



**Children Hybrid Integration: Learning Dialogue
as a way of Upgrading Policies of Participation**

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Towards Participatory Schools



Towards Participatory Schools



Education and the Agency of Migrant Children

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Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Methodology	11
Sampling	13
Conducting Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic	14
Migrant Children at School – Theoretical Frameworks	16
The School as an Educational and Social Space	19
The School of Our Dreams	20
School – What is the Reality?	27
The Affective and Relational Dimensions of School	30
Relationships with Teachers	31
Relationships with Peers	36
Conflict and Conflict Management	39
Sources of Support	41
Teachers and Other Professionals	42
Family: Parent(s) and Siblings	43
Grades	46
Language Acquisition	49
Factors Influencing Children’s Language Competences	50
Language Skills	52
The Role of the Mother Tongue in Enhancing Language Competences and the Value of Multilingualism	54
Methods of Teaching the Language of the Receiving Country	56

Fostering Children's Agency	58
Factors Shaping Migrant Children's Agency	60
Forms of Expressing Agency	64
The Gender Dimension of Agency	65
Enhancing Agency Through Peer Networks	66
Agency Outside the School Environment	68
Future Plans	69
Children's After-School Activity Spaces	70
Keeping in Touch with the Language and Culture of Origin	72
The Impact of COVID-19 on Student Agency and Participation	73
The COVID-19 Pandemic and Children's Participation in School: Voices from Professionals and Students	75
Schools after Lockdown	81
Maintaining Relations between Classmates	82
The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children's Agency	83
Recommendations	85
The School as a Relational Space	86
The School as an Educational Space	90
The School as a Space for Children's Personal Development	91
The Work of Professionals and Cooperation Between Institutions	94
Conclusion	96
Bibliography	100

Introduction

**'A Child's Place Is Not in the Woods'.
The Significance of the CHILD UP Project**

Whilst this report was being written, a horrendous refugee and humanitarian crisis played out along the Polish and Belarusian border.¹ Thousands of people, mainly from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and both Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa have sought a way to enter the EU, hoping to reach Germany, France, or the Netherlands in search of a better place to live or to reunite with family members who had emigrated earlier. They believed that Poland would be a gateway to a better future, and that the route through Belarus would be simple and safe. Yet they were unaware of the geographical distances separating them from their destination countries or the devious political and economic strategies that Lukashen-

ko's regime had implemented along this new migration route. Prevented from crossing the Polish border by soldiers, the police, and border guards, they effectively became trapped in a no-man's land between the two countries. Stuck in a narrow strip of land in the primeval Białowieża Forest, these refugees have found themselves in a stalemate, unable to move forward or back. The greatest victims of the anti-humanitarian policy being practiced are the children amongst them, who are experiencing hunger, terrible cold, a lack of safe shelter, and the deaths of their loved ones. In a desperate attempt to help, activists from non-governmental organizations and ad hoc citizen-led initiatives have staged protests and fought to supply aid to those who are extremely exhausted, ill, and even dying.

¹ Since the beginning of 2021, the Polish Border Guard have recorded over 37,000 attempted illegal crossings of the Polish and Belarusian border, with over 3,500 in August, close to 7,700 in September, nearly 17,300 in October, and more than 8,000 staged in November. https://www.rmfm24.pl/raporty/raport-stan-wyjatkowy/news-miejsce-dzieci-nie-jest-w-lesie-w-hajnowce-odbyl-sie-protest,nld,5657587#crp_state=1 (date of access: 7.01.2022)

Particularly heart-breaking has been the fate of the children, suffering together with their parents, and sometimes becoming separated from them and lost in the vast expanse of the forest. Despite being illegal under EU and international law, border guards and soldiers employ pushback tactics on those very children if they succeed in crossing over. As some activists have aptly put it, a “child’s place is not in the woods”.²

Such stories document a horrific migration childhood marked by wars, exile, and a resulting deep trauma. The fate of children may be linked to other forms of migration, not only those involving refugeeism, but also those concerning economic, family, religious, and cultural migration. Regardless of this, the place for migrant children is not in the woods, but in school, the best way to ensure their inclusion and better life. The children at the border are deprived of such a chance, with it unclear if and when they would start their education, go to a nursery, make up for their backlogs in learning, or the losses related to peer relationships they have missed. Pessimism strides before optimism. Their hopes for the future have been shattered in the midst of this forest and they have been let down by insufficient European policies. Now, more than ever, research on migrant children is extremely important, with ever changing issues that are to be investigated (see the case of Poland and Belarus) and which guide us to a re-arrangement of policies and practices focused on the child’s well-being and migration success.

The Horizon 2020 CHILD UP project has responded to the challenges faced by all the receiving countries **to provide migrant children with inclusion in society, protection, safety, and a good quality of life.** Achiev-

ing these goals begins with education, a multi -structure-oriented school, the placement of migrant children in the migration system, with professional staff encouraging and strengthening the educational aspirations of children in a creative way. As the project partners have emphasized, the 21st century is an age of the migration of children, with an increase in their visibility in migration and a growing awareness of the importance of including their voices on issues concerning education, achievements in learning, educational aspirations, relations in their school environment, and their agency in overcoming various barriers and difficulties.

To grasp the plurality of their complex school experiences, we will rely on thick comparison (Niewöhner, Scheffer 2010). This approach allows us to conduct a context-sensitive comparison through empirically-relevant categories that will enable us to show the particularities of their lived experiences. National cases are brought into correlation and reveal particularities and similarities, while simultaneously fostering middle-range theorising on the school as a social, educational and self-development space.

CHILD-UP addresses the issue of migrant children in Europe **through an innovative perspective, based on the concepts of children agency and hybrid cultural integration.** This project places the self-determination of children at its heart: allowing children to select the cultural elements of originating country and hosting country, of generational discourse, and local and global perspectives to combine them in an original and unique personal synthesis.³ The tremendous mobility of children which leads many to experience transnational childhoods, requires the

² The Ocalenie Foundation shared the case of a 20-person group of migrants via social media. There were eight children among them, including 2.5-year old Almand, 4.5-year old Alas, and 6-year old Arin. They were in need of help, and were already in the territory of Poland (in the town of Szymki, Michałowo Commune). <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/bialystok/dzieci-z-michalowa-nowe-nagranie-z-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej/0f2g4k3> (date of access: 18.11.2021)

³ <http://www.child-up.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CHILD-UP-basic-brochure-v10.pdf> (date of access: 18.11.2021)

application of a unique child-centred approach (Ni Laoire et al. 2011; Tyrell et al. 2013). Such a requirement stems from the assumptions of the new sociology of childhood (1970s) in which the child is discovered as an agent, a reflecting actor, who may tell us a lot about their experiences, occurrences, and connections of transnational migrations with their childhood. Perceiving children as passive actors has been primarily driven by the fact that children were mostly viewed as victims of conflicts and violence produced by wars and migration of their parent/s, who have been the key decision-makers about migration movement, its nature and course. This “paradigm shift” is manifested in the application of different qualitative or participation methods that allow children to be given a voice (Christensen, Prout 2012: 42; Hogan 2012; Scott 2004; Smith 2011; Baraldi 2014) and research to be designed “with children”, and not only “on children”. Children are not to be seen as “migration baggage” (Orellana 2001), but rather as active actors influencing numerous spheres of family and social life (Scott 2004: 122). They are perceived as rightly entitled individuals, who act and have an impact on the lives of others, on what happens around them, and who take decisions in specific broader social conditions, respond to what life brings about, naturally as measured by their own means and possibilities.

The quantitative studies confirm⁴ the urgent need to conduct systematic research dedicated to children from a multidimensional perspective (including their cultural background, social, institutional and legal factors, as well as global trends). An important factor which is driving research is also the noticeable difference between national cultures, where

national norms and values permeate many spheres of everyday life and only a limited space allows for multicultural optics in politics, institutions, and practices.

The qualitative research carried out as a part of the CHILD-UP project focused on: (1) the ways in which professionals working different school institutions enable children to learn and motivate them to participate in the social processes in which they are involved in; (2) children's expectations, levels of trust, present and desired future activities, relationships with environments, protection systems (where existing) and the school system, and evaluation of social factors. It captured the attitudes and values of the respondents involved in specific educational life situations, and allows the world to be perceived from a subjective perspective, i.e. seen through the prism of the subjective experiences of the individuals participating in it. Here we refer to the tradition of the Polish school of humanities (Znaniecki, Thomas 1976), where social reality is captured “with the humanistic coefficient” in order to foster a child centred approach. This methodological directive assumes that “the real environment of social groups is not the environment seen and known by the observer who locates these groups [...] in it, but those that the members of these groups themselves perceive as data in the course of their experience [...]” (Szacki 1981: 741). And further: “This feature of cultural phenomena, objects of humanistic research, their essential property that, as objects of theoretical reflection, they are already objects given to someone in experience or someone's conscious activities, we can call the humanistic coefficient of these phenomena” (Szacki 1981: 740).

⁴ According to the data provided by the Migration Data Portal, 12% of the total were child migrants under 18 years of age, while the young ones, aged 15 to 24, accounted for 11%. In Europe, these figures stood at 7% and 10%, respectively. Absolute figures and a proportional share of children in migration streams are obviously differentiated depending on a region. According to the data by UN DESA the largest percentage is accounted for by Africa, however, the last thirty years (1990-2020) have seen a slight, but steady increase of the figure also in the case of Europe, which only strengthens our conviction about the need to conduct research in this area.

In more detail, through qualitative study (focus group interviews, individual in-depth direct and on-line interviews) with professionals (teachers, cultural assistants/mediators/interpreters, and social workers) and migrant children (among others selected on the basis of their school age, ISCED0, ISCED1, ISCED2, ISCED3, and their migration background) conducted in Italy, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Poland we examine the role of schools and educational centres in empowering migrant children. Children's experiences are explored with regard to schools as learning, emotional and relational spaces, shedding light on children's aspirations, peer relationships and cooperation with parents, as well as the gender and intercultural dimensions of social relationships.

Naturally, the research was impacted tremendously by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the extended lockdowns leading to the closure of all schools in most countries. Nevertheless, this was treated as an opportunity rather than a limitation, and the research objectives were expanded to consider the influence of the pandemic on the experiences of children and professionals in education, with the former experiencing restrictions in terms of relationships in addition to the public health measures. The pandemic had a profound impact on both the school and out-of-school experiences of students and professionals alike, and our research at least partially captures the vulnerability, resilience and renewal that were features of this period. The pandemic led to the decision to alter the research methodology (e.g. abandoning focus group interviews and replacing them with individual interviews conducted online or face-to-face when the opportunity arose, for more details, see the research methodology section).

The report has the following structure. First, it briefly presents the main methodological issues, focusing on the aims of the research, sampling measures and the implications that the COVID-19 pandemic had for the project. The second part of the report is devoted to selected findings

from the research, presented across all countries involved in the CHILD-UP project. It starts with a section on school as an educational space and as a social space to discuss problems such as the importance of grades for children, language acquisition, support offered to children, relationships with teachers, peers, and parents in the context of cooperation with the school. The third part of the report is dedicated to the key project results concerning the agency of migrant children at school. The fourth part presents the results showing the functioning of schools and students during the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges to be tackled after the lifting of public health measures. The fifth part presents recommendations and conclusions, synthesizing the results across the countries.

Methodology

The qualitative research engaged professionals and children in an exploration of the educational experiences of children with migrant backgrounds. It focused on the participation and agency of children as seen by these two distinct groups. The research involved individual and group interviews which allowed us to discuss the difficulties at school together with the potential and opportunities which school brings, the impact of policies and the support offered to children with migration backgrounds and the professionals working with them.

The qualitative study expanded the findings from the quantitative survey, showing a more detailed and nuanced picture of the inclusion of migrant children, their participation in schools and their agency. To provide a coherent vision of these processes, the schools which took part in WP4 were invited to participate in the next phase of the research. Although all of the invited schools recognised the importance of the topic

and the potential of the CHILD-UP project in all countries, it was not always possible to involve them in the study. While the qualitative study was conducted in the same schools in Sweden that were involved in WP4, most of the professionals who took part in the interviews in Belgium were from different schools than those included in WP4. In Finland, the UK and Italy the study was conducted mostly in schools which had already participated in the quantitative part of the project, with only a few additional interviews conducted with newly recruited schools. The research sample was modified to a greater extent in Germany and Poland, where some schools/day care centres refused to participate further citing the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased workload faced by professionals. To cope with the situation, new institutions were successfully approached. Additionally, it was not possible to carry out interviews in reception centres in Germany because the pandemic regulations imposed many limitations within the scope of the project.

The qualitative study was conducted on the same guidelines in all countries for the in-depth interviews, which in each case was adjusted to the country context and to the interviewee. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the fieldwork was either entirely postponed or interrupted and only resumed when the pandemic regulations were relaxed. As a result, the interviews with professionals were conducted between early March 2020 and lasted for a year (until March 2021) and with children – between February 2020 and June 2021.

