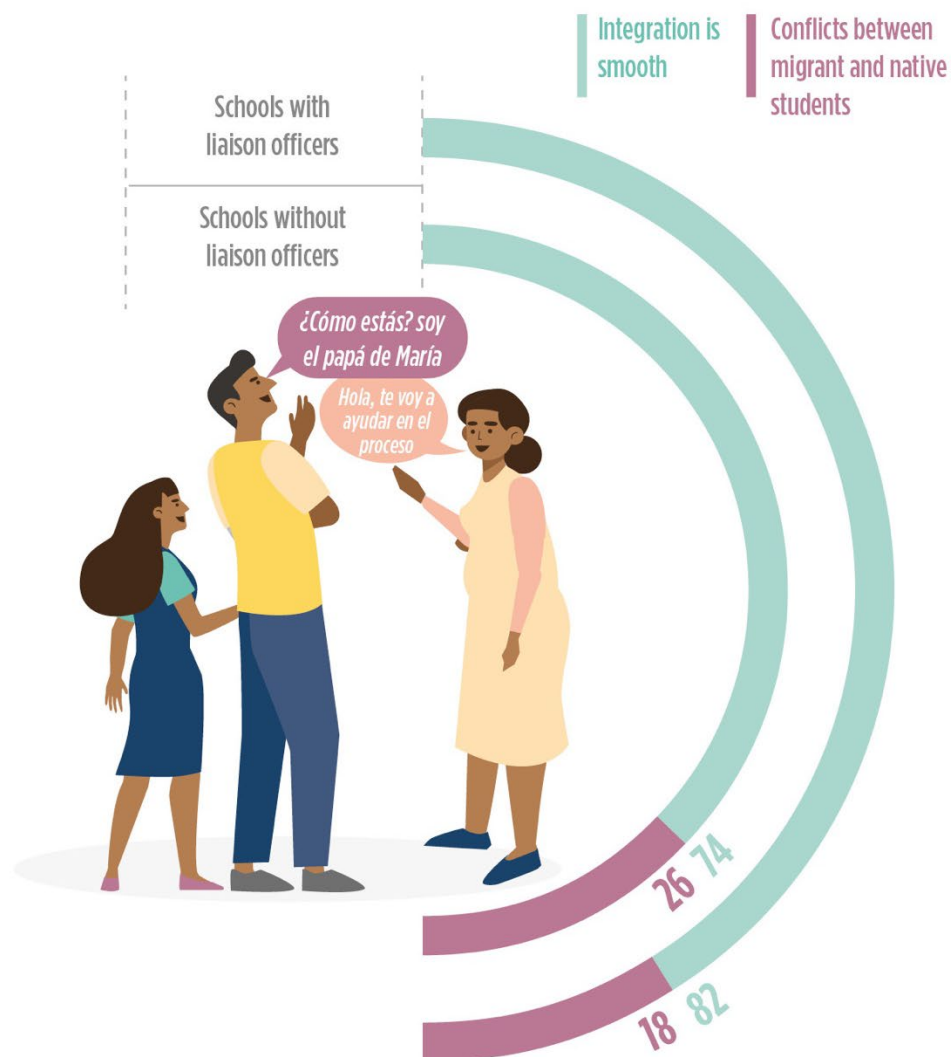


Source: IDB 2020.

Home liaison officers appear to be as important as school counselors for purposes of integration. Nearly half the schools employ liaison officers to facilitate the parents' participation in their children's education (figure 3.1). Although they include native families as well, these officials ease overall integration and lessen student conflict. Schools lacking these liaisons report an 8 percent higher incidence of conflict among their students (figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: School liaison officers may ease conflict between migrant and native students

Ease of student integration by whether the school employs liaison officers (%)



Source: IDB 2020.

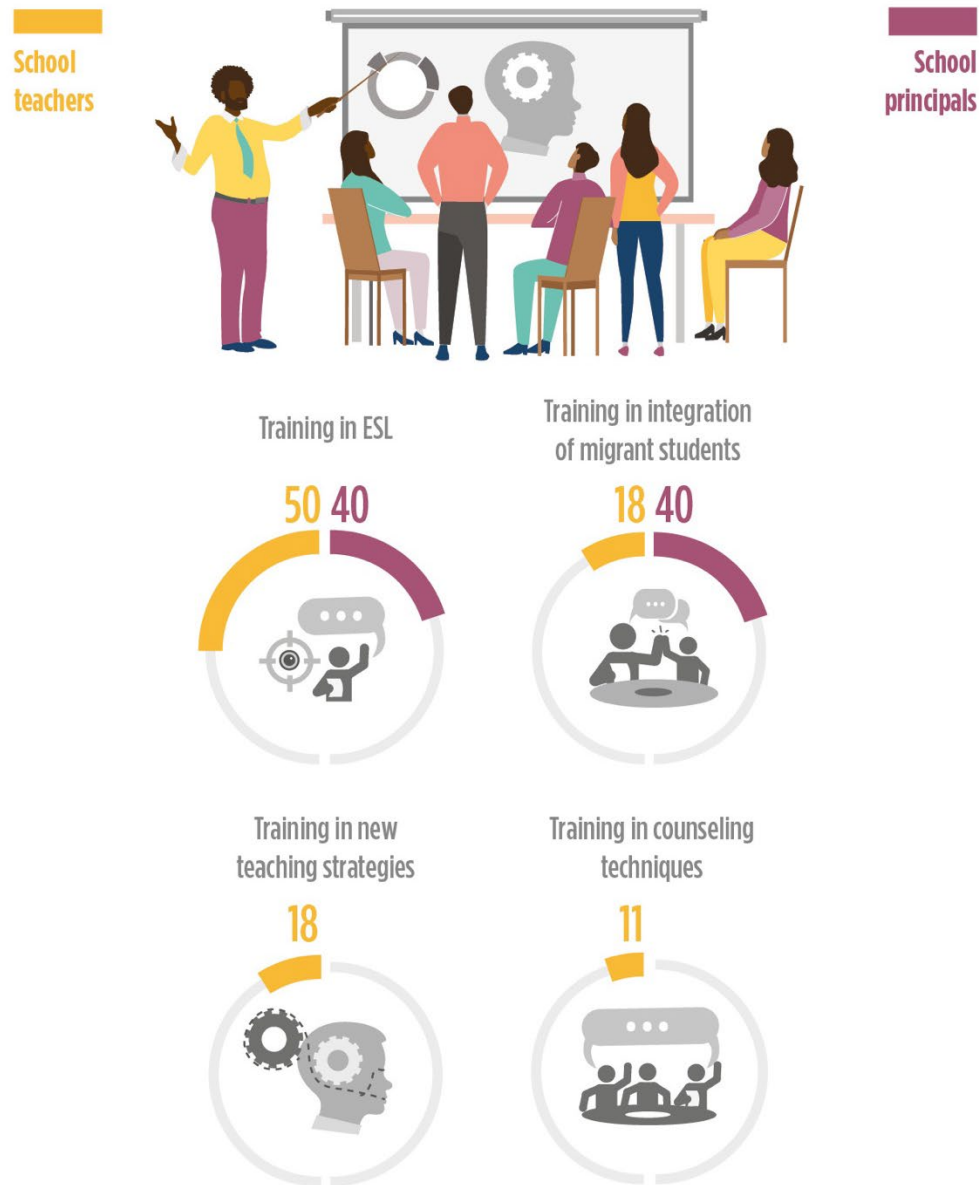
Additionally, assimilation is reported to be easier in the 53 percent of schools sampled that employ staff with immigrant backgrounds (seen in figure 2.4). In schools without immigrant-background staff, assimilation is more difficult, with levels of tension reported to be 15 percent higher between migrant and native-born students.

Teachers are key to successful integration, and they themselves cite the need for more training to work in diverse and multicultural classrooms and for policies to provide training. A third of teachers, and half of principals, concur on the need for more training in ESL, integration, new

teaching strategies, and counseling (figure 3.8). The call for more training by Belizean teachers echoes that of their colleagues worldwide. The global literature finds that teachers often report feeling unprepared for multicultural and multilingual classrooms (European Commission 2015; Trasberg and Kond 2017).

Figure 3.8: Principals and schoolteachers need training on multicultural environments and integration

Professional development needs (%)

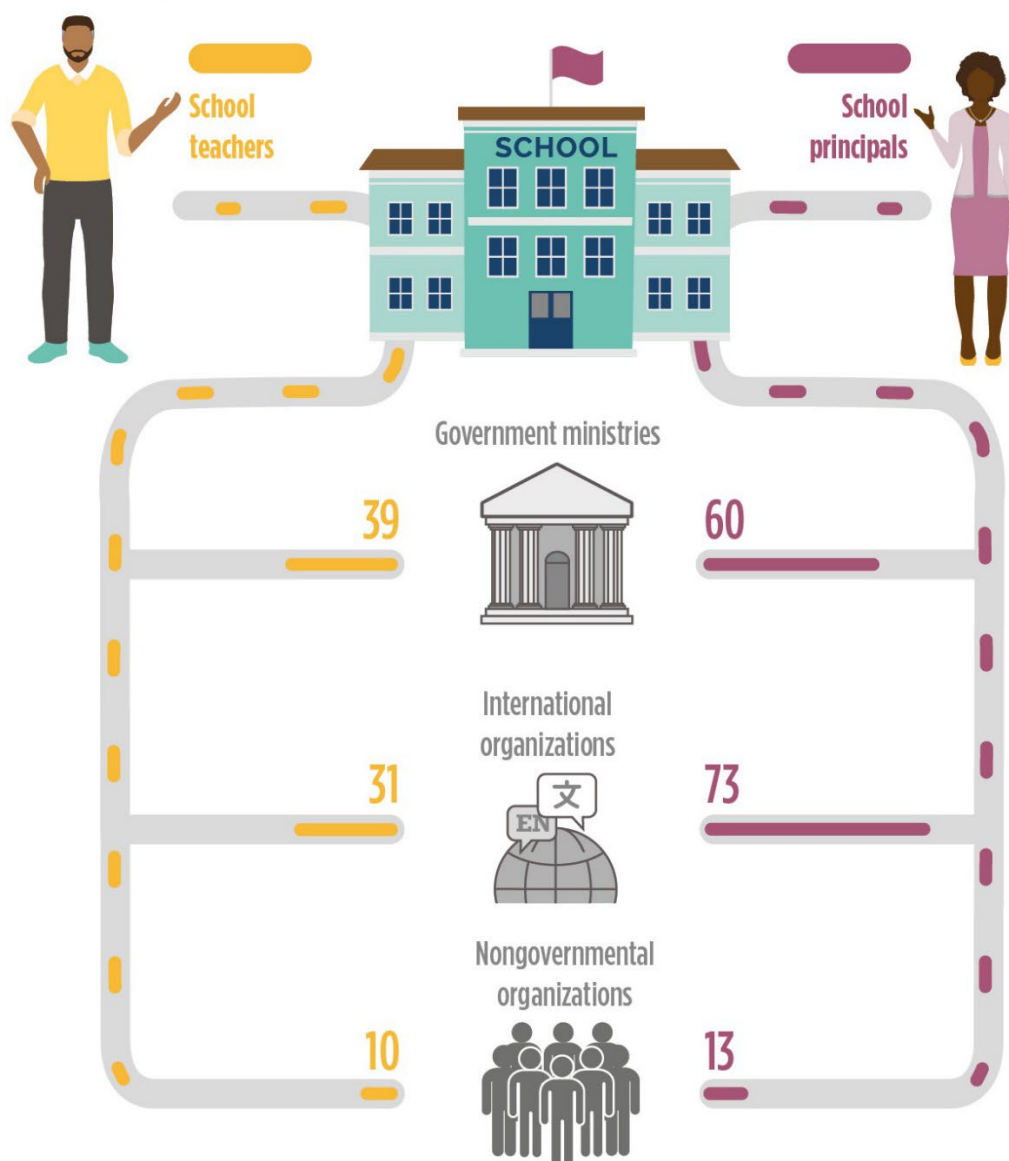


Source: IDB 2020.

Teachers and principals both call for better coordination between schools and government agencies (figure 3.9), for example, to make it easier to make referrals for counseling or psychosocial treatment. In addition, schools call for improved coordination with nongovernmental and international organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and other entities working in the field of migration.

Figure 3.9: Principals and schoolteachers call for better coordination with government agencies

Organizations that need to coordinate with the Ministry of Education to provide better services to migrant students (%)



Source: IDB 2020.

3.2 How much access do migrant children have to schooling?

In Belize, any child of compulsory school age (between 5 and 14 years) must attend school (Government of Belize 2000). This requirement covers all children, independent of their religion, race, ethnicity, language, or political affiliation, and it extends the same rights and obligations to every child living in Belize, regardless of a child's migratory status. In practice, however, Belizean schooling falls below regional averages for both migrant and native households.