Sampling

A total of 284 interviews with professionals were carried out, despite the often low responsiveness of schools due to their lack of resources and capacities supporting the researchers and the project. The table below shows the overall number of professionals who took part in the research.⁵

COUNTRY	TEACHERS/EDUCATORS		SOCIAL WORKERS		MEDIATORS/INTERPRETERS		PROFESSIONALS IN RECEPTION CENTRES	
	No of interviews	No of FGI / no of FGI participant	No of interviews	No of FGI / no of FGI participant	No of interviews	No of FGI / no of FGI participant	No of interviews	No of FGI / no of FGI participant
Belgium	10	-	2	-	1	1 / 4	0	-
Finland	13	-	7	-	4	-	-	3/10
Germany	8	4/14	9	-	2	1/3	-	-
Italy	43	-	6	-	1	8 / 21	6	-
Poland	17	1 / 5	8	-	-	1 / 7	2	-
Sweden	12	-	8	-	5	-	-	-
UK	42	-	14	-	-	-	-	-

TABLE 1

Sampling – professionals

⁵ Quotes from the individual interviews are presented in the report (on the right part of the page) with the following codes: PL_SW1_F: PL – country, SW – group interviewed (e.g. SW – social workers. T-teachers, M-mediators/translators, CH – children), 1 – interview number, F/M – female/male.

It is worth noting that professionals worked at all ISCED levels and had regular contact with children with migration backgrounds. Respondents included class teachers, subject teachers, teachers of a local language as a second language, school assistants, and youth and leisure instructors. As for the social workers, the sample included both social workers working in the school and in a reception centre as well as those working directly with migrant children and those working primarily with the entire family. Moreover, some of the professionals (e.g. in Germany) also had a migration background.

In the case of FGI with children, the sample included both migrant and non-migrant children as FGIs were conducted with the entire class. In some countries – such as Belgium – this had an impact on the course of the interview as questions concerning migrant background could not have been asked as this would mean revealing personal data as well as sharing information which children may not have wanted to reveal to their colleagues. The group sizes of the FGI with children also varied between countries and schools – from only 2 people (in Finland or Germany) to 24 children (in Belgium). In addition to FGIs, individual interviews with children with a migration background were carried out in most countries.⁶

Conducting Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The CHILD-UP qualitative research was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The fieldwork coincided with its outbreak and con-

tinued throughout, which in all countries gave rise to continuing uncertainty regarding the possibility and the extent of research. In all countries new regulations aimed at alleviating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic made access to schools much more difficult, leading to delays in the recruitment process, carrying out interviews, changes in planned activities and even the manner in which interviews were conducted. Moreover, it was not possible to hold face-to-face interviews due to social distancing requirements and to ensure the health and wellbeing of both the children and professionals. As a result, they had to be substituted (entirely or partially) by online interviews in the case of individual interviews with professionals (in Belgium or Italy). Even more difficulties arose in case of focus group interviews which were partially replaced with individual interviews (e.g. in Poland and Belgium), with the exception of the UK where all FGIs took place in-person. It should be pointed that there were some limitations to online interviews which were experienced in all countries, including transmission delays, unavoidable distractions, connection problems or difficulties in reading and assessing body language. In Poland, children were assisted by their parents, siblings, and cultural assistants. The latter were present when the interviews were conducted at school to ensure child safety. On the other hand, the German case highlighted the importance of conducting interviews in a space that was not directly linked to education.

Special attention was also focused on protecting the interviewees. The COVID-19 pandemic was difficult and stressful for professionals, who had to quickly reorganize their work and adapt to remote work. In Belgium and Poland, the research was postponed in order to give professionals,

⁶ Quotes from the focus group interviews are presented in the report (on the right part of the page) with the following codes: PL_F1_CH_1_G: PL – country, F1 – number of FGI, CH – group interviewed, 1 – respondent, G/B – girl/boy.

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF FGI	NUMBER OF FGI PARTICIPANT	IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS
Belgium	4	89	11
Finland	7	16	-
Germany	23	52	27
Italy	33	513 approx	-
Poland	6	40	27
Sweden	10	30	-
UK	20	500 approx	-

TABLE 2

Number of interviews
with children

especially teachers, more time and space to manage the switch to online work and to avoid overburdening them. Such a strategy also meant that professionals working in reception centres (e.g. mediators and educators) were interviewed at the end of the school year. Despite the increased workload of professionals, as the Italian case shows, they appreciated the interview and perceived it as a way to reflect on their practices, as well as the tools and programmes they had used.

The COVID-19 pandemic also made children's timetables much more intensive. Therefore, the teachers in Belgium were reluctant to give up their classes for FGI with children since they had already lost too much teaching time during school closures and were afraid of further limitations due to the new organizational constraints placed on teaching. Similarly, teachers in Finland were not willing to facilitate the interviews with children as they found, among others, the process of organizing interviews to be too demanding (e.g. getting consent forms from guardians) and time-consuming as well as distracting the children from their safe routines and learning.

Migrant Children at School

– Theoretical Frameworks

While discussing the educational sphere, we are primarily interested in issues concerning children's education **in institutional and non-institutional dimensions**, i.e. the course of important educational processes in school and out-of-school environments, or the experience of multiculturalism presented from the perspective of both professionals working with children (teachers, mediators, social workers) and the children themselves. **The school is a metaphor for both integration into the receiving society and the question of one's own identity**, a confrontation of mutual expectations on the part of the receiving state and migrants (Adams, Kirova 2007; Adams, Shambleau 2006; Reynolds 2008). It can also be a place where the migrant child faces barriers: linguistic, social and cultural, or quite the opposite, it becomes a space for deeper integration (D'Angelo, Ryan 2011).

This report focuses primarily on **the school as a social space**, but we must bear in mind the national contexts of the educational system for all its participants (e.g. the centralisation of the system vs. the autonomy of schools and teachers) as well as national immigration and integration policy, i.e. the issue of including children with a migrant background in education and socialization processes. As already noted, education plays a key role in the **integration** of children, in **building relationships** with others, in providing them with **knowledge** (especially language competence) and in discovering their **identity**, assuming that their right to **agency** is identified and acknowledged. Recognising the importance of agency allows us to discover its different forms both within individual schools and between countries. This approach also allows us to focus on children's formal and informal activities, their participation in school life, their activity among peers and their family (Baraldi, Cockburn 2018; Baraldi, Iervese 2014). The dynam-

ics of the peer groups and teachers (and other professionals as well) and the arrangements used to ensure inclusiveness, avoiding discrimination or emphasising the values of different cultures are also crucial for participation in school life and educational development. However, Senge (2000, see also Carrington and Robinson 2006) warns against the **phenomenon of the apparent change**. He notes that there is often a dissonance between teachers' declarations of inclusive assumptions and the actual implementation of traditional, deeply rooted personal beliefs, values and attitudes expressed in interaction with students, conflicting with ideas of inclusion. From the perspective of social constructivism, it must be acknowledged that teachers are guided in their activities related to **inclusive education** by their already formed system of values and beliefs (Rodriguez 2004).

All these assumptions and limitations concerning the actions of professionals must be taken into account at the classroom level, when we focus on the support of students, including students with a migrant background. Here we encounter the following issues: **school policies, teaching the language of instruction** (Rokita-Jaśkow, Pamuła-Behrens 2019; Pamuła-Behrens 2018), working with classes to build cohesive student groups in a multicultural environment, conflict mediation, prevention of discrimination, exclusion and bullying, intercultural education, fostering children's agency and participation (Bjerke 2011; Faas et al. 2014; Lewowicki 2011; Nikitorowicz 2015). This is **both an institutional perspective**, resulting from existing legal frameworks and established ways of doing things, **but also a perspective of the actions of individuals**, of good practices, or conversely of oppression, discrimination or exclusion. We also need to be aware that, from the point of view of professionals, the question of agency is always a matter of choice and negotiation. It reflects on the dilemma posed by acknowledging the agency of migrant children while at the same time considering the constraints they encounter as minors and migrants within a broader school context (Jørgensen 2017; Curdt-Christiansen 2020).

In turn, by focusing on pupils, we need to consider their personal and family situation as they often have had difficult experiences and are facing a time of transition into a new society which can be hampered both by restrictive policies or discrimination, but also the particular cultural background of particular migrant groups and lack of cohesion between cultures, so called cultural discontinuity, might contribute to the development of their children's mental health or social problems (Gonneke et al. 2008; Salinas 2013; Lovelace, Wheeler 2006). A crucial factor is their agency and participation in school activities, their building of relationships with their peers, situations of exclusion (e.g. because of their origin, but also because of their lack of language skills) or their strategies of resistance to the school reality if it is perceived as oppressive, which can relate both to the issue of content communicated in curricula (Hoerder 2005) and to school relationships with professionals and peers. Hoerder argues that curricula constructed by representatives of dominant cultures are aimed at transmitting the values and attitudes of the dominant culture to colonized or immigrant youths but simultaneously stresses that migrant children have a broader perspective, since they have the ability to switch between at least two cultural contexts or negotiate between them. Depending on the activity of the students, we can refer here to the creation of the so-called "third space" (Bhabha 1994), but also conceptions indicating marginalization due to the complex interactions that lie at the juncture of age, ethnicity, social class and place or level of language of instruction proficiency (Sime, Fox 2015; Grzymała-Moszczyńska, Trąbka 2014). On the other hand, we have school activities that can foster the construction of subjectivity and hybrid identities of migrant children, assuming the adoption of an inclusive school culture (Ainscow 2005) and the implementation of intercultural education, which is one of the solutions to the challenges of multicultural classrooms, combining official policy with the ways in which identity and culture are discussed and negotiated in a given sociocultural context (Banks, McGee Banks 2009).

The School as an Educational **and Social Space**

The School of Our Dreams

The school cannot be solely understood as a place to acquire knowledge and where the curriculum is implemented, or even in the macro-social context as a place that affects the life chances of individuals. Instead, it should be perceived as a social micro-world, as an educational and social space. To explore this dimension of the school in our research, we decided to compile information regarding how students⁷ **see and feel** the school (also considering here that this is their perception of reality and may differ from student to student) as we asked them to project an ideal school that meets their needs.

Combining the findings from the research in all countries, we can distinguish four characteristics of the ideal school:

- **a friendly school**, a place where one enjoys spending time;
- the school as a place that teaches in a way that **meets expectations and needs**;
- the school as a **place of autonomy and empowerment**;
- a school where teachers are **supportive and engaged**.

It is worth emphasizing that this is not a disjunctive division, but rather an analytical separation of key aspects for creating the shape of the desired school.

⁷ In this section we consider the students' perspective, with the views of teachers and other professionals covered in the chapters which follow.

A FRIENDLY SCHOOL

When asked about their school, children frequently referred to its physical dimensions, the architecture of the building, the functions assigned to the rooms and how they decode them. In cultural geography, *place* is understood to grant security, belonging or meaning (Ellis 2004). Places can create a *social space* for growth and self-development but also oppression and exclusion (Hay 1988). As Donoghue emphasizes: "All learning is emplaced. It happens somewhere and it involves material things. It is located and situated" (2007: 62). Spatial metaphors are useful for understanding the politics of inclusion and integration, managing the participation and creating hierarchies (de Hann, Leander 2011). Therefore, as Apple (1990: 49) points out, there is **the hidden curriculum** on the one hand, a set of norms, rules and expectations that regulate both the physical space of the school: the construction, the 'boundary lines of the school' that only authorised people can cross, but there are also the **organisational practices and the possibility of influencing school reality** (Regalsky, Laurie 2007). On the other hand, we locate students' aspirations to maintain autonomy and agency, their active participation, which are possible to enhance alternative actions, and therefore change in the interaction (Baraldi 2014).

The students addressed the issue of the school's appearance in different ways. These could be simple proposals to change the colour (but, as in the case of the Italian students, even linked to a declaration of participation in its redecoration), bold and impossible concepts or ideas for re-arranging the space, meaning shifts in the functions of the place, e.g. one of the British students would redesign the school to have a playground in the central area. All these dreams also lead to other conclusions – students would like to have their voice included in planning the appearance of the school, they would like its shape to relate to their needs. Such a space

Boy1: like decorating the classrooms more because they are all white and grey.

Interviewer (I): but to do it yourselves or to have someone do it for you?

Boy1: not us, I mean it would be nice (IT_F23_CH_B)

My first wish would be that our school was in the middle of a jungle, in a forest, where there is also a lake where we can go swimming.

(G_F24_ISCED1_G)

A big, huge play area where all kids can play together and catch up and do nice things so they do not go there like they are going to get bored. (UK_F1_CH_1_B)

And everyone is kind of friends with everyone and none of the guys thinks it's embarrassing to be with someone of the opposite sex.

(SWE_F8_ISCED1)

would be non-hierarchical and open to all and can promote good relations for all. As the Swedish students pointed out, good relations between students mean that there are no group boundaries. This also concerns the **gender issues** – relationships between boys and girls. It also means peer support, respect for others and no bullying or making fun of others. Reflecting on the shaping of space, therefore, also leads us to think about solutions to the significant problems experienced by students – exclusion, intolerance, discrimination. Stressing the need for gender equality, something clearly articulated and especially by students in Belgium, should also be included here. In Belgian focus groups both male and female students often mentioned that their ideal school would have a less restrictive dress code and a more equal treatment of boys and girls. They also criticized the separation by gender for sports practice and gym class, and they wanted to have the opportunity to participate in the same activities. Separation, in their view, affected the focus of each gender on traditional sports or activities, for example, girls did not have the opportunity to play football.

As a continuation of the changes in the functioning of the school space, suggestions can be made to increase the number of so-called extra-curricular activities. Italian students here referred to an idealized conception of the American school as a place where students could also engage in art, music, dance, or sports much more frequently than in their home schools, but similar ideas emerged in all countries. Creating opportunities for more extracurricular activities was also one of the teachers' demands. One might wonder to what extent these activities are still "extra-curricular" in the expectations of students (and teachers), and to what extent they would like them to take a more central place.

The requested changes also translate into expectations regarding the organization of the day, an issue raised by students from Italy and Belgium, among others. Students referred to both the starting time of the lessons, with older students especially wanting to start later, but

Girl: Then you want everyone to be friends, and friends are important for studies, I think.

Boy: For concentration, you do not have to think "where would I be now on the break? Would people laugh at me?" (SWE_F7_ISCED2)

Boy1: Like some more activities, like in American schools there is the option of doing activities after the lessons like music, dance, etc.

Boy2: Exactly [...]

Boy1: Things like theatre music and dance, for me, I would do them in a shot [...] because they are things that attract me. (IT_F5_CH_B)

School shouldn't start so early in the morning so you don't have to wake up super early, but just be a little bit later and finish in the afternoon. (IT_F22_CH_G)

also called for longer breaks, so that the intervals between lessons were not just a time to reorganize, but a real opportunity to “switch”, a time to get rid of stress from the previous lesson. Students were mostly in agreement that the school day was too long and too full. In an ideal school they would start later and have longer breaks. They also called for fewer hours of study and far less homework. Students (e.g., from Great Britain) even emphasized the disturbed work-life balance, the limitation of life only to school.

To sum up, a friendly school is a school without such a rigid time and space structure. On the contrary, it considers the needs and wishes of students as well as their changing developmental requirements. It also has the effect of reducing the distance between pupils and teachers and creating a more relaxed atmosphere without fear of this translating into educational or behavioural difficulties – as one Belgian student described it, the need to ask for permission to drink water was because “they do not trust us” (BE_F2_2_B) and in another focus group a student stated, “they should trust us” (BE_F1_1_B).

A PLACE OF LEARNING TO MEET NEEDS

Students are very critical of schools as a place to acquire knowledge and skills, although there were differences between countries, depending on the age of the pupils (older pupils, from ISCED level 3, as in the case of Italy, were far more reflective) and the form of the survey (it was much easier for pupils to make comments during focus groups than in the individual interviews which some countries switched to because of pandemic restrictions). They perceive the school as an ossified institution that responds very little to contemporary challenges and hardly at all to the grassroots voices of students questioning established ways of doing things. One Italian student compared it to the situation at the time of the

Sometimes I cannot enjoy my time with friends because I think about school. I need real free time without stress. (UK_F5_CH_7_G)

Schools have been at a standstill for one hundred years, he said, and therefore it must be revolutionized in the way that carriages developed into cars, the school should be revolutionized. (IT_F8_CH_B)

That the school would address the labour market, to do a little more practice, to prepare you for what it will be used for. (IT_F8_CH_B)

Boy: We had so much fun when Mr. [teacher's name removed] was telling stories of him going to school and he did not like it then I like it and the funny stories with his friends

I: How did it make you feel?

Boy: Fun and it looked like me actually (UK_F16_CH_2_B)

It would be nice if our teachers could narrate better. The lesson. Then it could be better. (G_F27_ISCED1_F)

invention of automobiles and emphasized that the **changes must be revolutionary**, profound, and total. Students were also able to identify what they believe are the key directions for change in educational content and teaching methodology. First, they would expect a much stronger link between school and experience and practice, which in their opinion would also translate into better preparation for entering the labour market.

They also pointed out that in addition to imparting knowledge and shaping skills, the school is a **place that should include personal narratives and feelings** understood as the opportunity to refer to one's own experiences in the learning process, something which strengthens the sense of agency and self-competence. British students even felt that such openness to the whole person should apply to everyone and would also expect teachers to sometimes share their own personal memories and stories. Students also simply found learning easier and more fun when teachers paid attention to student interests and devoted more time to their strategies and methods. It is therefore a call for a holistic view of the student, the use of a person-centred approach, activities to engage students in the learning process, moving away from assimilationist, mainly verbal teaching methods, looking for an individual approach to the student, and teaching through play. Such suggestions, arising from the everyday experiences of students, appeared in the findings of each of the countries studied. Importantly, the formulated demands do not imply an unwillingness to overcome difficulties or to cope with challenges. On the contrary, e.g. Swedish students cited a good practice which they called "challenging", recognized by them as difficult, but in a good way, because it helps the students to become better in different school subjects and which was recognized as helpful for future studies.

Finally, students expect that in a digital world, where new technologies are important in virtually every area of life, schools should also use them to a greater extent than they currently do, a demand that emerged in most of the countries we studied.

Like you don't just go to school, like you're welcome to come and learn. Not just like you're forced to do something, but that different people learn in different ways. --- So when the teacher says to me, 'Write', and I learn by listening, it becomes difficult to me. I get nothing but writing benefits someone else. But that we all have to do it. (FI_F4_CH_2_G)

I believe that in school you have to learn while having fun because if it's too serious, ultimately it's hard to learn. (IT_F21_CH_G)

I: Challenging in a good way. What do you mean then?
Boy: I mean, it's hard. But these difficulties will help us in the future. For example, if I get a difficult task, then I learn something new from that. Or if I happen to do something wrong, I learn from that mistake, and in high school I will be able to do it better, or have seen it before. (SWE_F10_ISCED2)

Boy1: Definitely tablets for everyone instead of paper.
F1: So no one would learn how to write.
Boy1: I can write on my tablet like on paper, you can learn too.
Boy2: Life needs computer they need to be in schools. (UK_F8_CH)

AN EMPOWERING PLACE

The third characteristic of an ideal school is its **empowering potential**. Students feel that they are able and willing to take responsibility for their educational process and would like to be included as partners in teaching and learning rather than being treated as passive recipients of teachers' activities. The change advocated by children concerns their participation in their own education, based on active participation and possibility of bringing personal experiences and knowledges in the classroom. Looking deeper into the statements of British students, we notice that just the simple act of moving away from strictly curricular content and giving the children/young people a voice increases their sense of satisfaction with being in the classroom and their feeling that their stock of knowledge has grown. The students also referred to the way of teaching used in universities, where – in the perception of the students – undergraduates have much more freedom to decide when and how they will learn, however, they must eventually demonstrate that they have mastered the expected range of material/possess the requisite skills.

THE SCHOOL AS A SUPPORTIVE PLACE

Finally, the last important feature of the **school should be the support** that is always available. In each of the countries, students indicated the presence of engaged and supportive teachers when designing their dream school. The Belgian students here started with very simple things – teachers should do their job and not something else during class time. We have chosen to raise this in the report because the negative indication of this approach by teachers is extremely important. While younger students might perhaps only have a vague sense that something is not right, teenagers are extremely sensitive to displays of hypocrisy on the

Boy1: the best thing ever is when we talk about what we have done with our friends and with the family.

I: Why is that?

Boy1: It feels nice to hear stories about places and to know what we do.

I: So you learn about them?

Boy1: You hear new things. (UK_F10_CH_1_B)

I found out that in college you study and then at the end you have to submit what you studied, and they give you a grade. And just so you don't have to have the anxiety of handing in the homework, but you have to study and then just through oral or written tests they question you on certain things that you studied. (IT_F29_CH_B)

For some courses, [the teachers] are not really attentive. 'Well, we give you lessons and while you do that for 50 minutes, I am going on Amazon to order my new shoes.' There are teachers who did that, for example... (BE_I8_B)

Boy: I remember that we were talking about what we do on Sunday and Mrs. [teacher's name removed] told me that what I do is very interesting I was feeling like happy.

I: Like proud?

Boy: Yes. (UK_F14_CH_2_B)

part of adults. Teachers' formulated expectations that students will be active, engaged, and willing to work must resonate with educators' attitudes. British students, as already mentioned, greatly appreciated their teachers' openness and readiness to share their experiences. Moreover, they emphasised how an attitude of interest in students and the active appreciation of their work could be particularly effective. They also pointed out the ability to rise above possible resentment that a student is talking to another person instead of engaging in a lesson, and to use this situation to engage students in dialogue. For Italian students, engagement and support is particularly evident in an understanding approach. The students are also very appreciative of teachers who make it clear that they enjoy working with them, that they enjoy spending time with them. In general, a "new school is a school *«which understands students' needs better, which not only focuses on teaching, but also on spending time together [...] teachers and students should help each other more and talk»* (IT_F10_CH_G)" (Baraldi et al. 2021). Finally, Swedish students define engaged and supportive teachers as those for whom it is most important that every student succeeds. At the same time, however, such teachers offer support in a sensitive and individualized way, when and how ever much is necessary. In one of the Swedish schools, there was a specific support activity which was very appreciated by students.

By way of a conclusion to this part, we would like to quote from the Belgian report: "Almost all of the students, both migrant and non-migrant, defined their ideal school in ways that echoed the tenets of inclusive education (Hemelhoet, 2011) and inclusivity amongst the students. They wanted classes that were easier to follow and in which they received more support."

It depends to some extent on the subject and the teaching. I like teachers, who teach not that boring, explaining something briefly, writing at the blackboard what we have to copy. However, sometimes this is necessary too. But some of them teach creatively and they just are nice people and the way they behave towards students, not as friends, but they are pretty kind and when they have a reason to praise someone, they do this really well. However, sometimes it is good as well if they are a bit strict, because my class is, I do not want to say a loud class, but we are definitely not quiet. [...] And there are teachers who are strict, and this is quite good, because then we are aware. We know we have to be silent. Thus, you probably can focus better.
(G_I36_ISCED1_G)

A good teacher should also want the students to succeed in school by supporting them a lot in their learning. A boy gives an example of how a positive support is implemented by one of their teachers: 'she helps us all the time. If we ask one thing, she answers a hundred times'.
(SWE_F4_ISCED2)

Girl1: At this school, we have something called Stahl. It is that every teacher gives help with homework. For example, the math teacher has on Tuesdays from four to five, then there are not as many students of course, and you get more help.
Girl2: Then there is more focus on the student who needs help.
(SWE_F3_ISCED3)

School – What is the Reality?

Knowing the features of the ideal school, we can pose the question of how students perceive and evaluate the real school as they have it today. What do they value in it, and what is subject to criticism?

Above all, school is valued above all as a meeting place, a space for contact with friends (the lockdown period was difficult for many students for this reason). Some students even explicitly indicated that they enjoyed their breaks the most, because they could freely spend time with friends.

As postulated by those children interviewed about their ideal school, students value some school activities greatly, especially those that enable **personal expression** or **group work/collaboration**. On the other hand, **inadequate teaching methods** and **lack of clear rules** in lessons are highlighted as key problems in real schools. These proposals are not very surprising and have been advocated for years. However, it is necessary to add also in the field of criticism the sense of **entanglement in hierarchy** and lack of subjectivity experienced by students. Students expect far more opportunities for co-determination in matters concerning them, as well as the possibility of disagreeing on certain tasks without the fear of consequences. Living in democratic systems, they feel that they should also be able to exercise certain rights at school. They would also expect teachers to be able to cooperate with each other, and to be consistent with one another, especially in terms of organising tasks and student work.

Students also mentioned the requirements of individual classes and hence the postulates of a place to play, to spend free time, so that a space requiring more defined frames can be balanced with a space that gives more freedom. They also take badly to **oppressive behaviour by teachers**, those enforcing discipline by shouting instead of explanation. Additionally, some students stressed inappropriate teacher behaviour

I genuinely like my school a lot and I get on very well with my classmates and teachers. For me the best thing, as my companion has already said, is breaktime, when I was in the first class and I didn't know anyone yet, it was talking with the others to get to know each other better. (IT_F31_CH_G)

I enjoy writing essays so much, when you present something personal [...] yes I like more the personal things, when one can express oneself. (IT_F29_CH_B)

Boy: Working as a group is the best thing about school, apart from playing football during the break, you work with other children, you communicate. (UK_F1_CH_2_B)

The lessons are almost always the same in the sense that the way of doing them never changes. (IT_F22_CH_G)

I don't agree with the amount of homework you give us (...) (IT_F11_CH_G)

or reactions concerning problems that are naturally experienced by migrant children, e.g. one of the students indicated that the teacher disregarded the fact that she may not yet understand handwritten Polish words – instead of support, migrant students sometimes must struggle with the fact that their limitations in the language of instruction are not taken into consideration.