School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic predict increased dropout rates. Pre-pandemic, Belize ranked below LAC's average net attendance rates. Primary school net attendance was 93 percent in 2018 (SIB 2018), compared with a regional average of 96 percent (CIMA 2020). The same year, net attendance in secondary schools was 59 percent (SIB 2018), compared with a regional average of 74 percent (CIMA 2020).

Attendance rates are lower among migrants than among their native peers (figure 3.10). Net attendance of primary school-aged migrant children is 10 percentage points lower than among their Belizean peers (83 percent vs. 93 percent). The migrant-native net attendance gap doubles to 44 percentage points (16 percent vs. 60 percent) by the time students reach secondary school (SIB 2018). Data shows boys have less access to education than girls. Particularly notable, the net attendance of migrant boys in secondary school drops 51 percentage points—lower than among their native peers (that is, 7 percent)—compared with 59 percent among Belizean boys (SIB 2018).

These already low net attendance rates will likely drop further because of pandemic-related closures, particularly among the lowest socioeconomic groups, including migrant students. A great many factors contribute to students dropping out, but a key reason is homework. Students fall behind in their homework, ultimately leading them to quit. Other reasons include (i) inability to access MoEYSC online-learning materials due to lack of hardware or internet; (ii) low-quality online instruction because teachers are untrained in distance education; (iii) inability to access trained people who can explain learning materials, particularly among students needing remedial education (already seen prior to the pandemic); (iv) limited bilingual learning materials for non-English speakers; and (v) competing duties, such as relatives or caregivers requesting household help.

Figure 3.10: Migrant children have lower attendance rates than their native peers

Net school attendance among migrant and native children in Belize (%)



Source: IDB 2020.

Source: Belize Labor Force Survey (2018).

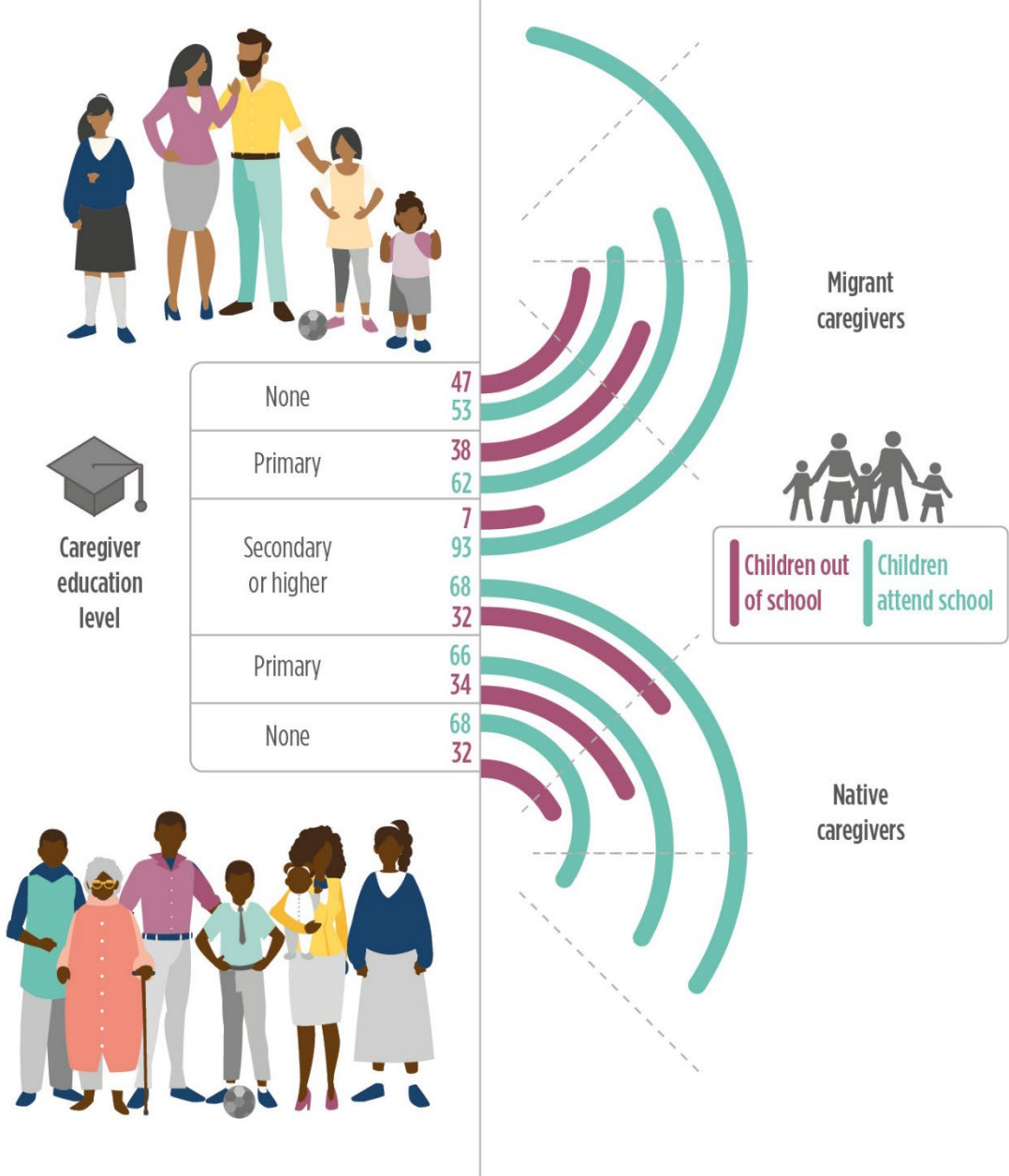
Among migrants, the educational level of caregivers strongly influences attendance (figure 3.11).⁴ Among migrant households whose caregivers received less than primary education, only

⁴ Results show a strong correlation between the educational level of migrant caregivers and attendance among migrants. Table A1 shows the probability of sending all children to school using probit regression models on variables such as caregiver education level, caregiver employment, and migration situation and social-emotional challenges.

half send their children to school. By way of contrast, nine of every ten migrant households whose caregiver benefited from secondary education encourage their children to reach the same level of schooling. Among native households, the caregiver’s level of education does not correspond to enrollment in the same way. Native caregivers with less than primary education send their children to school with the same academic expectations as their more educated peers.

Figure 3.11: Education level of caregivers has a stronger effect on school attendance among migrants

School attendance of school-aged children by migrant and native caregiver education level (%)

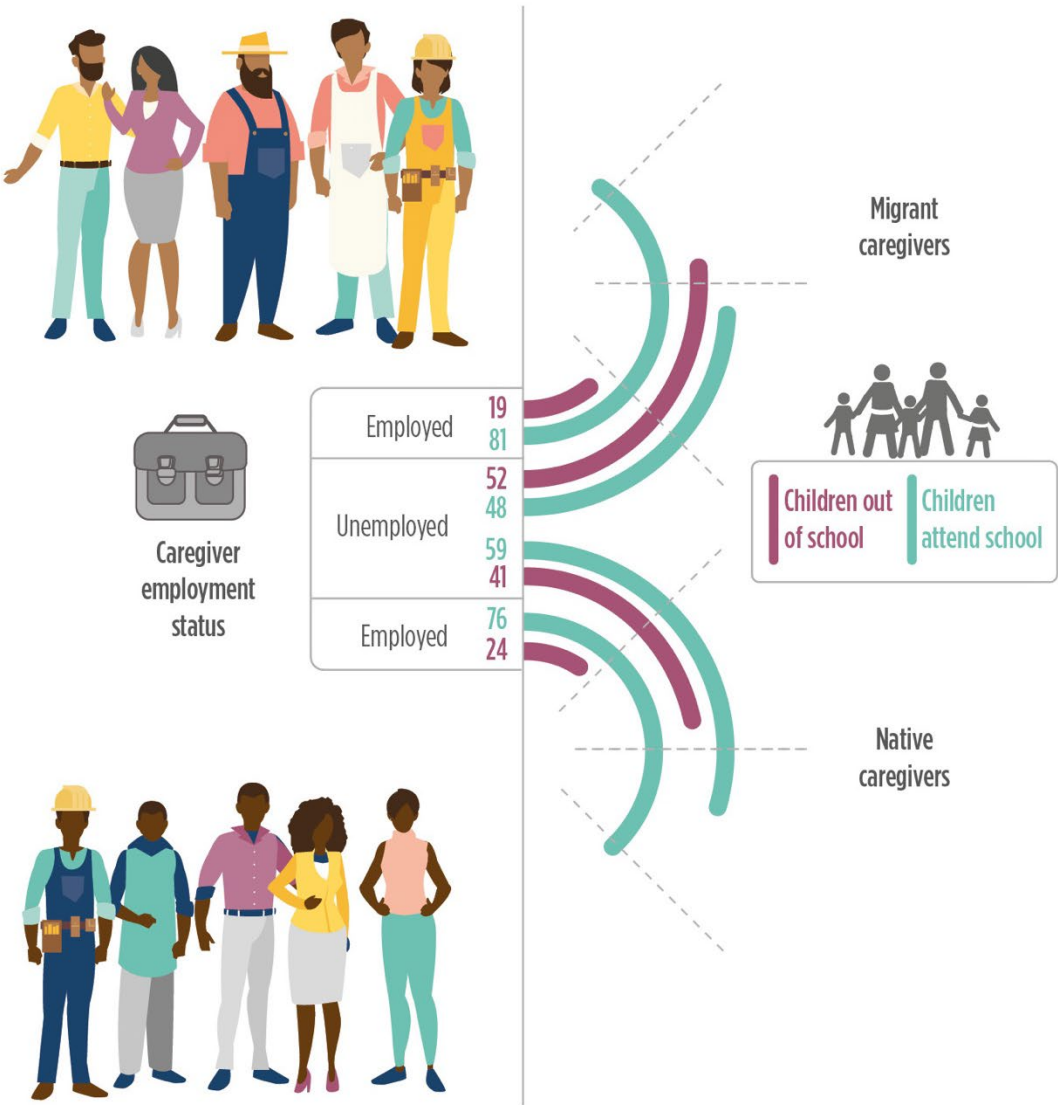


Source: IDB 2020.

The employment status of caregivers has a strong effect on a child’s school attendance among migrant and native households (figure 3.12). When migrant caregivers are unemployed, this has a dampening effect on their children’s school attendance. Approximately three-fourths of employed caregivers, migrant and native, send all their children to school. Native-born caregivers who are unemployed send their children to school at rates that are 10 percent higher than their migrant counterparts.

Figure 3.12: Caregiver employment status is more strongly associated with school attendance among migrant children

School attendance of school-aged children by migrant and native caregiver employment status (%)



Source: IDB 2020.

A child’s mastery of English strongly correlates to school attendance (figure 3.13). Six out of ten children who struggle with the language attend school, compared with eight out of every ten

migrants who speak English. This phenomenon is seen in other countries. A review of migrant education in Austria, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden concluded that language mastery strongly affects school performance and attendance (OECD 2010).

Figure 3.13: Migrant school-aged children who struggle with the English language are less likely to attend school

School attendance of migrant school-aged children with difficulties learning English (%)

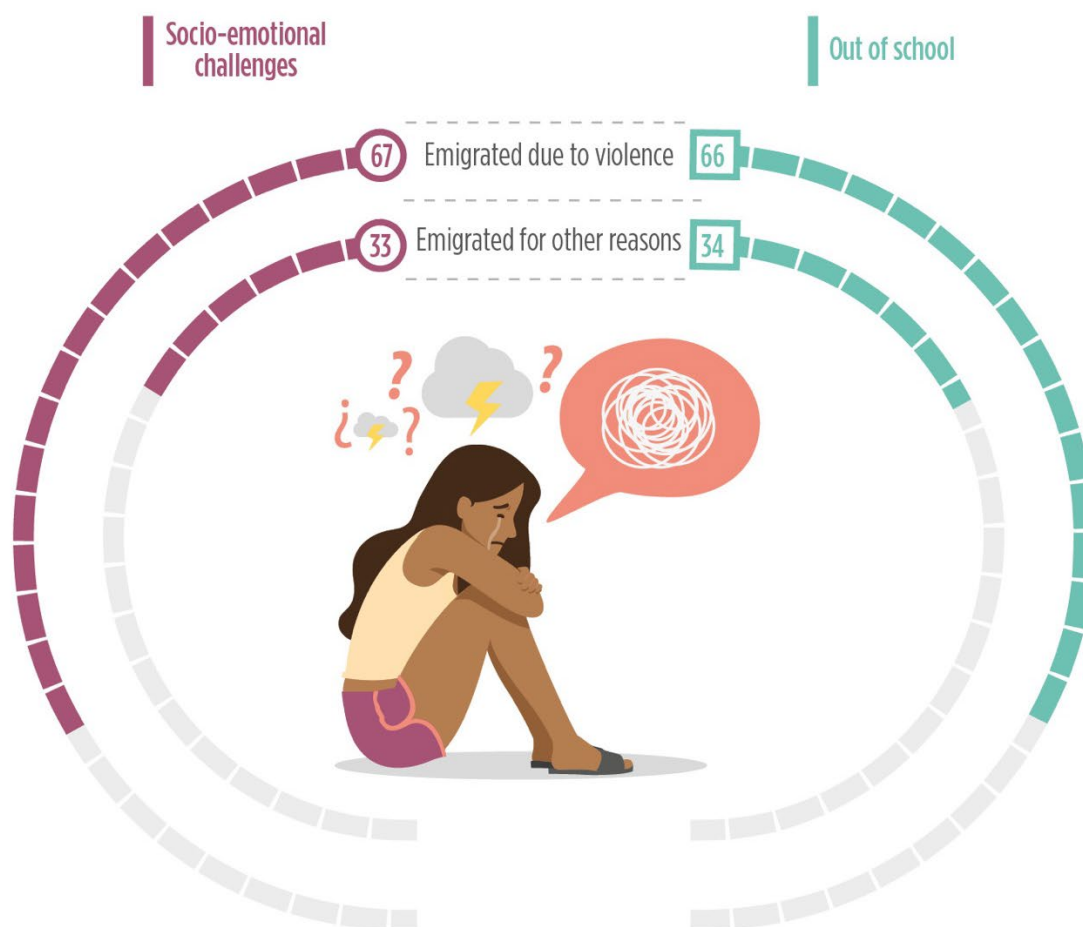


Source: IDB 2020.