Finally, the last issue raised is **helping to resolve social situations**. Bullying and intolerance from other peers is a problem. For some students, this led to a preference for remote learning, because by staying at home they do not have to face resentment, teasing or exclusion. However, students reported also that sometimes their functioning at school, learning or rest during breaks is disrupted by other students who do not respect the rules. In such situations – where there are no personal conflicts, but situations that violate the comfort of others – it seems important that teachers and other professionals provide support to help define the needs and rules arising from them, but also perhaps to support both sides if a student is unconsciously disruptive because of certain disorders.

To sum up, it is important to note that students – when given the opportunity to speak freely – are very reflective and have a strong need for agency, which was expressed in concrete proposals for school changes. This is of course not the case for all of them. Some migrant students do not formulate proposals for change, because comparing their current schools with their previous ones, they feel the situation has improved – both in terms of the appearance of the schools and the relationships within those the schools, something which was raised in some of the interviews conducted in Poland. As a result, some children were unwilling or unable to say what their dream school would look like, or what they have a problem within a real school. But the dreams and proposals for change or the declarations that they like the school and even that they would like to stay there permanently, show the importance of the school as a place

Teachers would ask us more for our opinion, even for the tests. That they would ask us when it suits us best, because it is democracy, it should be the choice of the student. It's not them [the teachers] who take the tests, it's us who have to study. They should think more of us. And that there is cohesion between teachers, that they organize themselves. (BE_I6_G)

Girl: I don't like it when the teacher(s) shouts and the subject is difficult or incomprehensible, like physics. (PL_F1_CH_G)

Girl: I don't like chemistry and physics, we have one lady and she is always shouting, she writes a lot on the board a lot and with her the writing is incomprehensible, I often have to ask what every word means. (PL_F1_CH_G)

Girl1: During lessons, etc. this boy, he messes around instead of paying attention. During breakfast, they are very noisy as well and in after school care, in the play corner, where you can find costumes and beanbags, they often fight and beat each other up instead of just calmly thinking up a game and then playing it.
I: And this is difficult for you. You said it is stressful.
Girl2: Because it is so noisy. And this is stressful. (G_I23_ISCED1_G)

of integration or exclusion, building or destroying relationships, fostering agency, or pushing them into hierarchical dynamics.

It is still worth raising the question of the extent to which the pandemic and the temporary closure of schools and the provision of remote learning affected the image of the ideal school. This undoubtedly depends to a large extent on the length of the school closure and the assessment of the situation upon return, but it is worth noting the convergence of some of the issues raised – school is, in the opinions of the children, supposed to be a place of socialisation, meetings and social development, as well as available support from teachers and other professionals, while lockdown was a time of social isolation, having to cope alone or rely on the help of parents. On the other hand, referring to the school reality, if the school does not fulfil the message of a friendly place where one can expect support and help in situations of peer conflict, remote learning may be the preferred choice and it is worth paying attention to whether such motivations are present.

The Affective and Relational

Dimensions of School

Social relations have a tremendous influence on children's school realities. The most significant are the relationships with teachers and peers, but those with parents and other family members and professionals such as cultural mediators are also part of the picture.

Relationships with Teachers

"WITHOUT IT, IT WILL NOT WORK" – TRUST, OPENNESS, INDIVIDUAL APPROACH TO CHILDREN

Classroom management and relationships with teachers are key factors in student learning (Fisher et al. 2002; Slee, Cook 1994; Buswell et al. 1999). All of the national reports have shown this link as teachers appear

So, what I think is to start from involvement fully in the life of the classroom, making sure everyone is heard by everyone and seen as equal; from there and not vice-versa, catching up academically will come. (UK_T6_F)

to have a significant impact on the experiences and perceptions of schools and thus play a very important role for children, especially for those with a migrant background. The importance of **establishing personal relationships** with children was underlined by most of the teachers, one which manifested itself in a frequent declaration of putting the integration of migrant children over their academic performance, as clearly formulated in the British case. As a crucial process, teachers saw in the first instance **recognizing children's capabilities** rather than concentrate on their deficiencies. The importance of bonding with children is encapsulated by a Swedish teacher's remark, that "Without it, it will not work" (SWE_T1_F), seeing the relational dimension of educators' work as a vital condition for cooperation with children. Teachers noticed that they are important people in children's lives in various ways, sometimes – as discerned in Finnish and German cases – being a role model, sometimes in the absence of parent figure and sometimes just "being there for them" as in Sweden. In this context trust emerges as a key factor in building relationships, especially in British and Swedish context. Migrant students are seen as less self-assured, in need of more attention and greater sensitivity towards their emotions. As already seen in the description of ideal school, teachers highlighted the importance of supportive characteristics of the teacher – student relationships mentioned by teachers.

Trust emerges as an even more important value in children's narratives in all educational levels. In all cases, the meaning of the relations of support, trust and encouragement with teachers were presented as being of crucial importance for both academic performance as well as for children's general self-confidence. Although reports show that children start with a high level of confidence in educational system, it can be undermined by teachers. Moreover, children mention barriers which hinder establishing trustful relations with teachers like hierarchy (especially underlined in Belgium), favouritism, pedantry (Italy), lack of engagement, teacher's solidari-

Then, of course, you also think about the gender of the teacher, is it better off there now or is it better off there now, what does it need now? So as a role model. Therefore, we do that in any case, and we have at least one man in each class. [...] That one simply looks at where is the child going now? Therefore, this boy is conspicuous because he needs a father figure because or he needs a mother figure because or he has more difficulties with a woman because. Therefore, that plays a role in any case, but I think most are so that they say, it does not play such a role and we do not WANT to keep these roles.

(G_T2_F)

And the fact that ... These students are very dependent on relationships, so to speak. The more you know them, the easier the job will get. Because they always want to test you, can you really trust this person and so on. (SWE_T5_F)

ty in case of conflict and discrimination (Belgium, Italy) or prioritizing their obligations and rules above children's needs (Finland, Sweden). Students perceive such attitudes as obstacles for engagement at school.

Perceiving teachers as a distinct and distant category results in not seeing teachers as allies in difficult situations. The lack of trust thus impacts children's readiness to report problems to teachers and their hesitance in sharing confidential information. In Belgium, Italy and Finland students perceived teachers as not always adhering to confidentiality rules so student would refrain from turning to teachers in the case of any conflict. In Finland and Sweden, children reported being hesitant to report problematic situation to teachers, because they were afraid of giving further information and making a big issue out of it, which might have consequences in notifying social services and bringing more trouble than benefits. In this way, migrant students are forced to refrain from sharing their troubles to avoid any potential consequences, something which is detrimental to their well-being and their sense of agency.

"LIVE THEIR JOBS" – TEACHER ENGAGEMENT AND FLEXIBILITY

Another leading feature that comes as important in the context of teacher-student relations is the need for flexibility that pertains to the teaching style and requirements, the **balance between treating children as special but not different**. In Finland, Poland, Italy, United Kingdom, Belgium and Germany the teachers recognize the need to be welcoming and open-minded towards migrant children, responsive to students' needs and ready to modify his/her teaching methods to fulfil migrant children's needs. Yet, in practice, there are various obstacles reported in each country to this flexible approach. For example, children in Italy mentioned that performance-centred teachers are more focused on the content and evaluation than on dialogue, trust and the valorisation of competences. In Germany,

So, just in break times, finally they all come to me. All children, I'll say most children, I won't say all, but I'll say most foreign or socially disadvantaged children come to me because I listen. I'm ... always listening. And I'm trying to figure out what they want, why, how, if it's not right, what we can do, and that's it. ... In fact, they call me the social one at school. When they say, 'Yeah you're very social', I say, 'No, I'm human'. Yes, I am very social, that's normal, we are in a group where there is a range of children, from many different cultures, we must also be able to share and listen to them. (BE_T5_F)

In school I do not see who I would go to because in general, the teachers or the principal will protect their colleagues so ... (BE_T5_F)

Girl 1: I don't trust them [teachers] cause I've noticed that in other schools, when students have told them, they've had to go to this (...) Child protection. (...) They've reported it to them. So that's why I don't trust. But if the teacher is someone who doesn't really proceed with things, that's when I can talk about things. But I don't really trust teachers that much to be honest.

Girl 2: Yeah. I could easily talk about positive events and I'd be happy to do so but with negative I try to be a bit cautious especially in Finland, you know. They take everything so seriously. (FI_F3_CH_G)

on the other hand, children said that sometimes the older teachers are less willing to adjust their teaching methods or children perceive them as bitter.

Flexibility is another important feature that was important for teachers and children alike. It means that teachers are supposed to adapt their educational strategy to the capabilities of the child, which was underlined especially in the British schools. Flexibility is especially significant for migrant children, who have various experiences and present individual educational traits. Another strategy employed by teachers in Germany, Finland and Poland included treating migrant children just like the rest of the class, especially in schools with a low number of migrant children. It does not mean disregard for their individual needs, but rather treating them as equal and not emphasising their distinctiveness.

Children's commitment to authenticity and engagement is mirrored by **the appreciation of teachers' commitment to their work**. As one of the children from Belgium described, the teachers should *"live their jobs"*, in contrast to teachers who just sign assignments leave children by themselves and do not put emotions in what they do. When children sense that teachers have distanced themselves from their work, students respond with a lack of trust. A factor impeding trustful relationships which was discussed by Swedish students and teachers was the frequent change in teachers. As a result, there was no time to get to know each other better and establish deeper bonds.

Especially appreciated by children is teachers' extra engagement in showing the initiative and pursuing activities that go beyond the school curriculum. In Poland pupils talked with admiration about a Polish language teacher who implemented innovative teaching methods involving playing football. In all the reports, especially among older students, actively reaching out to children by teachers was seen as very important and was very much appreciated. In Italy pupils especially appreciate the time devoted to them after school hours. Children in Sweden mentioned teachers engaged

Boy: Some teachers are old, and sometimes I think, they are old and a bit angry. I don't know why.

I: How should they be?

Boy: Not that angry. (G_I26_ISCED1_B)

For some courses, [the teachers] are not really attentive. 'Well, we give you lessons and while you do that for 50 minutes, I am going on amazon to order my new shoes.' There are teachers who did that, for example... [BE_I8_B]

Girl: My class teacher. I can actually talk to her openly about everything, because she was also the teacher, my first teacher, from this class. She accepted me into the international preparation class and, for example, she always asked me whether I had a device at home, whether everything was going well. So she already always asks me how I'm doing and tries it to find a way to improve that. She always thinks about me and that's why I would reach out to her. She always takes her time, also sometimes talks to me on the phone about my problem if I have one and that's why I have trust in her. (G_I43_ISCED3_G)

in playing sports after school with children. Educators and teachers recognize the **meaning of teachers' gender** in relation to students which might result in tensions making attitudes toward gender to a sensitive topic in the work with parents and their children. Teachers noticed that their gender has meaning. In Germany, male teachers mentioned being treated as a role model by male students in cases where the father was absent. Gender also plays a role in the way the relationships with children are established. Male teachers in Sweden, Poland and Italy used sports like football as a tool of inclusion and a way of establishing relationships especially with boys. In Belgium the importance of having a migrant background as a teacher was raised as a meaningful factor helping to understand children and their needs. Also the knowledge of the child's home language was seen in Sweden as helping to bond with the child.

UNFAIR TREATMENT

The research identified also problematic areas of relationships between children and teachers. The age of the children might be of importance here, since older kids, ISCED 2 and ISCED 3, are more prone to problematizing situations when they had been unfairly treated. In the UK, where mostly younger children took part in the research, conflicts between teachers and students were presented as not having a great impact on children's well-being, whereas in Belgium, where research participants were significantly older, such conflicts posed much bigger problem and children recall situations of unfair treatment and discrimination. Children express directly **being unfairly treated** by teachers on the basis of their migrant background. They mention handling students' behaviour in class differently (Belgium, Finland), giving lower grades to migrant children (Poland), undermining children's ability to learn (Poland) or declining remedial teaching (Finland). In Italian and Belgian reports children talk about teachers assigning labels

Then, of course, you also think about the gender of the teacher, is it better off there now or is it better off there now, what does it need now? So as a role model. Therefore, we do that in any case, and we have at least one man in each class. [...] That one simply looks at where is the child going now? Therefore, this boy is conspicuous because he needs a father figure because or he needs a mother figure because or he has more difficulties with a woman because. Therefore, that plays a role in any case, but I think most are so that they say, it does not play such a role and we do not WANT to keep these roles.

(G_T2_F)

Every hour of class I had remarks ... 'we will have a future murderer or prisoner, won't we Mr. ****'. Comments like that I got every hour of class. So poor relations. ... It didn't bother me too deeply. A teacher who says that kind of thing to you is a bit of a kid, and you say to yourself 'well, it's not someone that I hold in high esteem so that doesn't bother me.' (BE_I8_B)

to kids, which has consequences for a child's educational career. In the Polish and Belgian cases, discrimination by teachers were mentioned.