Children who fled violence in their home countries are much less likely to attend school (figure 3.14). A striking proportion, 66 percent, of these children do not attend school, and a similar proportion experience socio-emotional challenges. Among migrant children who left their home countries for economic or other nonviolent reasons, a greater proportion attend school (34 percent).

Figure 3.14: Migrant children suffer from socio-emotional challenges, affecting their learning and integration

Proportion of students out of school and with socio-emotional challenges by reason for migration (%)

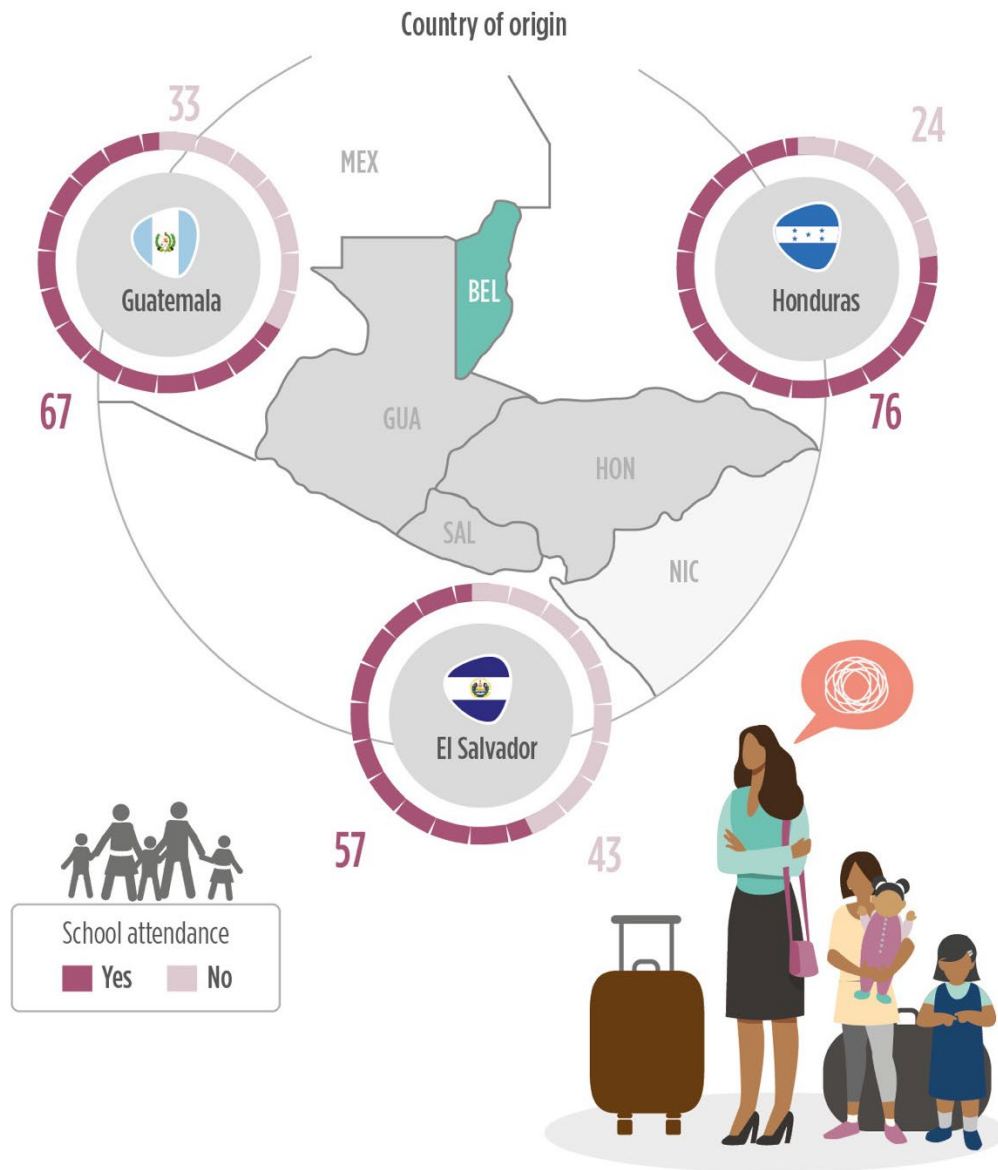


Source: IDB 2020.

Fewer migrant children from El Salvador attend school than their Guatemalan counterparts (figure 3.15). Only 57 percent of Salvadoran children attend school, compared with two-thirds of Guatemalan and Honduran children (67 and 76 percent, respectively). The lower attendance rates among Salvadoran children might be linked to trauma, as nine of every ten Salvadoran families fled violence—that is, more than twice the figure cited by Guatemalan migrants.

Figure 3.15: Migrant children from El Salvador are less likely to attend school than their Guatemalan counterparts

School attendance of migrant school-aged children by country of origin (%)



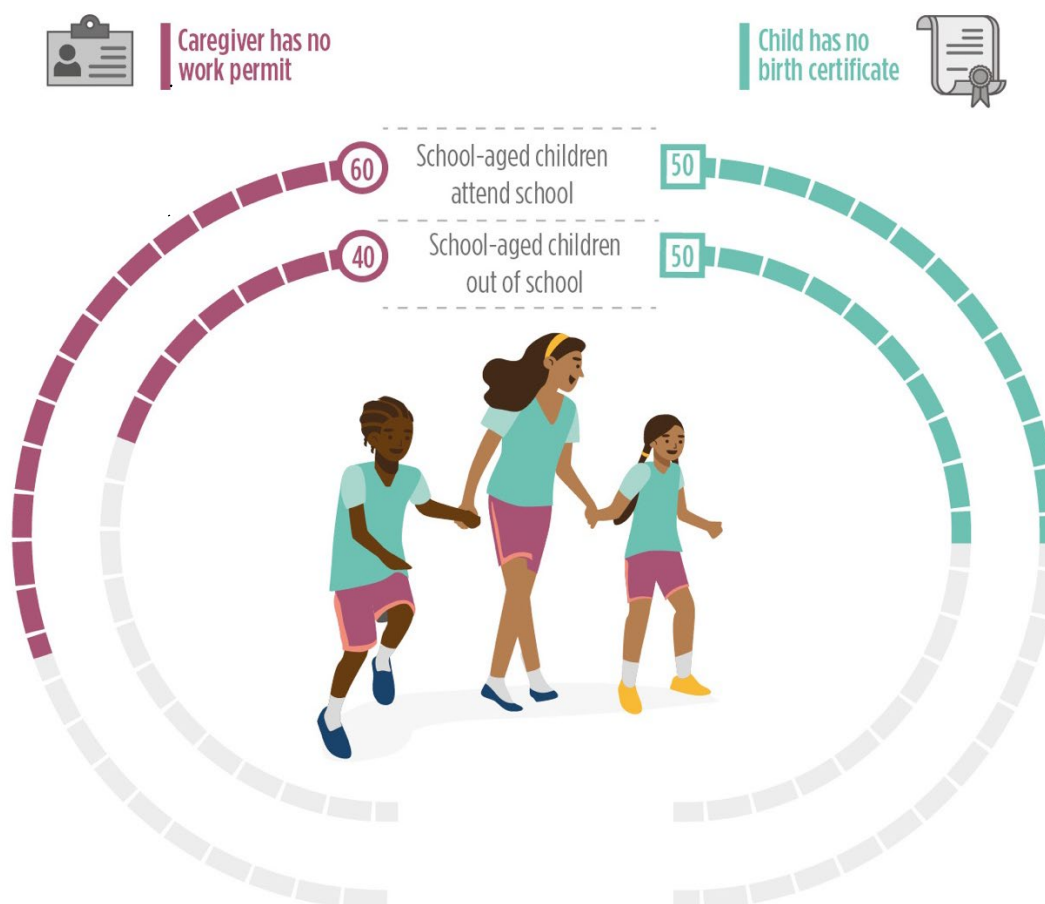
Source: IDB 2020.

Over the past decade, Belizean authorities have made concerted efforts to regularize the status of migrants, providing them with temporary work permits and citizenship (IOM 2016). Yet, among migrant families surveyed, lack of legal documentation persists. Only 17 percent of the migrant caregivers hold valid work permits, and just 53 percent registered the births of their children. Legal documentation strongly correlates with school attendance, as nine out of ten children whose parents hold work permits attend school (figure 3.16). Only six of ten children of

caregivers without work permits attend school. Similarly, four out of five children with birth certificates attend school, compared with half of their peers who have no birth certificates.

Figure 3.16: Legal documentation is positively linked to school attendance of migrant children

Legal documents of migrants by school attendance (%)



Source: IDB 2020.

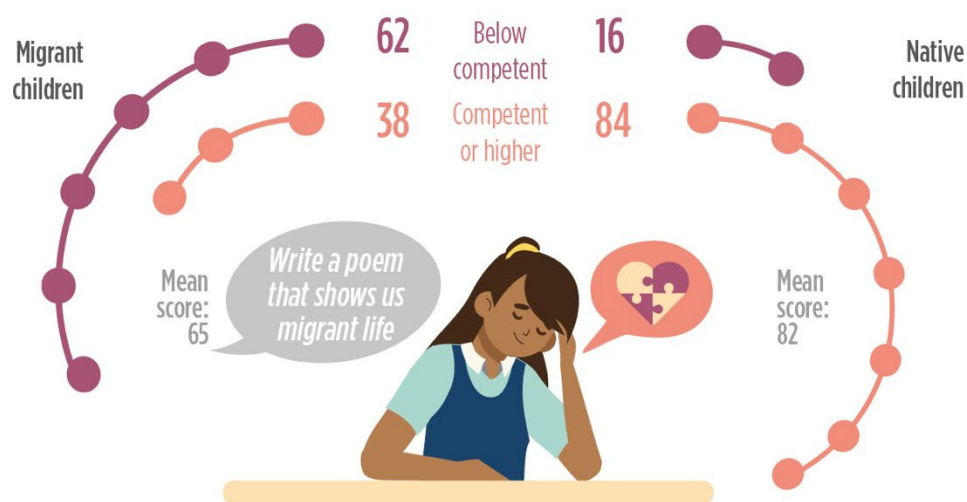
3.3 Are migrant children successful in school?

Worldwide, migrant students underperform their native peers. This holds true in Belize, where natives outperform their counterparts in both Language Arts and Mathematics (figure 3.17). Eight out of ten native students scored competent or higher in Language Arts.⁵ Among migrant students, only four of ten students achieved competency or higher. In Mathematics, the data are similar, although less pronounced. Eight of ten native Belizeans obtained a score of competent or higher, while six of ten migrants achieved the same level of competency.

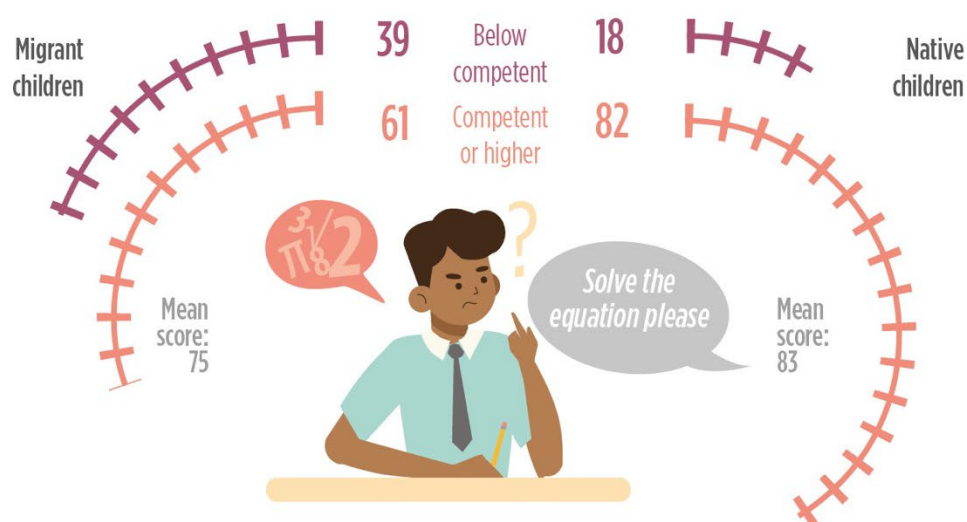
⁵ For Language Arts and Mathematics, grades A and B are considered competent or higher, whereas grades C, D, and E are considered less than competent.

Figure 3.17: Migrant students are outperformed by native students

Student performance in Language Arts (%)



Student performance in Mathematics (%)



Source: IDB 2020.

Lack of English skills is a factor affecting the school outcomes of migrant students. Based on exam performance as well as in-class activities, principals sampled in the survey agree the greatest educational need of migrant students is assistance with learning English, corresponding to what migrant parents perceive as well. Almost three in every four migrant families report their children struggle to learn the language. The survey shows migrant children who speak English perform better in both Language Arts and Mathematics. Migrant students who speak English average 15 percentage points higher than their non-English-speaking peers (74 vs. 58 percent, respectively). Approximately two-thirds of English speakers reach competency or higher, while only one-fifth

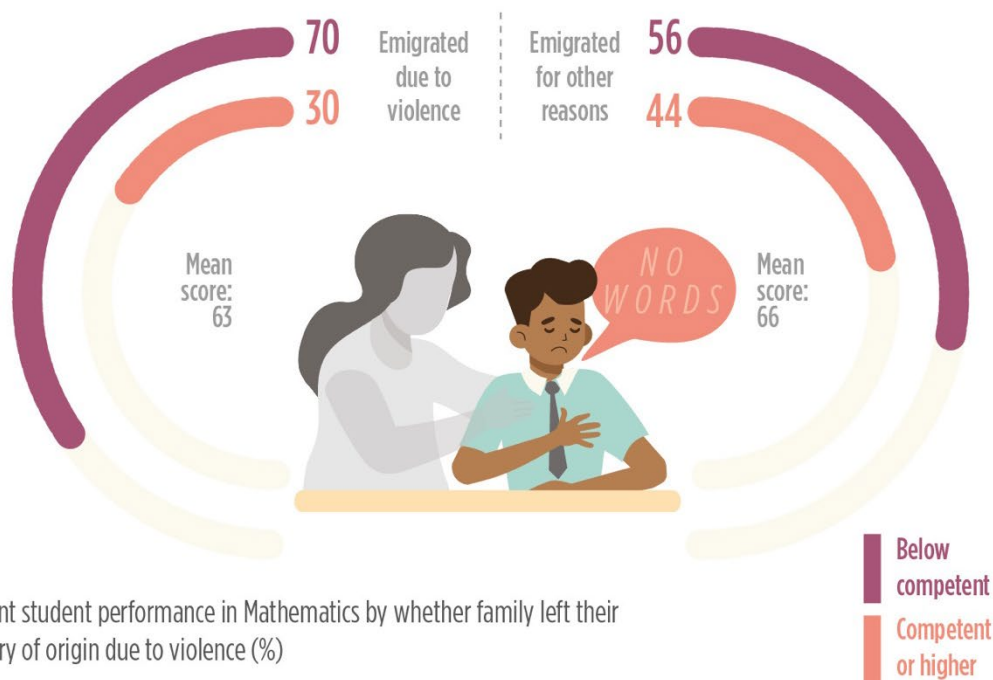
of non-English speakers scored relatively the same. In Mathematics, migrant English speakers scored 78 percent and achieved competency, while the others scored 73 percent.

Migrant children who fled violence perform at lower levels (figure 3.18).⁶ Students who left their home countries due to violence struggle more in schools than their peers who migrated for economic or other reasons. The difference is 14 percentage points in Language Arts, and in Mathematics, 23 percentage points.

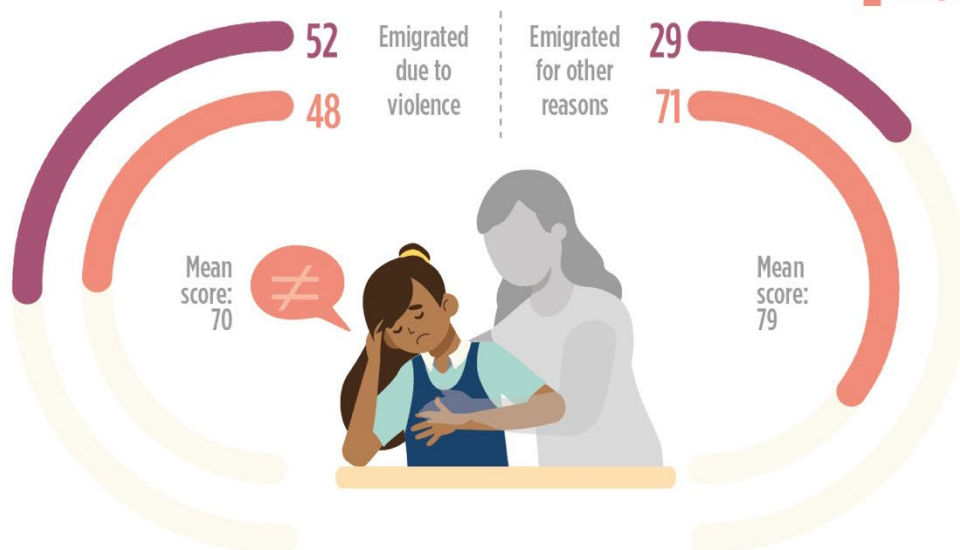
⁶ Table A-2 (in the annex) shows the effects on school performance of migrant students using ordinary least squares regression models on variables like whether child left his/her country due to violence or whether child speaks English.

Figure 3.18: Migrant children who left their countries due to violence have lower academic performance

Migrant student performance in Language Arts by whether family left their country of origin due to violence (%)



Migrant student performance in Mathematics by whether family left their country of origin due to violence (%)

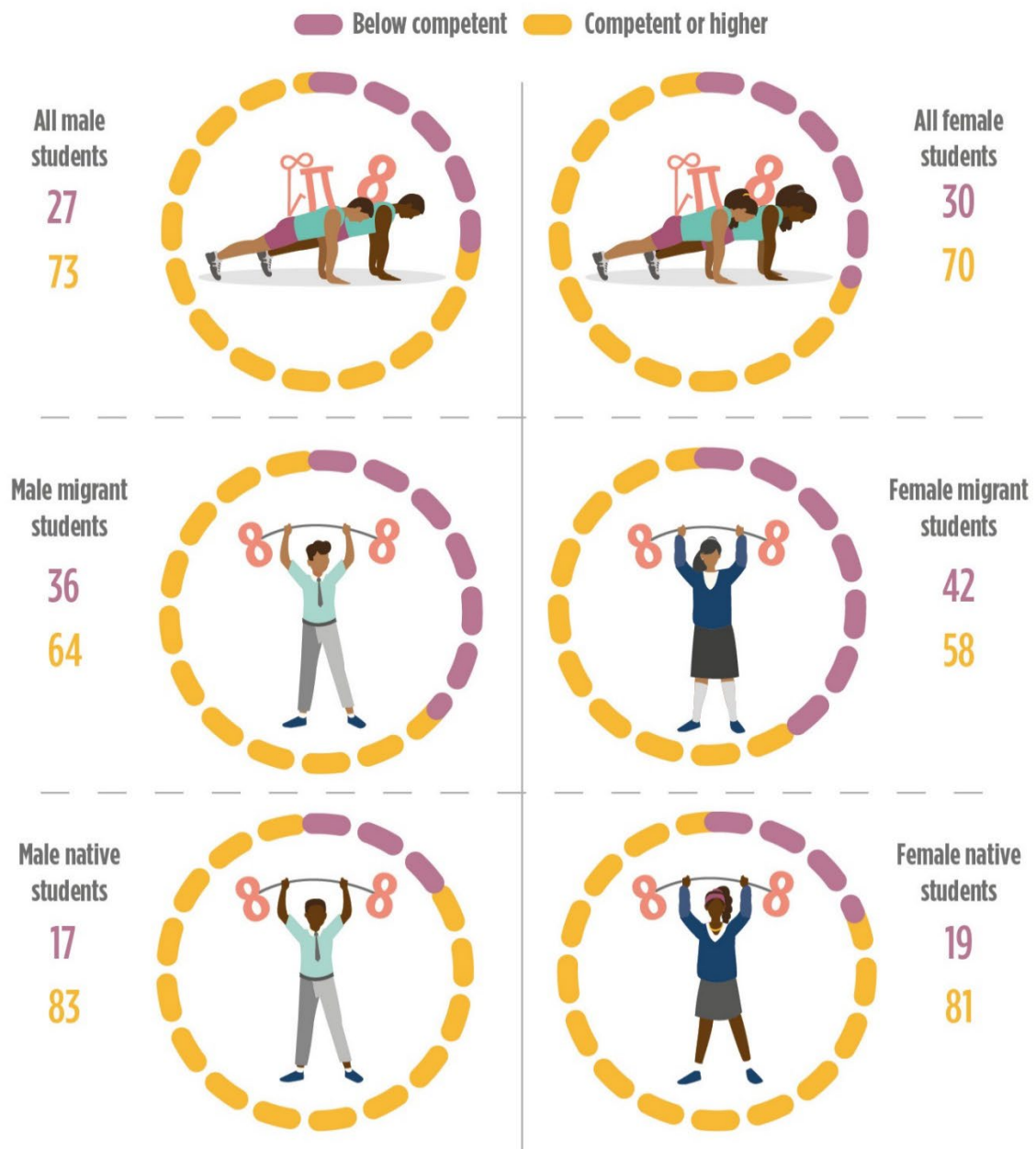


Source: IDB 2020.

Consistent with many other LAC countries, boys outperform girls in Mathematics in Belize's primary schools (figure 3.19). The performance gap is much more pronounced, however, among migrant than native students: 2 vs. 6 percentage points.

Figure 3.19: Migrant and native boys outperform girls in Mathematics at the primary level

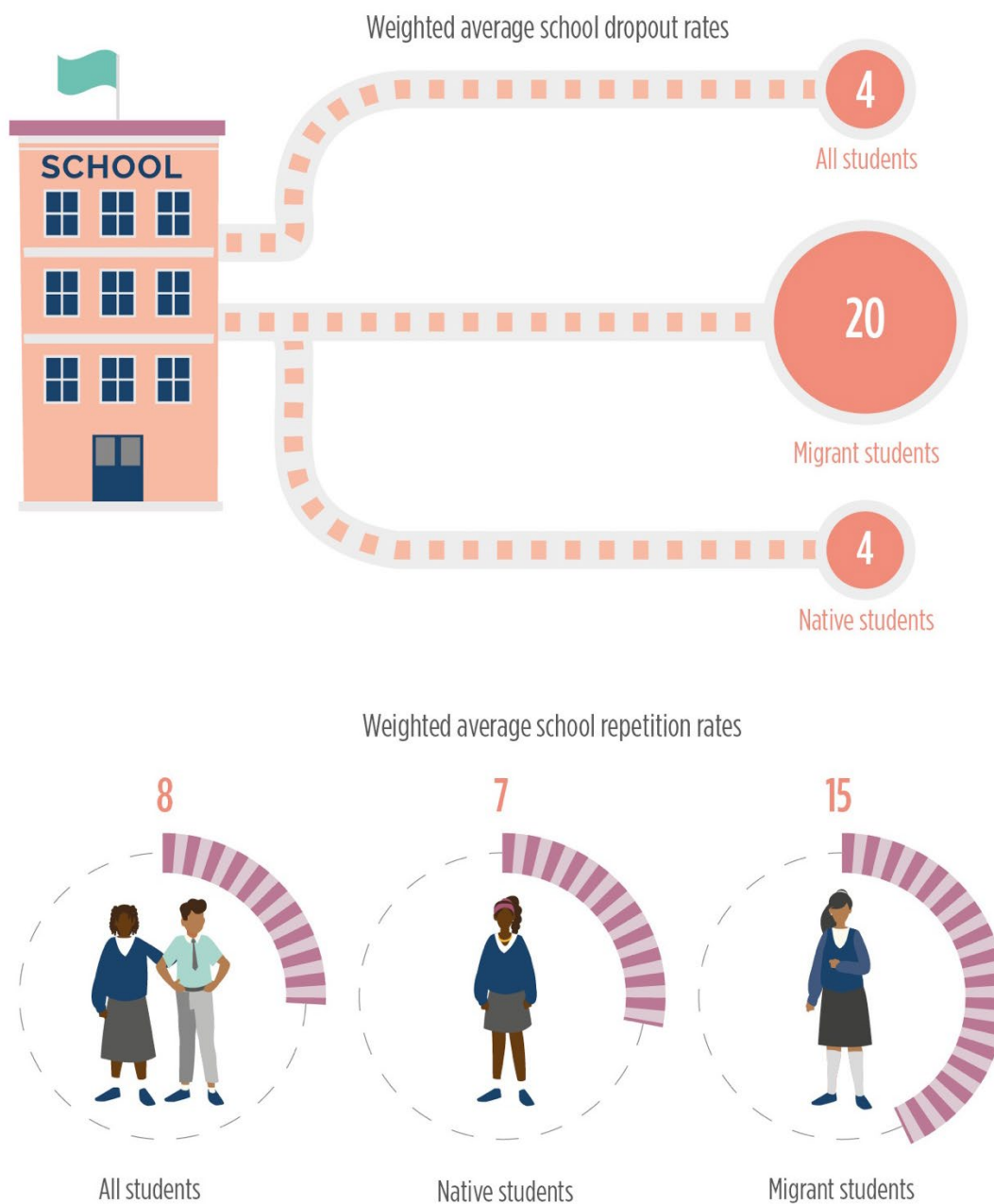
Student performance in Mathematics by gender (%)