Relationships with Peers

Relations with peers is another very important area of children social interactions at schools. Professionals – teachers, social workers, cultural mediators – recognize children's need to fit in the group of local children and their willingness to create social bonds. Social worker in Italy stated that **"kids want to feel similar to Italian kids"** (IT_F6_M_3_FM). Professionals recognize also the **vulnerability of kids**, who are not included or even rejected by the group, and they undertake actions to help children to overcome marginalization. In Finland, teachers observed difficulties in finding friends among Finnish-origin children for migrant children even when they had acquired basic Finnish language proficiency. In the Italian and Polish contexts, professionals highlighted the marginalization of migrant children and the fact that they tended to stick to their own language community.

Peer relations occupied significant space in children's narratives. As children in the UK claimed, social relations more than the quality of teaching or curricula seem to shape their experiences of schooling. We noticed that the dynamics and character of peer relations varies most of all according to diversity at school and we encountered a whole array of different situations in our research. In schools with a diverse social environment, children reported experiencing friendliness and rarely talked about being rejected, as in the cases of small school in Poland near the centres for refugees with a high percentage of migrant children. In a diverse school environment, such as in Malmo in Sweden, social relations are the source of positive experiences. Another factor fostering integration was identified among ISCED 0 children in Germany, namely that the younger age of chil-

If we confront her, we're screwed. Our year is ruined. So there you have it ... But I think the management has heard some things, but they don't care. (BE_I6_G)

Polish children in such situations have them too when left on their own, and here when children from Ukraine are left alone, it's even double, or triple a problem, since they are left alone, because there's a language barrier, and on top of that they're separated from the world, because they don't know the language, they don't have friends, and they're separated, too and also often receive some negative things, because they're different and are not accepted in the classroom and, simply, such child might just have very many psychological problems and depression, and so on. (PL_F1_M_1_M)

dren can be decisive since there are greater similarities in terms of interests and activities as well as more friendliness and sympathy. Establishing peer relations among small children is a straightforward process where a migrant background does not play an important role.

PEER RELATIONS IN SCHOOL AND OUTSIDE

The processes of peer integration take place both within school and outside of it. At school, peer relations can be both facilitated or hindered by teachers, while in the context of free time children have greater agency in terms of fostering peer relations. Professionals' especially underline **the importance of unstructured time for integration**. This can be realized in various contexts (parishes in Italy, after school in Germany, Finland and Poland, community centres in Poland, Finland and Sweden, free play in the UK, breaks during classes in Italy). In the former case, teachers can use various tools to increase cooperation and the inclusion of children, such as group work, engaging in sports, free play, or trips.

The importance of the peers' role in learning process is great. In Germany and Italy children enjoyed **mutual learning and peer support** during classes as well as playing games together like football or learning other skills from their peers. Peer cooperation was often reported as stemming from teachers' encouragement (Germany), who introduced mutual learning practices (like group work) that include all children in small groups and projects that involve everyone. This way of **fostering integration through engagement** is very much appreciated by students. Also, in more traditional learning settings, children reported receiving support from other students, both speaking their mother tongue as well as those who spoke the language of the host country (Poland, Italy, Germany, Finland). In the Belgian context, turning to peers for help was a result and a remedy for inadequate support from teachers. In fact, mutual support was seen by students in Belgium

My favourite activities involved working in groups because it helps you to approach your classmates, to make friends, maybe we fought with a classmate and the teachers would then try and put us with this classmate to strengthen the relationship. Also, because when you find something difficult with group work you can ask your classmates for help or even the teacher supervising us. (IT_F21_CH_B)

I: (..). You just said something exciting about playing soccer, that you learned that. How or from whom did you learn that?
Girl: Well, the boys more or less taught us. We taught ourselves by playing a lot. And then we just learned it and kept on doing it. And then we got better and better at it. And I also practiced a lot with my friends. (G_I33_ISCED1_G)

as the main source of assistance for migrant students, with structural support seen as nonexistent.

BONDING ACTIVITIES

Children mentioned numerous **bonding activities** that help them to interact with others, make new friends and sustain those relationships that had already been established. These activities allow children to socialize with each other and are usually located outside of the classroom – free time at school, after school classes, sports, shared interests. For younger children, afterschool classes in the school or community centre (in the case of Finland, Poland and Sweden) and parish (in the Italian context) play an important role, representing places where children can **socialize through play**. Children greatly appreciated any additional opportunities created for them at school that aim at establishing close relationships. In Sweden and Italy, children mentioned trips outside the school, for example to the forest where they spent together a couple of days and have the opportunity to get to know each other better. In Italy, social workers engaged in after school centre mentioned the important role they had in keeping children safe from gangs. Social workers saw their goal in providing activities that would compete with illegal networks, keeping them safe from illegal circles.

GROUP BOUNDARIES

Various factors that create group boundaries were mentioned by children. Although it is important to notice that age plays an important role here, and younger children discerned fewer barriers towards integration (something clearly visible in the UK and Germany, where ISCED 0 and ISCED 1 children were interviewed). In Finland and Germany, children talked about aggressive children in class which led to distressing and stressful ex-

And that's why we're now tackling the tandem project. Where the third grade, for example, always takes over a first grade as a monitoring, so to speak, where everyone gets a godchild. And then you also do things together, in the hope that they will have someone, an ally in the schoolyard, so to speak, but not to ally against others, but simply to have support in questions of general orientation, language, learning mentorship, etc. (G_T2_F)

Like last year, for example, we had a newcomer. We integrated him well enough into our group so that he does not feel different. He had more support from us than from the management. ... I think the management doesn't realize, but they try to be there but without being there; it's not enough for a new person who has just arrived. (BE_I3_G)

periences. Even if children are not themselves the target of bullying, the violent atmosphere has an impact on the whole class.

One of the key structuring factors is gender, albeit experienced in various ways in particular contexts (national, age, level of education, in relation to other characteristics of the school environment). Among younger children in the UK, gender was noticed as a factor influencing peer relations or class behaviour. It was interpreted as having only a minor significance, whereas the children from ISCED1 level in Germany experienced **gender divisions** which had an impact on their social relations. In Belgium, the importance of gender was reported as developing in tandem with the age of the children. **Gender can be perceived as a bonding factor**, when children are attracted to each other by gender specific interests like soccer, cycling or creative activities. In the Swedish context, in a highly diverse school environment, the number of group boundaries including gender was not particularly pronounced, nor was gender frequently experienced as determining a group boundary in the school context. The Italian report showed that gender may play a role in levels of conflict, with all female classes seeming to have more conflict than all male or mixed ones.

Conflict and Conflict Management

Conflicts are an inseparable part of social life and the lived reality which children refer to. In conflicts in Italy and in Poland, violence was also seen as an inherent part of social life, one that just happens, and is best solved by children themselves and not with the intervention of teachers or parents. The strategies for **conflict management** vary, but in most of the countries children are willing to deal with the conflict autonomously (UK, Poland, Finland, Germany, Belgium, Italy) as they **draw a sense of agency** from it. The reluctance to refer conflict situations to adults arises also from

They [the program] focus a lot on team building, so the first two years we were out for example to the forest and we slept there for three days in a tent. We got to know each other there. (SWE_F1_ISCED3)

M1: when I argue with D, as D said, we come to you (i.e., the teacher) and then you tell us that quarrelling is good

M2: It's good.

M1: It's good, yes, but we must argue without insulting each other. (IT_F28_CH_B)

a sense of distrust towards teachers and a desire to avoid making a fuss or taking things further up in the administration. The engagement of teachers in resolving conflict situations was noticed mainly with arguments that are more serious and by students from ISCED 1, who would more frequently turn to the teacher to help resolve problems, report problematic situations or with cases of harassment.

Migrant status can expose one to bullying. In Germany, bullying was not frequently reported, but the Finnish and Polish reports mention cases of bullying towards children with a migrant background as being a problem. The Italian report also mentioned **singling out and marginalizing children with a migrant background**, whereas older students in the Belgian context mentioned **harassment** as a serious factor influencing their everyday school life and social media appeared as a tool for harassment. More cases of discrimination on the basis of cultural or ethnic origin will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Girl: Yeah, there is a group of girls that was in our class at the start of the year and didn't like us too much but I don't know why, I had never really talked to them. They were quite unpleasant and when one of them saw us in the yard, she laughed, she made doggy noises or said to groups that were passing by when we were also passing 'ah well look ...', and they insulted us.

I: How did you go about fixing the problem?

Girl: We went to the prefect. They asked us to write down on paper what they had done, but there was no real prosecution. We had even emailed the screenshots to them because there had also been some things on the networks but they calmed down more when they knew that we had proof with screenshots and that we had talked about going to the police if they continued and there they stopped. But from school in fact there was nothing. No action, they did not respond to my email. (BE_I2_G)

Sources of Support

Teachers and Other Professionals

Seeking out sources of support depends on the country and the organization of school and social support. Moreover, children in Italy differentiate between sources of support depending on the problem they have, turning to the person who they think is the most reliable in this particular case. As already discussed, children pay special attention to trust as the founding value that foreground their relationships with adults. Most **teachers are a source of support for children**. However, we have also documented cases of indifference towards the situation of migrant children or even discrimination. Children usually would find one or two adults at school whom they can trust and see that person as a source of support. However, many teachers are seen as not being committed to their work or perceived as unreliable. Especially in the Belgian and to a lesser extend

Girl: Well, there used to be Mr. Name 5 [A, social worker], who was there for people who had a problem, who were sad. (...) With Name 5 [A] it was just like that, you really trusted that he wouldn't tell anyone. Yes. (...). It was somehow nicer to tell him and not your own teacher. (...) Yes, and sometimes the teacher brings it up in class, even though you don't want to. (...) Even though I didn't go to him, but he also sometimes sat down in front of the school with his guitar and sang and for the new school year, or for report cards, there were little notes that said no matter what your report card said, somehow like that and then, for me you're unique and / yes, somehow something like that.
(G_F30_ISCED1_G)

in Italian context, some teachers appear to be particularly unsupportive and the whole school environment is seen as hostile.

There are also other important adults to whom children can turn to for support. In Sweden these are often the **student counsellor or student coordinator who are especially seen as committed to student's well-being** and perceived as figures to whom students can turn to with difficult cases. In the German context, this role is played by social workers, in the Polish case a huge source of support for children are **intercultural assistants**. Children who had experienced stress and trauma in school especially appreciated their presence as they speak their language and act as an intermediary between children, their parents and the sometimes hostile school environment. Swedish **social workers** support young people, especially those experiencing difficulties like absenteeism. They view their role as people whom the children can trust, and they have a sense of being there for them.

Family: Parent(s) and Siblings

Parents and family are also a great source of support in the school context. Children turn to them with challenging situations at school and with peer conflicts. However, there are some obstacles to their role in education which are not only connected to their migration status, but also their culture and religion. Parents are not always able to be a source of significant support in school matters because of their lack of language skills or lack of time. This was discerned in all countries apart from the UK. In the Italian case, older ISCED 2 and 3 children **refrained from asking parents** for help in difficult or conflict situations because they did not want to them to get involved, wishing to deal with challenges on their own and unwilling for parents to do it their way. Similarly, in Sweden and Germa-

Boy: The luckiest thing is that we have Mr Volodymyr (name has been changed).

I: He is your cultural assistant? (...)

I: And what does Mr Volodymyr do? (...)

Boy: Well, everything. Maybe he's like a translator. (PL_I2_CH_B)

We shall create some kind of security at school, where you can sense that adult support that you can trust always is available. And to establish trust, you have to work a lot with social relations, so building social relations is our first priority. And we seek to start early.

(SWE_SW5_F)

If I have a problem with a colleague or he insults me or says something, I won't do anything, I'll tell the father, then the father will tell the director that this boy insulted my son and that's why. And if he insulted me, that I would do something to him, then it would be a problem for us. That would be a problem, that's why I'm not touching anyone, I'll just tell the father, so that the father will tell the director.

(PL_I27_CH_B)

ny, children admitted that parents were unable to play a role in the communication with school or as a source of support in this context because of a lack of language skills. In this context, **older siblings are frequently mentioned as family members who can be entrusted with difficult situations** or who can help in school matters as they speak the language, have already gone through the school system or they were sometimes the first one to come to the host country. Especially in Finland, Germany, Poland and Sweden, siblings appeared in children's narratives.