Source: IDB 2020.

Migrant students are five times more likely to drop out, and they repeat grades at higher rates than their native peers (figure 3.20). Similarly, the grade-repetition rate is 2:1. The higher dropout rates among migrant students are consistent with international data (OECD 2010).

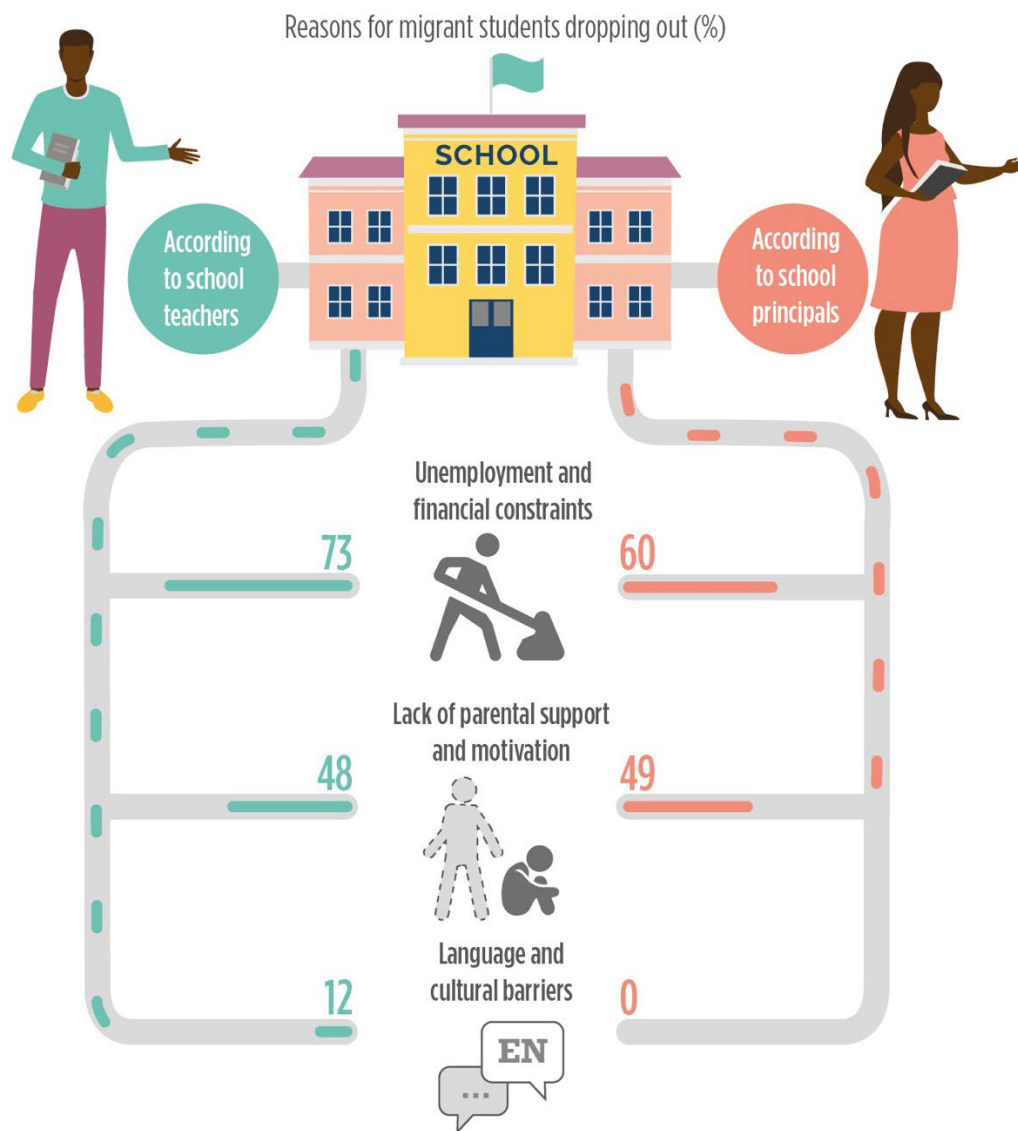
Figure 3.20: Migrant students tend to drop out and repeat grades at a higher rate than their native peers



Source: IDB 2020.

Migrant students drop out of school due to financial constraints and a lack of parental support and lack of motivation (figure 3.21). Almost two-thirds of the teachers, and half the principals, in the sample state that migrant students drop out because their caregivers cannot afford the school fees and books or they have encouraged their children to start working. Also, half the teachers and slightly less than half the principals concur that greater parent participation raises graduation rates.

Figure 3.21: Migrant students drop out of school due to financial constraints and a lack of parental support and motivation



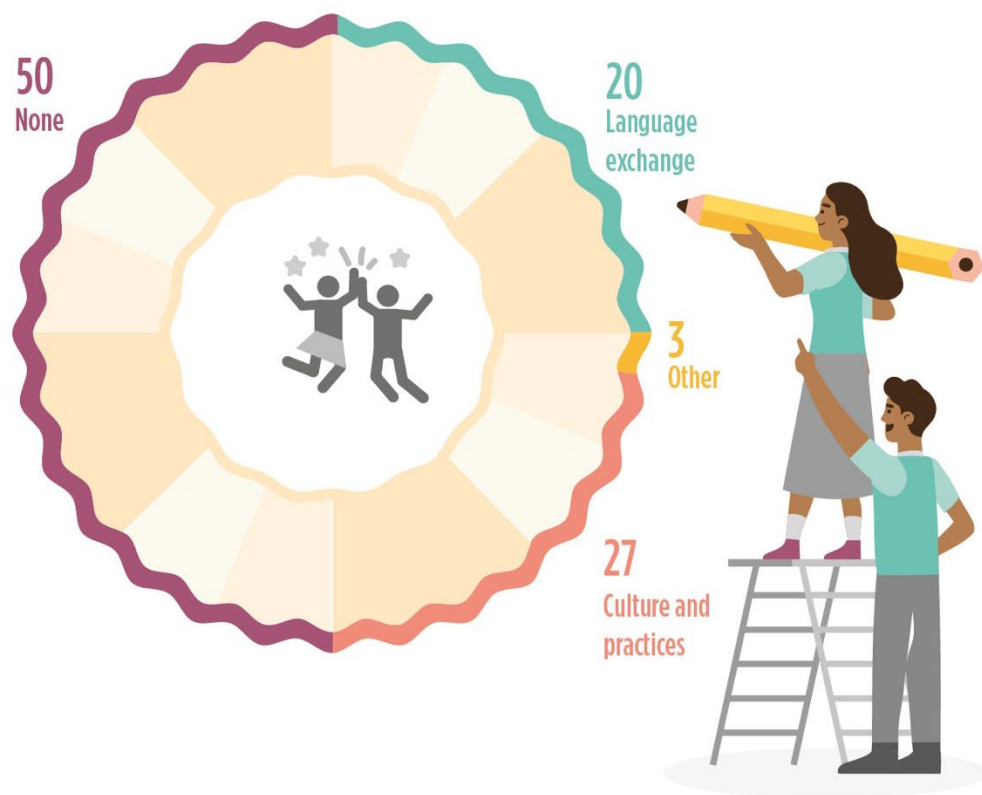
Source: IDB 2020.

4. Belizean Family Attitudes Toward Migrants

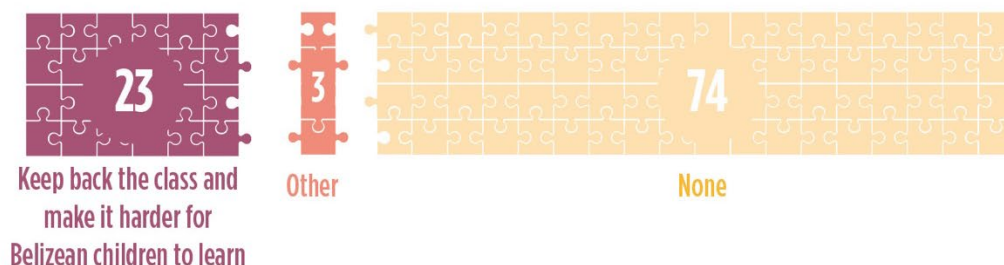
Native-born parents or caregivers report perceptions that are both positive and negative toward migrant students' effects on the school environment (figure 4.1). Half the Belizean caregivers in the survey said they think that the culture, practices, and language contributions of migrant students have a positive effect on the school environment. But approximately one-fourth of caregivers report thinking that migrant schoolchildren keep native students back and make it harder for other students to learn because most migrant schoolchildren speak only Spanish.

Figure 4.1: Native caregivers have both positive and negative perceptions towards migrants

Native caregiver perceptions of migrant students' positive effects on the school environment (%)



Native caregiver perceptions of migrant students' negative effect on the school environment (%)

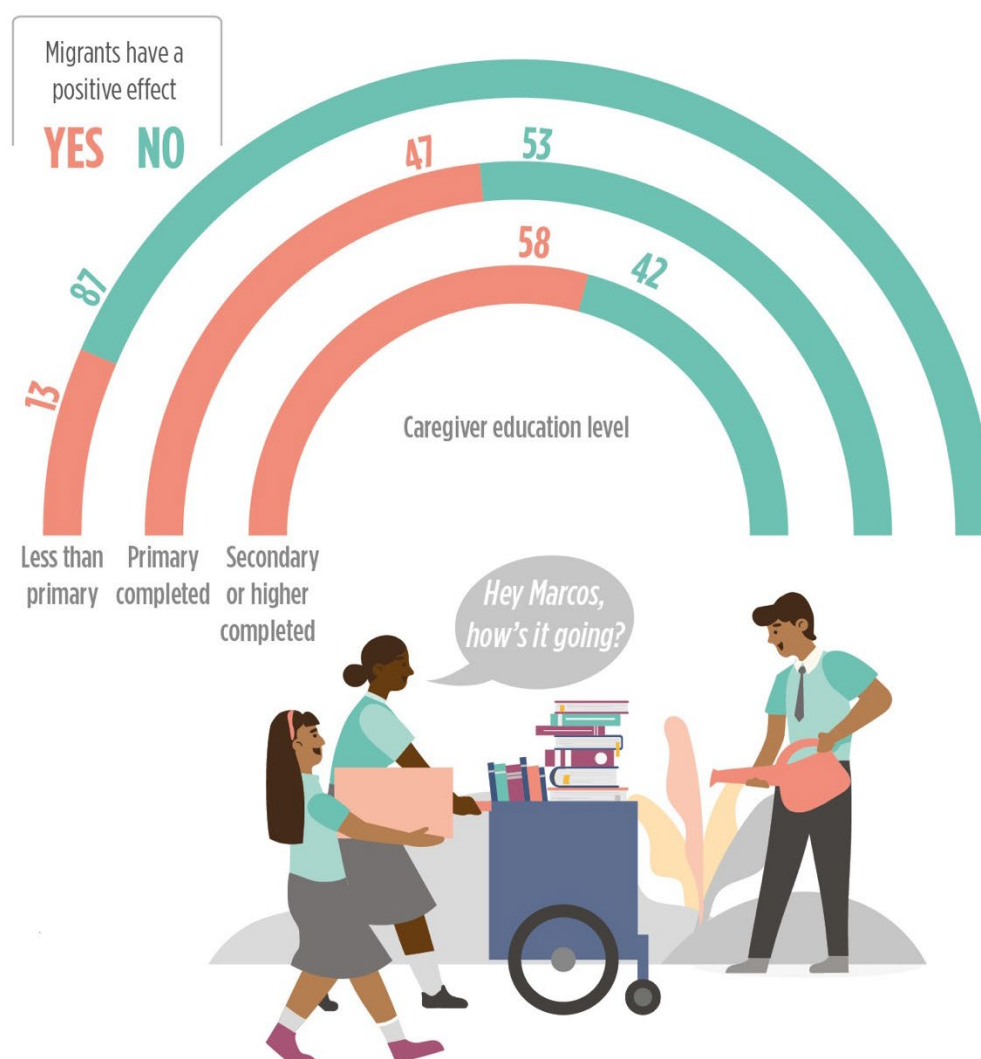


Source: IDB 2020.