Teachers from all the countries commented on the conditions of co-operation with parents and their abilities to support children. One of the biggest barriers is that of language, especially in the case of newly arrived families, being a crucial factor which influences the capacity of parents to support their children in the school context. Teachers from Finland, Sweden and Poland underlined the **difficulties in communicating with parents**, and the way it influences their ability to support children in education process. In Germany, Belgium, Poland, Sweden, and Italy, professionals talked about the situation of reversing power dynamics inside families, when children have greater language proficiency than their parents after a few months of attending school and it is the children who are translators and intermediaries in contact with the school. The **lack of language skills** also has a limiting effect on parental understanding of the requirements of the school (grading system, assignments etc.) and hinders their capacity to support children in this respect. In Poland, teachers also observe obstacles to parental involvement pertaining to work – **long working hours** or even leaving children with a nanny for a few months in order to work. Another obstacle to parents supporting children is the **temporariness of a migrant stay** in the host country, when parents want to either return or move on to another place. It hinders parental support for education (Italy) and the whole educational process (in Poland, this is in the cases of refugees which “move on” and children drop out from

So if I'm honest, they talk to me more than they talk to my parents. So for example in the LEGs [teacher-parent talks], my teacher talked more to me than to my mum. So my mum only said hello to her and then she only talked to me. I don't know if it's because she thinks my parents don't understand German or what, but mostly my teacher only talks to me. About things that she might normally discuss with my parents. (...) And I find that a bit hm, critical? (...) So that somehow gives me the feeling that I am the parent of myself (laughs), because I am always addressed instead of my parents. That's / so otherwise it doesn't really bother me that much. It's the only thing. (G_I43_ISCED3_G)

The language is a barrier. Parents practically do not know Polish. I don't know if they can't learn, if they don't want to or if they don't need it. But the language is a big barrier. The daughter always translated. I said it in Russian as much as I could, and she translated the rest. Mom always said: I don't understand, I don't know. (PL_T9_F)

I always speak for my community, even now parents want their children to learn Chinese because in their minds they always think they will return to China to live forever. But that's not really the case for young people, so there is a wall in the communication between the kids and their parents now. (IT_F4_M_3_F)

school). On the other hand, the different ways of organizing the educational systems as well as cultural ways of handling the educational process can be problematic in the European context. For example, professionals in Finland noticed that parents are willing to help children in ways that are not accepted in the host country, for example buying grades or organizing extra lessons. This was seen by professionals as being exacerbated by a different philosophy of education, for example the focus in Finland is more on what the child needs than acquiring loads of knowledge.

Gender differences, and especially the expectation towards the girls to marry early and start family life, is a frequently raised issue. In Poland, both teachers and social workers mentioned competing views on **gender roles** at school and at home. In Sweden, Poland and Italy, the control over girls described as significantly stricter than over boys in some ethnic communities (Chinese, Muslim). Another consequence of cultural differences is the conflict arising between family and social welfare systems, especially concerning child welfare officers and violence at home, different patterns of parenting etc.

The discrepancies between the children's own view of their educational path and their parental expectations influence the kind of support they receive. The difference that arises from values children adopted from school are in conflict with parents' way of seeing the social order and children's educational path. In Poland, Italy and Finland, this pertains especially to **migrant girls changing perceptions of gender roles** and their desire for greater gender equality, which in turn causes conflicts at home.

There is small number of families in the centre for foreigners that attach importance to education of their children, especially girls (...) so maybe in their world the girl shouldn't be educated, maybe her role in life is different, maybe, I don't know. (PL_T14_F)

And then here a little one says that he has been beaten with a stick or something and I have to make a child protection notification behind the parents' back because the child has talked about something like this and... Sometimes if there's been violence at home and then it's so hard for parents to understand that if a child talks about this then why aren't they even contacted. This is probably what has led to the worst conflicts with parents, that they don't want to have anything to do with me. Things like that must be sorted out then. These issues are worked through with child protection, but yes, it may leave parents with such distrust and then there's the fact that they cannot, for example, forbid their child to see a school social worker, according to the law. (FI_SW1_F)

Grades

In most of the countries, children presented **mixed feeling about grades** ranging from appreciation to very critical views. Children see grades as useful, allowing them to understand the level of knowledge they have acquired. In Germany and Poland, children were far more engaged in obtaining good grades and were proud of their achievements. Other children, however, were very critical about grades and perceive them as too standardized, inadequate, and not taking children's capabilities into account but rather focusing only on points. Older students were more verbal about their attitude towards grades, saying that gaining knowledge was more important than obtaining good grades. In Finland, children were very critical of grades and the grading system, describing it as a top-down process. In Finland a common practice is self-evaluation, which was also seen as pointless by children. In Belgium, migrant children expressed the need for **more flexible grading methods**.

Girl1: grades are very important to me, because if I see that they are a bit low for a subject is, I know that I need to work harder in that subject.

Boy1: In my opinion they are important because they help determine when a person is doing well in some things and in what they need to improve. (IT_F33_CH_GB)

I: What do you like best about your school?

Girl: The exams and my friends. (...) Maths tests or German exams.

I: Ah, and you like to do that? |

Girl: Yes. I: Well, what do you like about it? Girl, 8 years old: I love the fact that we get grades and I like grades. (G_I34_ISCED1_G)

You can't evaluate a person with a number, I am not a number. How do you evaluate a person with a number? It's almost like Auschwitz in that you have to remember your number, you have to evaluate a person according to his skills and if a person is not good in that field it is because you have decided that he has to learn that field, if you gave him the opportunity to measure himself in what he considers his field, something in which he considers himself good, everything would change [...] I would give them the opportunity to show their skills, but not with the lessons I decide, but with what they decide. (IT_F4_CH_B)

Children talked about the difficulties faced by migrant children who lack the requisite language proficiency in obtaining good grades. Migrant children would like to be fairly graded like other children, but also would like that the grading system to be adjusted to their skills and capabilities. In Italy and Finland, children also see teachers as putting too much attention on grades and less on the actual process of learning things and making progress. Younger children also **prefer to be graded descriptively**, which allows the effort they have made to be recognized, not only just the bare results. The perception of grades and their fairness or unfairness depends also on the relationship with the teacher, perceiving him/her as a trustworthy person. Observing unfairness in grading can have a profound impact on children's trust in education, as in the case of the UK. This feeling of being unfairly judged is also present in the Italian report. Children also expressed their feelings of being judged extremely by both teachers and parents.

Professionals problematize grades to a much lesser extent. Teachers assign importance to grades and would like to see children as striving for good grades. Drawing on the interviews with Polish teachers, one can see a recognition of migrant children's frustration when they cannot fulfil their educational goals and aspirations. Teachers also widely discussed a lack of adjustment in the examining system for children who do not have the requisite language proficiency or their cultural context. On the other hand, social workers, especially in Germany, see that too much importance is put on grades.

In my opinion, in general, some teachers should believe in us a bit more, not expect much or little, I mean, to believe in us anyway. Perhaps if you answer a question incorrectly, instead of giving us a four or five immediately, they could give us another chance. (IT_F7_CH_G)

Girl1: As I was saying when I was at [school's name removed] I did not trust the teacher and the marks was so unfair I could not bear to look at them and to listen to him.

I: You could not trust him.

Girl1: No I could not and I did not believe him so it was pointless, really. (UK_F13_CH_1_G)

The regulations do not foresee it being that difficult. (...) She will only have a dictionary, but it is a different vocabulary for example in math. And the examination sheet for foreigners is based on the readings that are supposed to be read in all European nations, but the African context is not taken into account. We would like the assistant to be present during the examination, but there is no chance of that. P. would have to have a certificate of special education, but she is a very intelligent girl, so there is not a chance for that. (PL_T7_F)

So I think, on the one hand, its overwhelming. For many, what happens in class is just too difficult. and the awareness [...] that their chances in society in general are not so good. (G_SW4_F)

Language Acquisition

The study in all countries involved in the CHILD-UP project provides an insight into the ways of language acquisition in the process of successful hybrid integration, and, generally, the influence it has on the well-being of children. The existing research indicates that **migrant students are lagging behind their native-born peers** in most European education systems. It therefore does not come as a surprise that migrant students underperform and express a lower sense of well-being in school compared to native-born students in most European countries (Eurydice 2018). Thus, we will pay special attention to those forms of support which aim at supporting migrant children in their adaptation to their new school environment and ensuring that they make good progress in their learning. The diversity of the countries of origin and native languages that children use shows the complexity of the education process. It requires considerable competences from teachers working in a multicultural ed-

ucation space, including sensitivity to migrant children's needs. At the same time, it poses various challenges for teachers teaching a language of instruction.

Factors Influencing Children's Language Competences

As already emphasized, all researchers believe and document that competences relating to language acquisition are of key importance for the integration of children in society. Language opens the door to many other spheres of a child's life, achievements in learning, peer relations, safety, and a sense of importance and identification. The process of language acquisition needs to be presented within an array of interrelated

considerations. The results of language learning thus cannot be separated from other key factors influencing the world of a migrant child, which include:

- migration experiences affecting mental health, traumas experienced (Polish, Belgium, Germany cases);
- the family's economic situation (Belgium, Finland, Sweden, UK, Polish cases);
- children's incentives to learn (Germany, Italy, UK, Sweden, Polish cases);
- importance of parental involvement in children's learning process (Italy, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Polish cases);
- cultural and religious context that influences the functioning of boys and girls (gender aspects, including girls' chores in a household and caring for siblings) (Italy, Germany, Sweden, Polish cases);
- supplementary language education at schools (additional Polish language lessons, preparatory classes in Finland and Germany, remedial classes);
- grades and adjustments to the migrant children's needs (UK, Italy, Germany, Polish cases);
- educational experiences learned in the receiving country (Polish, Sweden, Germany cases);
- collaboration along a child-school-family axis (Italy, UK, Sweden, Belgium cases).

Therefore, we particularly emphasise the need to secure psychological and socio-economic support for migrant children in order to pursue goals relating to language acquisition.

But the largest challenge is that our students have very weak language skills. As a large majority, the vast majority have really weak language skills. And then we talk about all ethnic backgrounds. It does not really matter. I have students with an ethnic background other than Swedish who have better languages than those with a Swedish background, or ethnic Swedish background. So, it really does not matter. But I think it's a big, big problem that students come here and have such weak language skills. (SWE_4_F)

Strengthening their language is an absolute need, language as a vehicle of coexistence, not so much to learn about literature and poetry, but precisely language as a means of establishing social relations. (IT_T7_F)

Boy: I like, I like Polish language, I like English the most, I like maths and biology, too.

I: And will you tell me why you like each one? Why do you like Polish?

Boy: Because I want to learn Polish very well.

I: And why?

Boy: Because when I talk to someone I either don't understand, or I ask, they'll say or yes, I want them to talk like a real Pole, I wish.

(PL_I24_CH_B)

Of course, the language is the main factor as education is all about communication, so difficulties in speaking and listening can be a problem, but we have always managed to overcome that quickly, I cannot remember a child who finished my year not yet being comfortable with English. (UK_T16_F)

Language Skills

The interviews with professionals and migrant children in all countries also provided insights into opinions discussing the challenges arising from the insufficient language skills. Language learning was identified by the majority of teachers, mediators and social workers as one of the main obstacles that migrant students faced. All professionals pointed to the fact that **low language skills characterized most of all the newly arrived children**. Italian, UK, and Swedish research shows that linguistic integration can be challenging only in the short term, in the period after the arrival of the child in the classroom. According to the teachers, linguistic integration is a swift and smooth process, they also do not link the migration background and educational aspirations and expectations. Children in Poland, UK, Italy, and Sweden highlighted language difficulties after their arrival and **recall an enormous sense of loneliness, isolation, which, in time, were overcome**. Many students remember the effort put into understanding peers and teachers as a reason for discomfort. One of the most common **forms of support for rapid integration in the classroom was peer-support**. German and Swedish research documents that this problem often concerns second-generation children (those born in an admitting country), and their slowness in learning. In cases where the language at home of the country of origin is spoken, students have worse results in learning and lower language competences. One of the possible explanations for difficulties in obtaining language proficiency is related to **limited opportunities to use the local language outside the school**. Many children reported speaking their parent's language or a mixture of their parents and the local language at home. However, books, music, and television are enjoyed primarily in the local language. After a period of time spent in the host country, the language competences of the newly arrived

Boy1: I was literally scared because I did not understand anything and I had to take 2 buses and sometimes a train and I was 8 with no English to be honest. The school was a scary place.

I: How did you manage then?

Boy1: Everyone was kind I was scared of breaks and lunchtime I was always looking for Ms. D. [teacher assistant's name removed] because I was scared and I think I thought she was like my mum. But everyone was cool and chilled after like one week I was fine and I met him we travel together. (UK_F24_CH_1_B)

Girl1: I was born in Ghana.

I: Ok how old were you when you came to Italy?

Girl1: I was seven.

I: Do you remember that?

Girl1: Yes.

I: And how did you experience it?

Girl1: Bad.

I: How come?

Girl1: Since I didn't understand the language, and I was also small and I was the only black child in the class, so since we were all small we all had the mentality of children, so every child was kind of afraid basically since they had never seen a girl in the class like me and I didn't even know how to talk to them and say, like, 'can we play together?', those things, so I was always just saying 'yes' and 'no' so when someone said something to me I just said 'yes' or 'no' [...]

I: And did you ever tell any of your classmates about this experience?

Girl1: I told the people who treated me like that how I felt.

I: Oh, did you tell your classmates then?

Girl1: Yes.

I: And how did it go?

Girl1: Normal, I mean, I talked more with my best friend who was my best friend at that time, so I told her the bad things she did to me at that time and she apologised. (IT_F2_CH_G)

children grow as they swiftly make up for language deficiencies, and, quite often, become diligent and outstanding students. Many teachers in Italy, UK and Poland showed both surprise and satisfaction with the approach of migrant children to learning and achievement.