The education levels of native Belizean caregivers influence their views that migrant students enrich the school environment through the exchange of culture, practices, and language (figure 4.2). Over half of the more highly educated caregivers agree that migrant students enhance the school environment. A quarter of these caregivers consider language barriers in class a detriment to learning for native children. But the majority of lesser-educated caregivers believe these newly assimilating students do not advance learning in the classroom.

Figure 4.2: The higher the education level of native caregivers the higher they value migrant students

Native caregiver perceptions of the positive effect of migrant students on the school environment by their education level (%)



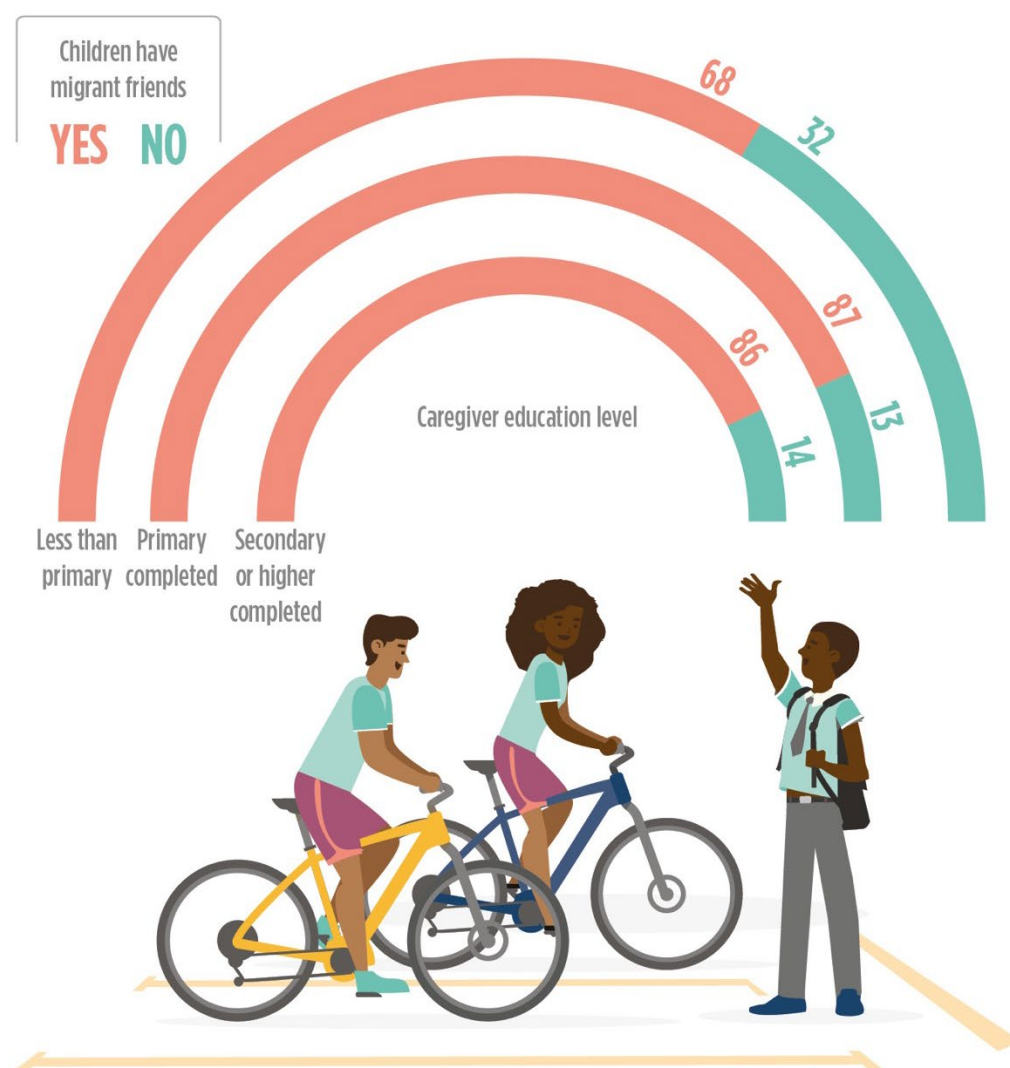
Source: IDB 2020.

Echoing the education levels of their home environments, native children will adopt corresponding attitudes toward their classmates who are migrants (figure 4.3). Eighty-six percent

of native caregivers with secondary education or higher report that their children have migrant friends, as do 68 percent of caregivers who are less educated. Both native and migrant caregivers agree, however, that their children develop friendships with the new arrivals.

Figure 4.3: The higher the caregivers' education level, the more migrant friends a native child will have

Friendship between migrant and native students by caregiver education level (%)



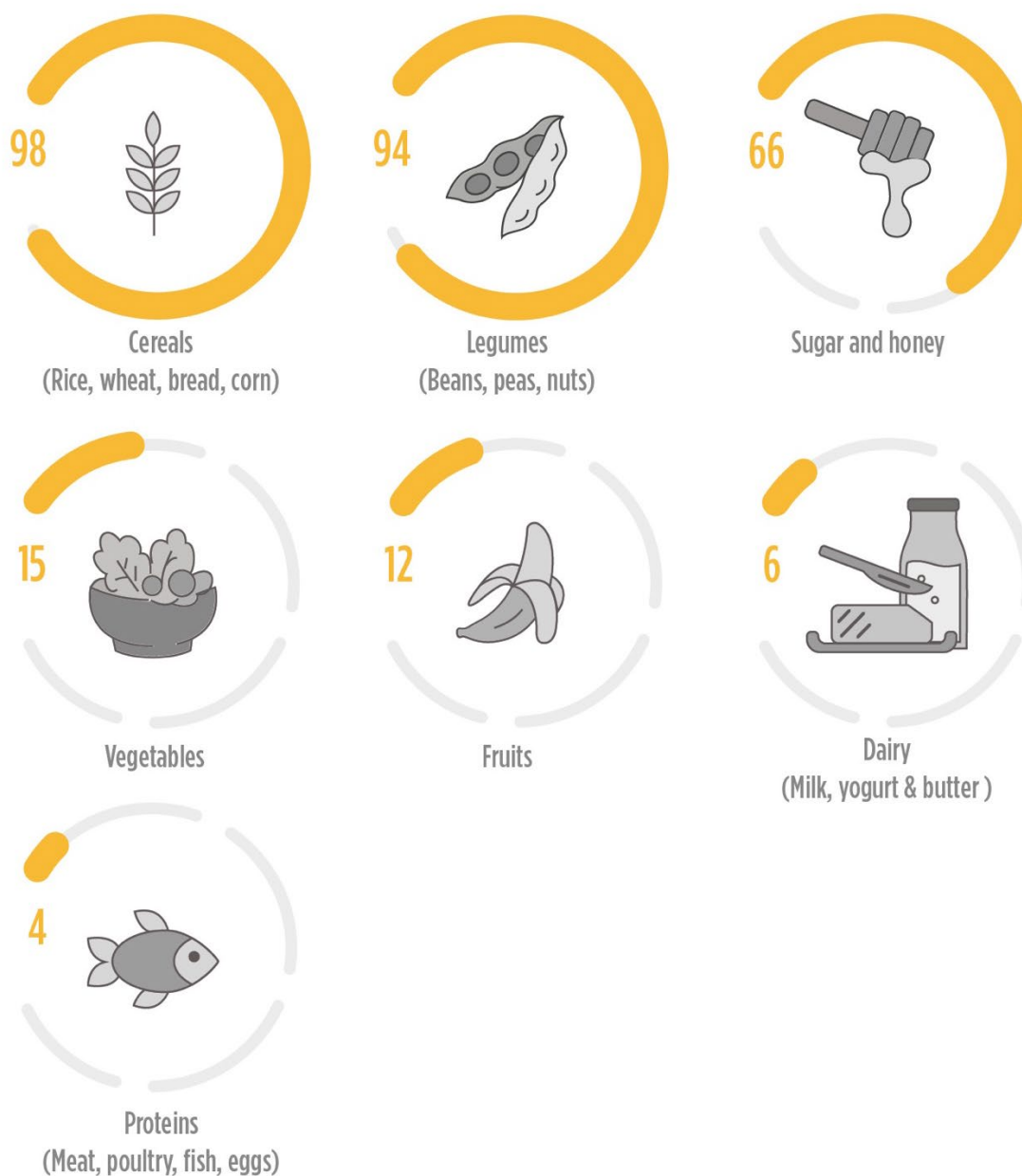
Source: IDB 2020.

5. Other Challenges Faced by Migrants

Literature squarely points to the importance of good nutrition for a student's overall health, thinking skills, and behavior, all of which are critical for learning. Conversely, diets high in trans and saturated fats are proven to adversely affect cognitive development for some young children (Florence, Asbridge, and Veugelers 2008). According to the survey, many migrant households report both lack of food generally and not eating fruits, vegetables, and proteins for four days or more per week (figure 5.1). Of the households reporting insufficient resources to purchase food, seven of ten are rural and are headed by two parents. Approximately 90 percent of these households substituted cereals and legumes for protein-rich meats and milk products because of financial constraints.

Figure 5.1: Many migrants lack access to a balanced and nutritious diet

Migrant households' access to food (%)



Source: IDB 2020.

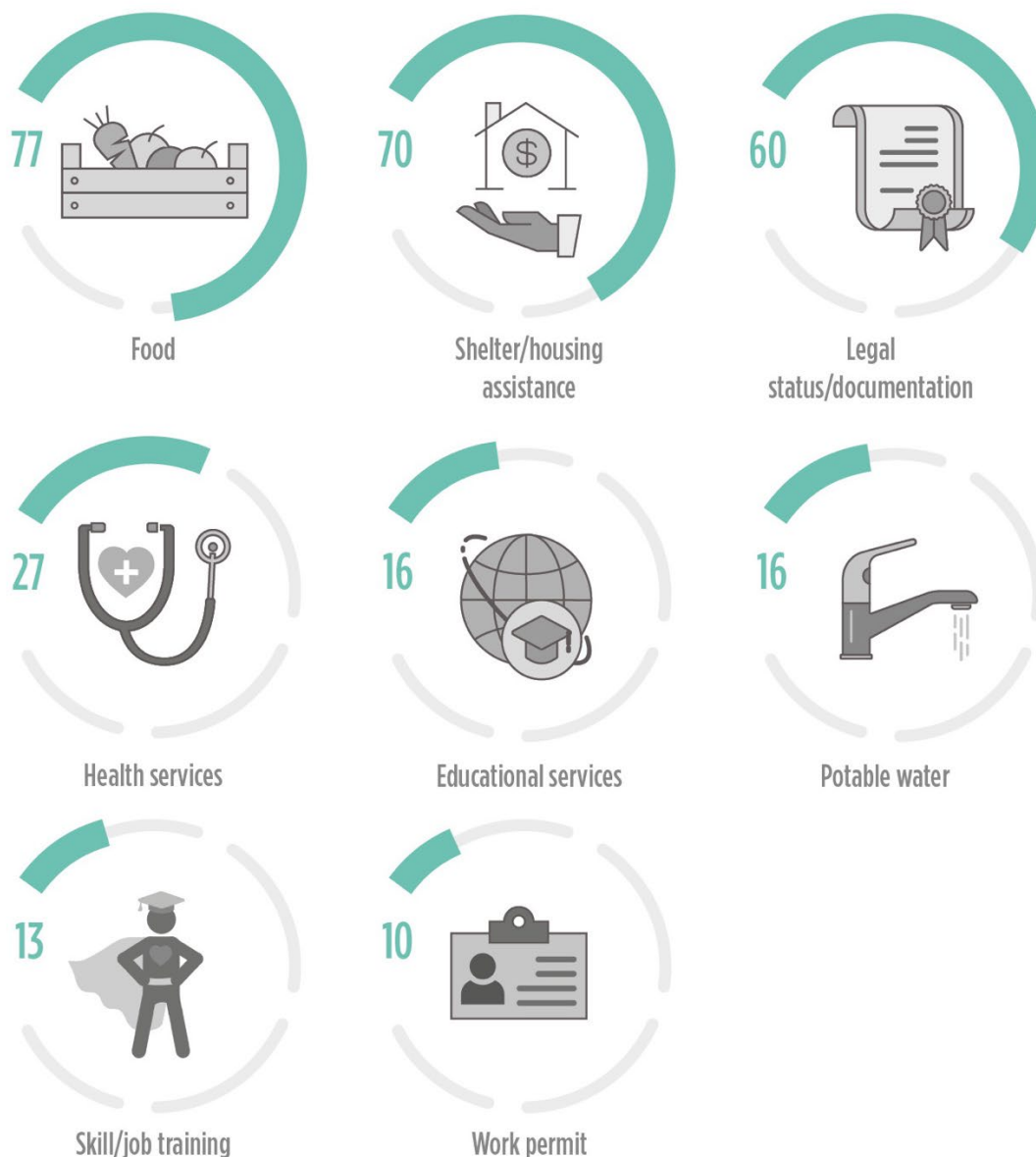
The documented food insecurity among migrants is consistent with findings in other countries. In the United States, one in four households with undocumented migrants experience food insecurity, 70 percent higher than among native households (Bread for the World 2016). The food insecurity of migrant populations is frequently aggravated by a lack of financial resources, language barriers, and limited knowledge of available resources and services (Anderson et al.