The school policies concerning using the language of instruction vary and range from strict rules commanding the mandatory use of the language of the host country to liberal attitudes aligned with students' needs. In Belgium and Sweden, flexible practices are found as well, including permission to use the language of origin during breaks, while playing, or in sport activities. According to all of the professionals, migrant children's needs are both variegated and interrelated. Two levels of language competences can be differentiated. On the one hand, teachers refer to language skills that are necessary for daily communication with teachers and peers as well as for establishing social relationship, while on the other hand there is the relevance of subject-related and technical language. On a fundamental level, teachers observed deficiencies in understanding the main school tasks. Significant research findings relate to insufficient collaboration between teachers of specific subjects. Teachers see the closer cooperation between L2 and subject teachers as a chance to promote language learning and individual success in school. This is especially important as considering and supporting students' individual interests and capabilities is seen as enhancing the social integration of migrant children. The language barrier is caused not only by the lack of skills in spoken and written language, but also shortcomings regarding specialized vocabulary related to education, as mentioned in Sweden and Poland.

German social workers offer an insightful diagnosis of the language situation of children with a migration background, concluding that such children "often live in a linguistic gap, whereby German is required at school, it is their mother tongue at home and English is spoken alongside German among friends. There is a risk of speaking a mishmash language. Unfor-

A challenge for instance are beginners, as I said. Many children with a migrant background come to us. However, a migrant background does not automatically mean that children need L2-classes. There are many children who have a migrant background but who have been born in Germany. You cannot see that they have a migrant background. I think about Russians or Europeans. It is a challenge to figure out which child needs the support of a L2-class. (G_T3_F)

Those who are newly arrived in Sweden, they are very good. They read in Arabic. But those who were born here in Sweden, they need more planning or like some who does not know the letters. I have grade six, some do not know letters. (SWE_M4_F)

We speak Russian in the family. At school and wherever we meet people we speak Polish. And Ukrainian I'm starting to remember [forget], because Ukrainian is similar to Polish, so I put words from Polish in Ukrainian and if I came to Ukraine and had to speak only Ukrainian, there would be a lot of Polish words. Well, I haven't practiced this language, I haven't spoken it for a year. In my family only mom knows Ukrainian, papa doesn't, that's why Russian comes first, that's what we speak. (PL_I4_CH_G)

But they lack the technical language and that is a big problem. A very big problem, because if they are eleven or twelve years old and can't understand a scientific text, even if it's very simple and they can't read it. (G_T4_F)

For example, during break time, teachers reported allowing students to speak with each other in different languages because they were likely to be tired from spending so much time speaking in a language they were not completely comfortable with. (BE_T4_F)

tunately, Germans fall into this mishmash language, and thus neither the mother tongue nor German is mastered well" (Droessler et al. 2021).

It is worth noting findings from the Polish context related to language learning among children of economic migrants arriving from the former Soviet Union (FSU) countries, mainly from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. **A cultural affinity and geographical proximity definitely facilitates communication at school and achieving good teaching results.** Many of the teachers interviewed mentioned the problem of children dropping out of the education system, especially those from a refugee background. Research emphasizes the strong influence of a family's context and a lack of educational aspirations. In such situations, children do not make efforts to learn, rather being focused on other goals, such as, for example, getting a job quickly, and helping their family. Polish professionals (teachers, cultural assistants/mediators) indicate that this is due to the temporary nature of their stay and a willingness to migrate further on to a country richer than Poland.

The Role of the Mother Tongue in Enhancing Language Competences and the Value of Multilingualism

Majority of professionals in Sweden, Germany, Italy and UK raised **the importance of child's language of origin in communicating and strengthening L2 learning**, recognising it as a **resource for migrant children and their parents**. Using the language of origin is particularly useful in the case of newly arriving children, who, when set in a new environment, are able to talk about lessons, learning, teachers' requirements, and school tasks with their peers, who come from the same country of origin. Such relations, de-

I have many newcomers who are super-motivated, and they have good marks, since we have made some adoptions. For instance, in social science or in natural science, the teachers have worked a lot together with the mother tongue teacher, so the students have made tests in their native languages. So, no, I would not say that it [a migration background] is a factor really. (SWE_SW3_F)

Even though they've often been here for a longer period of time, for example for a year, it isn't only those children who have just arrived, but they've been here for a longer period of time, there are very few hours of Polish as a foreign language and apart from the fact that they don't have the basic communication skills, there are also problems in the educational sphere, because they don't understand many subjects in Polish, like for example the analysis of a poem or a metaphor, they also have problems in biology and history. Because in those universal subjects, like mathematics, it's the least of their problems, because they can understand them without the knowledge of the language, in the case of the other subjects, well, it's troublesome for them.

(PL_F1_T_1_F)

And then I actually tried to start translanguageing a lot more, that many times when we create wordlists, I put a column with... where we have words in English or Swedish in one and then I add mother tongue and Swedish. (SWE_T2_F)

However, I happened to have a student, also a Chechen, who wanted to learn, was ambitious, making progress. It is generally observed that it is easier for Ukrainian children, because the language is similar.

(PL_T12_F)

veloped often among children speaking the same language, are an element of their emotional safety, sense of belonging to a group, and peer support. Many teachers claimed that for migrant children the cultural background is extremely important. It helps them in developing their language skills, pursuing educational aspirations and establishing relationships. Thus, it should be respected and recognised by an education system. Children themselves display satisfaction with a possibility of relying on their language of origin in learning a language of instruction. They are willing to present cultural practices of their country of origin in a classroom or at events at school. Such positive functions of the language of origin are emphasized by social workers, cultural assistants/mediators, and interpreters.

There are nonetheless critical opinions voiced by some professionals in Germany, who see several downsides in using the language of origin by students. In their opinion it disturbs the course of lessons, slows down learning the language of instruction, hinders inclusion. Moreover, some professionals in Sweden, Poland, Belgium and Germany indicate that using the language of origin leads to the establishment of sub-groups in the classroom on the basis of origin, and also transfers negative language practices to native students.

The professionals in Italy, Sweden, UK, Belgium and Finland clearly indicate that **children speak different languages within the school space, given the increasing importance of multilingualism and the use of “mix-languages”**. Therefore, multicultural education is important as it ensures the same chances of learning/teaching. Recognizing various cultural and linguistic contexts opens up possibilities of communication among various actors in the educational space, and it provides the conditions for **establishing equal and trust relations within a student-teacher-parent triad**. It helps to avoid discriminating students because of their country of origin, with such opportunities being offered to them regardless of their origin. The almost simultaneous practice of mixing languages is a characteristic, dynamic fea-

Yes, of course, the main thing is language I guess, but I am not fully comfortable with that because I wonder if we are the one who are not ready, children never come without a language, they have often more than one, it is us, we are structured around one language only. (UK_T23_M)

Boy1: Everyone is helpful. Like, the teachers... even for me, I have my mother tongue teachers in the end of the hallway. So I could... if I need something urgent, I just go to her and tell her I want some lesson.

Boy2: You just don't need to be shy. It's like you can get help with everything.

I: Yeah, it feels okay to ask?

Boy2: Yeah, yeah, you can ask. If they want... say like no, if they... If they cannot help, they will just say 'sorry, I can't', or something. But they will always help you. (SWE_F5_ISCED2)

I felt with the students [...] who had also been in an elementary school for a while, they speak such a strange language. Such a mixture of German and your mother tongue. So in everyday life too, they can already speak German [...]. In an elementary school, they actually learn German pretty quickly. They can then, but they have a completely different language. So they speak German to each other ... and have already spoken to each other in their native language, mostly Arabic. Now it's either German or some strange mixture, something like an artificial language. And the Germans take it on board and speak the language, too. Such a mixed language. (G_SW3_not specified)

ture of schools with migrant children. An example here is a Swedish school where Swedish, Arabic and English are among the languages employed. While Swedish is used both within the school's space and during lessons, English is mainly utilised when the interlocutors do not speak Swedish or share a native language, and it becomes the only means of communication.

Methods of Teaching the Language of the Receiving Country

The education systems of the surveyed countries offer different policy and systemic solutions related to the inclusion of migrant children into the education system. Some countries, such as Germany and Finland, offer one-year preparatory classes and a number of remedial classes, while in other countries, e.g. Poland, children attend regular classes relevant to their age while schools offer remedial or additional classes. Our respondents reported both the advantages and disadvantages of the solutions mentioned above. For example, teaching German language in preparatory classes in Germany may contribute to the cultural segregation of children, hindering their integration and limiting their social relations to ethnically/nationally homogenous circles. Direct inclusion in an education system, initially raises a lot of stress in children, helplessness, and generates gaps in knowledge and its acquisition. In order to resolve the language problems of children and support them along their educational path, schools employ social workers in Sweden and Italy, mediators/cultural assistants in Italy, Belgium and Poland or interpreters, who provide assistance to children and their families. Their role is to facilitate integration in both the school and the learning process. Children living in centres for refugees in Poland are provided with additional assistance in learning the language.

...but sometimes I have to stop when it's only in the native language or in the language of origin. That's not possible. We've already had that, too, when there are a lot of Arabic speakers, that it then gets out of hand and that the communication goes over the heads of the others. [...] but then children are excluded, who have just no other child of the language of origin there. I simply don't want to, therefore: I prefer German as the language of instruction. But I allow the language of origin if it makes sense in any case or if I notice that the child is now overwhelmed, that it is too fresh, that it can no longer concentrate, that it now simply needs the language of origin or it now simply needs a possibility to switch off, too. Because the whole day is, that is already for some children simply large load, especially at the beginning.

(G_T2_F)

I talk a lot of Swedish with them, but sometimes when you look at them, and you know... when they make a face like this and 'Do you understand what I mean?' No, then I talk in [the native language].

(SWE_SW4_M)

Sometimes some students who were born here, still it needs to be explained to them, for example, about atoms. Teachers explain about atoms, but they need someone to explain in Arabic. Then I can help them. For example, I explain to students in Arabic – 'ah, now, I understand'. (SWE_M5_F)

Of the 50 teachers who are teaching mainly children of colour, only one is from a migrant background. Sometimes I ask friends of a migrant background to come to speak to my students and the kids open up more and are more honest about their experiences. (BE_T6_F)

In addition to the opportunity to have an interpreter, they can also work with a guide showing them the school and non-school environment. Collaboration with parents is seen as key in this process, especially as a way to raise awareness of the importance of their children's education. The interviewees also emphasised the benefits of learning in small groups where it is easier to ask questions and show uncertainty than in larger ones.

The essence of L2 learning is clearly discernible in the German case. The views expressed here by professionals and children are similar to those in other countries but indicate that the goal of learning the language of instruction is clearly defined and is intended to improve the integration of migrant children. However, teaching L2 is not easy, as evidenced by the varying reception of these lessons by children. The conclusion is that **each country, based on its own experiences and digital innovation, should find attractive teaching methods**. "From a formal perspective, L2-classes are considered as a resource dedicated to migrant students to strengthen their language proficiency in German and accordingly improve their integration into school and into society as well. As it was the case by the teachers, migrant children express different experiences and different views on L2-classes. Those views are ambivalent, lingering between reflections on L2-classes as helpful and important resources and reflections, which consider them as boring, because there is no individual progress in learning German. Other children see L2-classes as an important resource, regardless of whether they attend these classes regularly, while they can use them in a flexible way when there is need for help or advice" (Droessler et al. 2021).

Linguistic understanding and communication are key components of successful integration and securing a better life for children in the future. Teaching basic language skills is seen as the first but most important step towards integration.

I: What language do you speak at home with your parents?

Boy: A mixture.

I: And between which languages?

Boy: Tunisian and Italian. (IT_F33_CH_B)

Mostly Swedish is used. You can say something in Swedish, then you can use words from your mother tongue and then continue in Swedish. (SWE_F3_ISCED3)

I don't know if throwing these kids into school is a good idea without language preparation. I am in favour of a one-year Polish language course, but maybe it is a professional preference, because I teach Polish for foreigners, so it seems to me that it would be helpful for them... assuming that everyone will handle without it is wrong. Maybe children from the first grade but I would not throw a child into the second grade. (PL_T15_F)

Girl: I do not go there anymore. So, there we learn to say, how old we are, what our name is and the numbers, colours. And we also learn to write, how to write [...] This is, what we learn. However, that all the way the same, because we are in L2-class [...] and this is quite boring. Other children think that too.

I: Is it boring, because you already know these things, or why it is boring?

Girl: I know this and we do those things all the time, have to paint all the time, to write the same things all the time. This is really boring.

I: What would you do instead? Girl, 9 years old: I want to learn things that are more difficult. (G_I25_ISCED1_G)

Fostering Children's Agency

Migrant children's agency, although quite often overlooked in both research on migration and in the social policies implemented in a given country or region, can be perceived as the key to understanding social relations at school. According to the broad scholarship on children and migration, there is a popular perception of unaccompanied migrant children, which is based on an assumption that those children are either victims coerced into migration or "unlawful agents" or even criminals (Thompson et al. 2017). In both cases, child migration is framed as a problem that should be solved by humanitarian aid or legal restrictions and control. Such a view, still present in public policies, has been slowly transgressed by researchers who have revealed the much more complex and dynamic character of children's agency. Agency can thus be defined as "an individual's intrinsic capacity for intentional behaviour developed within the individual's environment(s) and subject to environmental influences" (Thompson et al.