2014). Migrant children often experience higher and more persistent levels of food insecurity than other migrant groups (Carney and Krause 2020). Many also report that they avoid approaching authorities for assistance out of fears of detention or deportation. Also, international data shows migrants often experience food insecurity due to their immigration status, lack of English proficiency, cultural expectations and practices, and limited access to social protection programs (Hadley, Patil, and Nayaho 2010; Kaiser et al. 2002; Kalil and Chen 2008). The survey confirms that migrants in Belize face similar challenges related to documentation. Among migrants who have approached food-assistance programs, 18 percent of them cite lack of proper documentation to access aid.

Besides food insecurity, migrant families have other important needs such as shelter and access to basic and social services (figure 5.2). More than 60 percent of migrant families said their top-priority needs were food, shelter, and assistance with identity documents to improve their living conditions. Few families mentioned livelihood training and work authorization as their top needs.

Figure 5.2: Migrants need adequate food, shelter, education, and identity documents to improve their living conditions

Top priority needs of migrant households to improve their current living conditions (%)

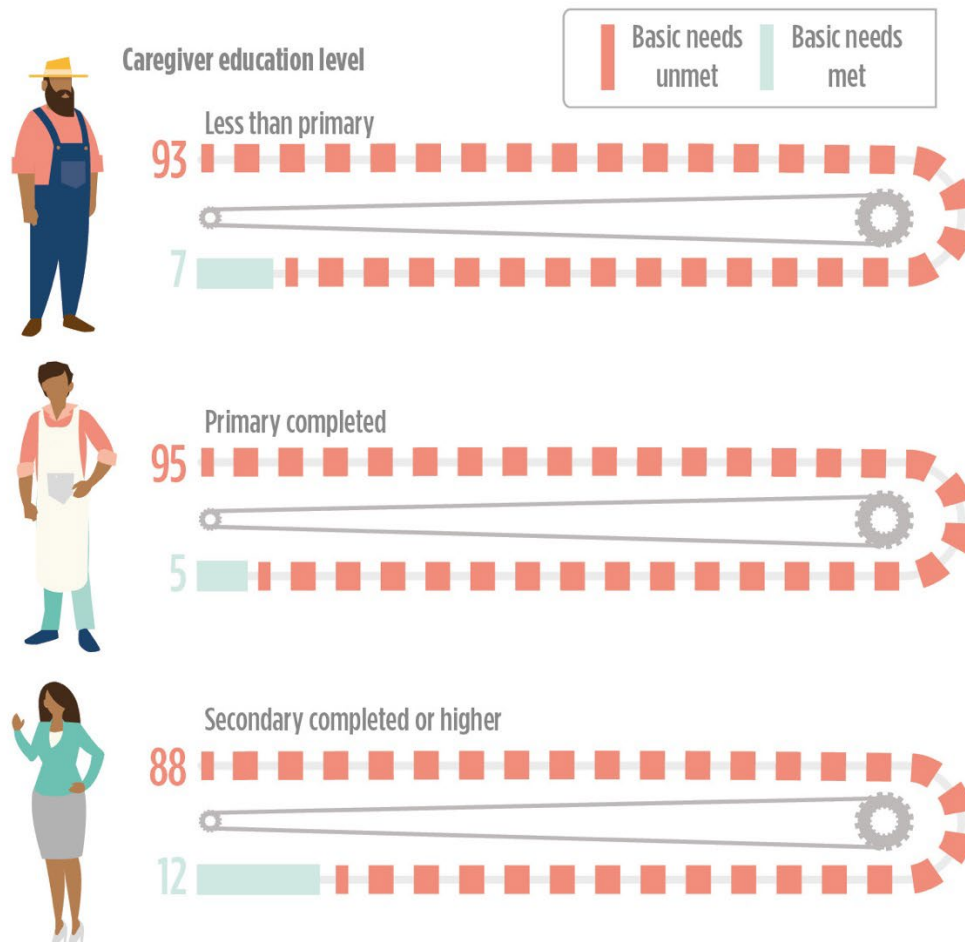


Source: IDB 2020.

Caregivers with little formal education (primary level or less) report the highest levels of basic unmet needs (figure 5.3). Basic unmet needs are, however, elevated among all migrant groups. Around 90 percent of migrants with primary education or less have basic unmet needs, compared with 88 percent of those with secondary education or higher. More than 60 percent of these families identified securing assistance with food, shelter, and legal status or documentation as critical to improve their living conditions.

Figure 5.3: The lower the caregivers' level of schooling, the more unmet basic needs migrant households have

Migrant households basic needs by caregiver education level (%)

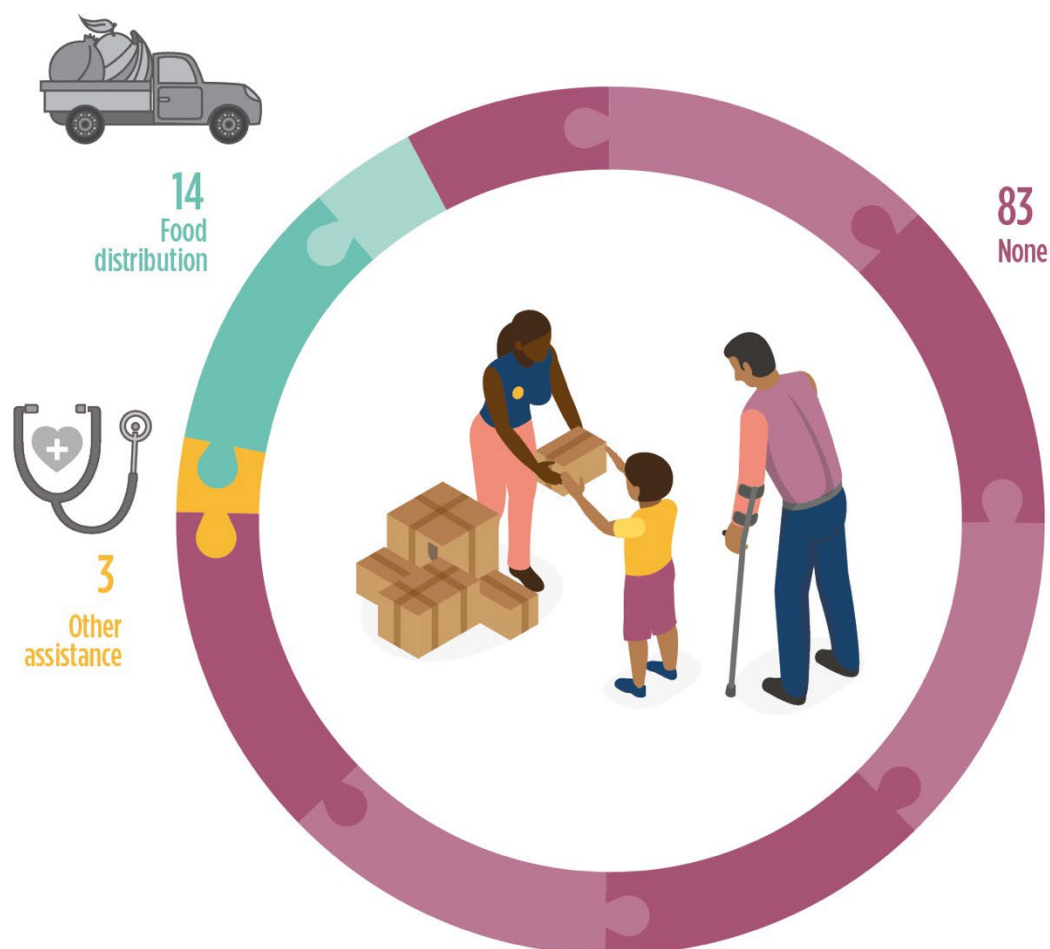


Source: IDB 2020.

Finally, close to one in five migrant households have faced difficulties accessing humanitarian assistance (figure 5.4). At the time of the survey, 17 percent of migrant households struggled to obtain humanitarian assistance over the past six months, particularly food distribution. Lack of documentation is reported to be the main hurdle in accessing humanitarian aid (69 percent of the households).

Figure 5.4: Some migrants lack access to humanitarian assistance

Difficulties faced by migrants when accessing humanitarian assistance (%)



Source: IDB 2020.

6. Recommendations

This study forms part of IDB's effort to help recipient countries integrate migrants into local communities so they might realize their potential and contribute to their communities and the country. Based on data covering roughly half the school-age migrant students in Belize, the study provides rich descriptions of these children and the school communities that serve them. The research team hopes it will be used in the design of education policy.

The research confirms that migrant students face multiple, layered challenges related both to their countries of origin and to Belize. Migrant students having been uprooted from their native language, friends, and culture. In many cases, migrant families report fleeing violence, suggesting that migrant students likely experienced trauma before arriving in Belize. Despite having arrived in Belize several years back, many migrants lack legal documentation. They also face teachers who are untrained for diversity and multicultural environments and who provide limited ESL instruction, among other issues. Collectively, the findings highlight the importance of national investment to improve learning environments and help migrant students succeed.

We see four policy recommendations emerging from the findings—four areas where Belize can improve educational opportunities for migrant children and ensure that they are well-integrated into the education system and, through school, into society. Absent investment, neither these children nor Belize will reach their full potential.

First, the study emphasizes the importance of enrolling newly arrived migrants into school as early as possible. Most migrant students who are now out of school arrived in the past five years. Yet they still struggle with barriers of language and culture. Research proves it is necessary to consider a student's linguistic and cultural background to facilitate their swift integration and increased well-being (Garcia 2009). This is done, for example, in Sweden, where schools use formative assessment to individualize education plans based on migrant students' language skills, other interests, and basic literacy and numeracy. La Petite Ecole in Belgium offers individualized learning plans for young children to promote swift integration, including psychological counseling (see table A1).

Second, the study highlights the role of school communities and parents in supporting migrant students. Half the teachers, and nearly half of principals, report that they see a lack of parent participation. Study results also demonstrate that parent involvement positively correlates to the achievement of their children and that schools that partner with parents through home-liaison officers report less conflict between migrant and native students.

Based on these findings, the MoEYSC should expand efforts to partner with parents and school communities. In designing a national program to facilitate parental participation in school life, the MoEYSC can build on a rich set of international practices, including parenting councils and

English classes for caregivers (see table A1). To minimize dropping out, national programs should include specific outreach to parents during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

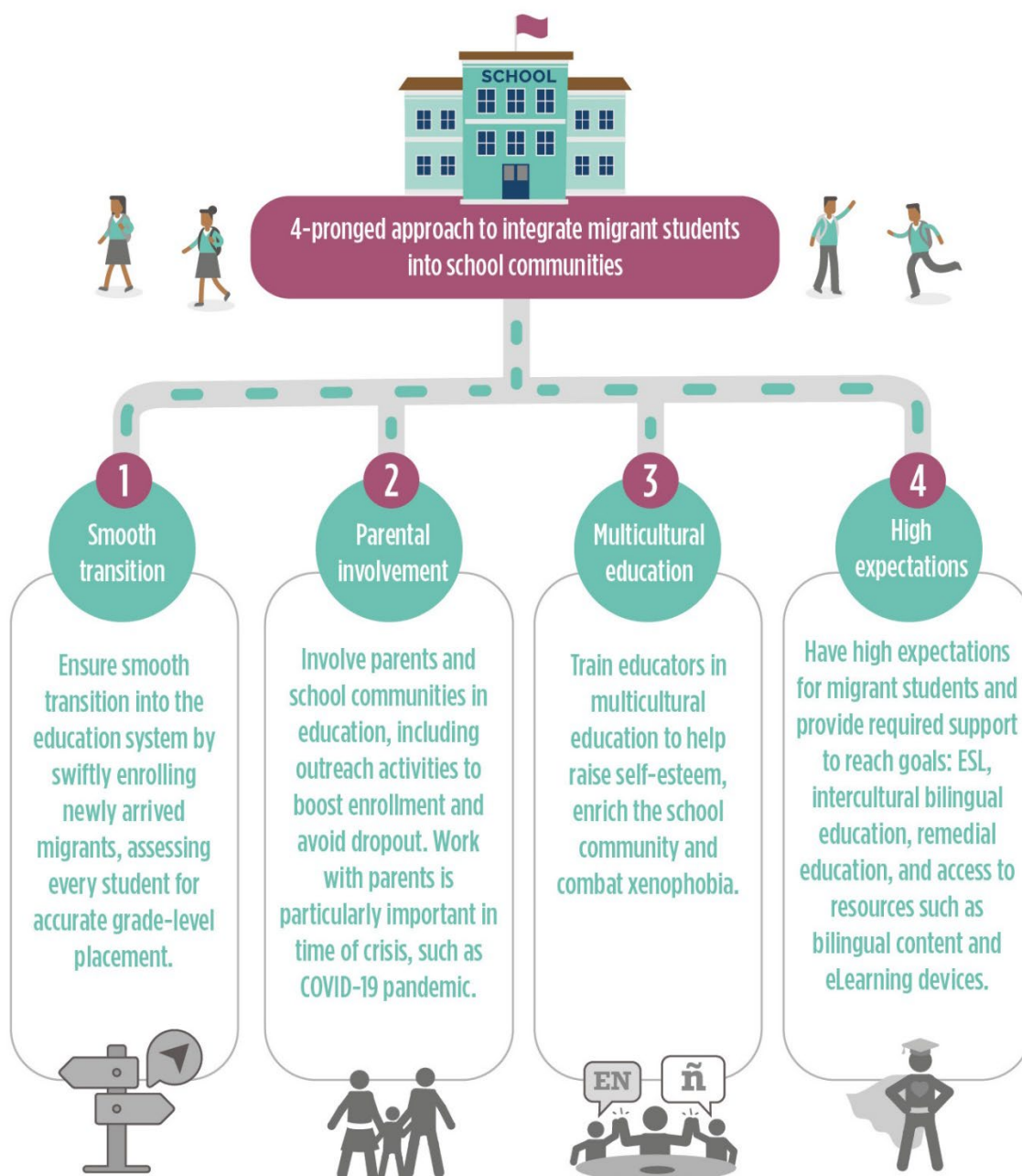
Third, the findings point to the need for educators to be trained in the integration of migrant students. Teachers should not be alone in ensuring that migrant students are successfully integrated into schools. Other professionals—such as school principals, counselors, social pedagogues, psychologists, social workers, and so on—could take part in this process (European Commission 2019). European schools commonly use teaching assistants and intercultural mediators to support migrant students’ initial integration in academic and social spheres, which contributes to their feeling of well-being in school. Principals and teachers in Belize request training on integration of migrants and multicultural environments. The training should cover strategies to integrate the culture of countries of origin into school life, education programs that can raise self-esteem, and strategies to combat xenophobia.

Because so many migrant students fled violence in their home countries, it is safe to assume that recent arrivals have experienced trauma. Therefore, a central part of the teacher training should focus on identifying and responding to trauma, including referrals for counseling or psychosocial treatment. Helping students with their social and emotional development contributes to improving migrant students’ overall school performance and minimizes the risk of low achievement and dropping out (Trasberg and Kond 2017). Schools can promote a caring and respectful environment that supports children’s capacity to communicate and connect with teachers and peers. Additionally, where teachers value each student and embrace diverse backgrounds and cultures, schools can create good learning outcomes (Stuart Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobo 2016). Diversity in the classroom allows students to consider perspectives and opinions beyond those they have already formed or were shaped early on by family and friends. A culturally responsive environment fosters a classroom where students become respectful and understanding of cultures different from their own. An array of best practices can inform the design of the training (see table 6.1). Austria, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Latvia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro include multiculturalism both in initial teacher education and continuing professional development. Teachers in the Netherlands explore multicultural teaching practices jointly through professional learning communities.

Finally, the study highlights the need to have high expectations for migrant students’ learning capabilities. For migrant students to achieve the same levels of learning as their native-born peers, teachers and principals say they see three areas of service. First, two-thirds of teachers and most principals emphasize that migrant children need help in learning the English language. Yet half the teachers say they lack the skills they need to provide ESL instruction, as well as the skills to provide bilingual or multilingual lessons when teaching subjects such as Mathematics and Science. Second, schools need to ensure that vulnerable students, such as migrants, have access to education resources like bilingual content and eLearning devices. This remains important in

times of emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic when bilingual content and eLearning devices can ensure educational continuity. Teachers also need training in hybrid bilingual education to ensure continued instruction for migrant students. Additionally, teachers and caregivers call for tutors and English classes to support the integration process in the school community. These calls among Belizean educators for English-language and bilingual instruction are consistent with the literature on migrant education, which highlights that language instruction should be a central tenet of integration efforts regarding migrant students (Nusche 2009).

Figure 6.1. Recommendations for a path forward for school-based integration of migrant students



Source: IDB 2020.

Table 6.1: Integration strategies for multicultural learning environments

	Strategy	Best practices
1. Facilitate prompt school enrollment	Smooth transition to schooling	<p>Belgium - Le Petite Ecole offers a smooth transition period in which they become accustomed to the new school and learn the language, the basic school rules, and behavior.</p> <p>Le Petite Ecole provides support activities such as sports, trauma counseling, and artistic activities. The transition period at Le Petite Ecole is individualized according to children's and families' readiness.</p>
	Formative Assessment	<p>Sweden - The Swedish National Agency for Education developed a method to map and assess the knowledge and experience of migrant students based on their language skills, other interests, and basic literacy and numeracy. On this basis, the principal decides into which class to assign the student, i.e. in a separate or mainstream class with additional support. Student performance is monitored and assessed after two months.</p>
2. Partner with migrant parents and school communities	Support of migrant parents	<p>The Pambazuka Project offered by World Relief in Chicago includes a parenting group, parent-and-child together activities and field trips to cultural and educational sites to integrate parents to the daily school activities of their children.</p> <p>United States - Georgia and Texas, for example, under the Migration Education Program have created Parent Advisory Councils (PAC) formed by public officers and migrant parents to provide parents with knowledge and skills for problem solving and decision making, as well as opportunities for parents to function in a variety of roles such as advisors, tutors, audience, and school program supporters and advocates.</p> <p>Ireland - The Maple Leaf Primary School provides English-language classes for migrant parents and organizes activities that bring parents together.</p>
3. Train educators and school administrators in the integration of migrant students	Formal training on diversity, intercultural pedagogy, and formative assessment	<p>Netherlands - Dutch schools have been using the professional learning community's (PLC) method to improve multicultural competence among teachers. Through the PLC, they were able to explore different areas of teaching practices such as how to change the content of a lesson and how to handle issues in a culturally diverse classroom. They shared materials and teaching strategies, thereon (Alhanachi, Severiens, de Meijer, 2018).</p> <p>Austria, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Latvia, Bulgaria and Montenegro - All teachers currently undergoing initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD) have the opportunity to develop or strengthen a wide range of competences relevant for teaching migrant students with a focus on multilingualism, intercultural education, and pedagogy in the context of migration (EACE, 2019). In Cyprus and Luxembourg, CPD activities are mandatory for teachers.</p>
	Strategies to reduce xenophobia	<p>Barça Foundation, Scholas y Futbolmàs - These organizations provide awareness workshops on bullying for primary school children through recreational and participatory dynamics where sport is the motivational context of learning. There are successful experiences in Chile, Paraguay, Kenya, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, Haiti, Greece, Lebanon, Iraq and others.</p> <p>MUSE-E Italia Onus (Italy) - The MUSE-E Project provides group activities through music, singing, theater, and figurative arts with the use of nonverbal languages, which facilitate communication and sharing of creative experiences. They also promote integration between children of different sociocultural backgrounds. The organization works with foreign students in 150 schools in 13 cities in Italy.</p>
4. Offer migrant children remedial education to close learning gaps	Integrating language and subject learning in regular school and bilingual teaching	<p>Norway - The Norwegian National Center for Multicultural Education provides intensive language classes to students through an array of learning materials, including dictionaries, books, and online platforms with scheduled sessions with teachers. The method succeeded in rural areas of Norway where the availability of second-language teachers was scarce.</p> <p>Panama - The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the IDB (PN-T1224) created a bilingual preschool program called Ari Taen JADENKÄ (Count and Play in Ngäbere language), which increases students' math skills compared to the control group.</p>

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Tabular Annex

Table A1

Estimating the probability of sending all children to school (using probit regression models)

Variables	Model 1 All households	Model 2 Migrant households
Caregiver education level		
Primary education or none	...	...
Secondary education or higher	0.068*	0.241***
	(0.039)	(0.054)
Caregiver is employed		
Yes	0.233***	0.257***
	(0.034)	(0.052)
No	...	...
Children have socio-emotional challenges		
Yes	-0.134**	-0.106*
	(0.050)	(0.056)
No	...	...
Has work permit		
Yes		0.089
		(0.090)
No		...
Children have birth certificates		
Yes		0.261***
		(0.054)
No		...
Country of origin		
Guatemala		-0.183**
		(0.077)
El Salvador		-0.239**
		(0.095)
Honduras		...
Family status		
Belizean	-0.091*	
	(0.050)	
Migrant	...	
Constant	0.385	0.269
Observations	859	398
Pseudo R2	0.0696	0.2546

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Standard errors are in brackets.

Note: Controls include geographical area, district, and whether children have difficulties with the language.

Table A2

Estimating the effects on school performance of migrant students (using ordinary least squares regression models)

Variables	Model 1 English scores	Model 2 Math scores
District		
Belize	3.274	8.082
	(6.088)	(6.301)
Cayo	1.659	9.549**
	(3.610)	(3.618)
Stann Creek	-2.210	-0.893
	(3.733)	(3.744)
Toledo	...	...
School has internet access		
Yes	3.442	-1.378
	(3.798)	(3.877)
No	...	...
Child speaks English		
Yes	15.222***	5.575**
	(2.258)	(2.275)
No	...	...
Child left their country due to violence		
Yes	-3.304	-9.041***
	(2.304)	(2.323)
No	...	...
Constant	58.036	70.935
Observations	213	215
R2	0.2238	0.1636

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Standard errors are in brackets.

Note: Controls include geographical area.

Table A3

Estimating the probability of migrant children having challenges (using probit regression models)

Variables	Model 1 Socio-emotional challenges	Model 2 Difficulties learning English
Caregiver education level		
Primary education or none	...	...
Secondary education or higher	-0.108* (0.065)	-0.184** (0.061)
Years in Belize		
5 years or less	0.224*** (0.056)	0.289*** (0.053)
More than 5 years	...	...
Left their country due to violence		
Yes	0.271*** (0.049)	0.075 (0.046)
No	...	...
Have friends/family in Belize		
Yes	-0.094* (0.051)	-0.117** (0.046)
No	...	...
Constant	-0.559	-0.079
Observations	427	427
Pseudo R2	0.135	0.1363

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Standard errors are in brackets.

Note: Models consider only migrant families. Controls include geographical area and district.

Table A4

Estimating the probability that Belizean caregivers feel that migrant students have a positive effect on the school environment and the probability of Belizean children having migrant friends (using probit regression models)

Variables	Model 1 Positive effect of migrant students	Model 2 Children have migrant friends
Caregiver education level		
Primary education	...	...
Secondary education or higher	0.187**	0.012
	(0.052)	(0.038)
Caregivers consider themselves knowledgeable about migrants		
Yes	0.025	
	(0.055)	
No	...	
Children have socio-emotional challenges		
Yes		-0.594**
		(0.141)
No		...
Constant	-0.372	0.856
Observations	432	411
Pseudo R2	0.0244	0.0972

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Standard errors are in brackets.

Note: Models consider only Belizean families. Controls include geographical area and district.