2017: 236) or as "children's beliefs that they can affect an outcome; to have self-efficacy and be effective as agents" (Gurdal, Sorbring 2019). Both definitions underline the active role of children in shaping their social realities, creating meaning in life and social relations, and participating in decision-making processes (Ni Laoire et al. 2011). Various studies on migration and childhood focus on an active role of children in family migration decision-making (Tyrrell 2011). Agency in school spaces and peer relations is another topic under scrutiny (Priyadharshini, Watson 2012). Importantly, however, researchers emphasize that exercising agency by children in the school context and beyond can be strengthened by external factors and actors. Children manifest their agency in various forms within different social relationships: peer relations, relations with teachers (and other professionals present at school), and with their parents. Expressing agency in all these contexts is shaped by various resources: individual, relational and cultural (Kuczynski, De Mol 2015). For example, relational resources

in school essentially means having a person responsive to students' needs and requests and who thus positively encourages their agency. Cultural resources, on the other hand, include social expectations regarding respect for authority and general patterns of power relations. Studies show that education systems which include teaching children about their rights into curricula, are more open to implementing measures encouraging children to practice their agency (Gurdal, Sorbring 2019).

The following section examines the institutional school context and its potential impact on expressing agency by (migrant) children. Voices of both professionals (teachers, social workers and mediators) and children are analysed here together.

Factors Shaping Migrant Children's Agency

From the perspective of professionals, especially teachers, an **open and safe atmosphere** in the classroom as well as teaching methods based on **dialogue and communication** are key factors positively affecting migrant children's agency. Some of the interviews also underline the need to introduce novel and **creative methods in teaching** that could increase children's agency (e.g. in Belgium, teachers mention following students' interests and hobbies, a role exchange – students as teachers; in Finland – using humour in teaching, supporting student unions activities; in Germany – fostering the individual needs of students, create a safe space for 'coming out of one's shells', in Sweden – starting lessons with warm-up tasks or games, using body language and visuals in communication, exploiting digital tools). Such an open attitude towards teaching may also have a positive impact on **agency in peer relations** as students start to cooperate with each other without being asked. Teachers in Germany observed that organizing work in class in small groups encourages

And what I have noticed, especially with children with a migration background, is that I always find that they still need a little longer than other children to simply warm up to everyday life and to come out of their shells and to really participate actively in processes. (G_T11_MFF)

I think it is important to create an environment where everyone feels safe. When everyone comes to school or is in the classroom that you are safe with yourself and you get to be who you are. And that's why we usually start a lot with this kind of warm up games or tasks and so on. It's just mostly to get everyone started, so that everyone feels a little ... So that everyone can have room, quite simply. (SWE_T5_F)

I work a lot with digital tools, in all different ways. And I notice that it works very well for the students, regardless of whether it is just a moment's play with Kahoot or Quizlet Live, it works very well. (...) The whole point is that they work in randomly selected teams and answer, as it looks now in the system, you can always just enter twelve questions. And the whole point is that students should talk to each other to find the right answer. So, every student has an answer, or their answer on their computer. So, you must work with each other to find the right answer to the question. And it's also a way to get them to discuss and interact and talk to each other at all. (SWE_T4_F)

I would never stand in front of a class and say, 'now you have the rules here, and this/ this is how it works for me.' That is always negotiated together. And those are the things, right? Where I say, this negotiation, this communication with each other, rules of conversation. But also really paying attention to what is expressed, what could hurt or offend others during the breaks. (G_T6_F)

children to be more open with their opinions and reflections and to communicate better with teachers. On the other hand, professionals claim that **discussing and negotiating rules of the classroom** is also a very creative tool for encouraging children to express their points of view and feelings. Negotiating rules in schools is perceived by students' themselves as a key element in shaping their sense of agency. This concerns participating in making decisions about the appearance of the classroom, organisation of work, grading and scheduling deadlines. In Italy, professionals accentuate the role of institutional influence on agency and recommend **extensive mediation, cooperation and dialogue with local communities**, less frequent classes and the design of educational extra-curricular activities that do not involve the extensive use of the language of the host country. Creative methods of work are particularly desired by younger and older children in Italy as they allow personal expression. In Poland, professionals stress that attention should be paid to **students' interests**, which will motivate them to learn the language and participate in school activities. Teachers from Sweden emphasize that children also express their agency in spontaneous conversations, and educators working with them should make use of it: interpret and then redefine their own methods and approaches at work. Thus, teachers highlight **the need of listening their students** and creating social spaces in which they could express their needs, opinions and fears. This indicates importance of relational resources in school but the potential to express one's needs can be also limited by lack of language skills. For example, teachers in Germany underline that language competences have a great impact on the educational and social development of migrant students and might significantly shape their participation in peer relations and their academic performance. Importantly, open pedagogy and teaching based on dialogue are very much appreciated by students themselves. For example, while talking about the ideal school, students

The opportunity to take part in training activities that do not require an excessive use of language, at least in the first phase [...] theatre, music, poetry, drawing, photographic exhibitions, etc... then those young people find spaces in which they can play a leading role and therefore design activities of this kind that are more expressive than linguistic, is certainly a factor that is influential. (IT_T24_M)

If we provide content, tools, and methods that are appropriate, it will be fun and attractive for these children, it will motivate them to spend their lessons actively. Then this knowledge will stay. We intuitively sense certain passions and hobbies and try to match them with tools and methods. (PL_T11_F)

That is, by listening to students' needs, and listening not only by asking, but actually interpreting what emerges in their texts, in the work we do, and the spontaneous conversations we have. So it is not at all the case that I sit and say 'yes, but now we will have conversations, now I want to know what to do, because now I will work after that', but it is... Their influence has so many different channels, as I... so, I use very many different channels to get their influence. And it is clear that it affects, that is the relationships I have with the students and what comes up, it affects my planning and my approach, at the same time as I have to relate to the curriculum. (SWE_T9_M)

in all partner countries expressed their support for methods which were open to children's needs and interests:

- in Belgium – a mixture of methods, including both individual and group work; openness towards individual needs, and the possibility to refuse to participate in some activities;
- In Finland – creative methods, supporting active roles of students, work in small groups;
- In Germany – regarding preschool children: a possibility of active usage of both play and rest spaces; school children: methods that strengthen the self-confidence through support, trust and encouragement; openness and flexibility in teaching; interactive methods;
- In Italy – creative methods (using short movies, swapping books), playing sports outside school building; activities supporting the development of social relations;
- In Poland – refugee children: a quiet, calm atmosphere at school, migrant student: more interactive methods of work;
- In Sweden – after school workshops and help with homework; an activity called Stahl;
- In the UK – allowing socialisation across age groups and classes, sharing personal stories and memories, a person-centred communication, learning by doing together.

Unfortunately, active, open pedagogy is sometimes rejected by some teachers who find it too flexible and unconventional. On the education system level there are also sometimes **structural barriers** that might negatively influence migrant students' agency. This is particularly visible in Belgium and Italy, where students with a migration background often attend (vocational) schools with lower expectations regarding their academic performance. In Germany, educators point to lack of resources, together with fluctuations and deficiencies in the number of competent

Frankly, very good because I try to always be open to what they say, I find it very important to listen to them. That's what I was saying, if I see that there are small tensions, I am not going to pretend anything. I would rather go and see what is going on, if it is at the level of the students. (BE_T4_F)

But they lack technical language and that is a big problem. A very big problem, because they are eleven or twelve years old and can't understand a scientific text, even if it's very simple and they can't read it. (G_T4_F)

Like you don't just go to school, like you're welcome to come and learn. Not just like you're forced to do something, but that different people learn in different ways. So when the teacher says to me, 'Write', and I learn by listening, it becomes difficult to me. I get nothing but writing benefits someone else. But that we all have to do it. (FI_F4_CH_2_G)

Girl: (...) Well, our maths teacher is quite nice. She also tries very hard and she [wants] (...) to motivate us. And she also does a lot of good exercises and she also explains. Our tests are not so very hard, so they are doable. So I like my math teacher. And in some subjects, it's like that, so you don't write so much on blackboard, just always talking. And you have to do almost everything independently. And yeah, so there are also teachers like that. (G_I40_ISCED3_G)

staff, which hinders work on topics such as autonomy and participation. A similar argument is raised by Italian teachers who underscore the fact that language skills are crucial for communication and establishing social relationships. Sometimes the expression of individual opinions by migrant students can be affected by their cultural backgrounds, either because they feel very different from their classmates and teachers, or because they are not used to expressing themselves as is common in the classroom. Being open to children's psychological needs and their difficulties is stressed strongly by mediators, who must work sometimes not only with students, but also with families and their expectations towards the academic development of students. **Traditional lessons and internal hierarchies** in school were negatively valued by students as factors limiting their agency, the freedom to express their opinions and individual needs. For example, students in Belgium underscored the fact that they felt discouraged from full participation in an activity if their role was reduced to listening to a teacher. They also want to have a genuine impact on deadlines and exam schedule. Furthermore, students in Belgium and Italy claim that some teachers tend to label particular students negatively, which in turn leads to mistrust in the classroom and students' withdrawal from active participation in activities. **Trust** seems to be crucial in shaping students' agency in Finland. In this case, migrant students tend to stay silent on insults they hear sometimes to avoid harsh consequences (institutional interventions). Similar strategy is undertaken by children in Polish schools – they prefer to solve their problems and conflicts on their own not to exaggerate the issue. In Germany, older children (ISCED3) are aware that they might to some extent determine their school life (e.g. school trips), however, they still do not feel very involved in decision-making. **Institutionalised forms of participation** (class representatives, student's councils and regular meetings with school heads) are regarded ambivalently by students. On one hand, they are seen as a basic yet necessary form

My favourite activities involved working in groups because it helps you approach your classmates, to make friends, maybe we fought with a classmate and the teachers would then try and put us with this classmate to strengthen the relationship. Also, because with group work when you find something difficult you can ask your classmates for help or even the teacher supervising us. (IT_F21_CH_B)

Girl1: At this school, we have something called Stahl. It is that every teacher gives help with homework. For example, the math teacher has on Tuesdays from four to five, then there are not as many students of course, and you get more help. (SWE_F3_ISCED3)

Perhaps because the teachers themselves are overwhelmed. Perhaps they are overburdened with the class size, with the heterogeneity of the class, with yes (-) the pressure of the parents. Perhaps there are too few teachers with basic training. The lateral entrants are technically good, but they lack the pedagogical qualifications. (G_T4_F)

Strengthening their language skills is an absolute need, language as a vehicle of coexistence, not so much to learn about literature and poetry, but precisely language as a means of establishing social relations. (IT_T7_F)

Well, madam, you have no right to punish that child. I, for example, for getting a 3 grade..., I would have given her a chocolate. Because, the kid must get some kind of reward, a reward for that... But she received punishment from her parents. And therefore, we sometimes must educate parents first– so they would be able to appreciate their own child, because when she is willing to learn, well, it's easier for her and for every teacher in the Polish school, right? And when the child is blocked by her parents, because mom is unsatisfied with such mark, so ... We, too, are such intermediaries – on one side and on the other, too. (PL_F1_M_4_F)

of making their voice heard, on the other, they call it '**fake participation**' and point to it having no substantial effect. In the UK, children advocate **a more person-centred style of teaching** – activities in which students can express their personalities are considered to provide a boost to trust and self-confidence. They also believe that teachers should learn to trust students' capacity to pursue their learning more autonomously.

Forms of Expressing Agency

The need to express agency for full participation in school life is widely recognized by teachers from different countries, and refers to all age groups, including ISCED 0. Professionals, however, define participation in school life in various ways: some of them point to it involving attendance of both school and extra-curricular activities, while others refer to the personal expression of feelings and views. In the UK, for example, professionals emphasize children's agency in their role of supporters of newly arrived classmates, independent of teachers' elicitation. In Sweden, on the other hand, mediators underscore the fact that sometimes children express their agency by showing that they do not need support from mediators and feel independent enough to participate in activities on their own.

Students in our research claimed that they want to have an impact on school life. For example, in Belgium they mentioned that one possible form of participation in school life is to supply their own input about how the school and classroom should function. This can be done by means of a suggestion box, for example, where students can submit their ideas regarding school organisation. The **possibility of contesting rules** that students find unfair or simply unnecessary can also be viewed as an expression of one's agency, even if schools are not always open to this form of participation. Contesting rules also seems to be an important form of expressing

More towards the person who doesn't judge because I don't want to 'spit in the soup' but some teachers put a label on people directly and don't try to understand them, while some teachers have this thing that it doesn't matter who you are, what your difficulties are; they try to help you and understand you. So I would go more to these teachers. (BE_I3_G)

Girl 1: It depends on the teacher. Like I said I don't trust them cause I've noticed that in other schools, when students have told them, they've had to go to this social... like, what are they? Child---
I: Child protection.

Girl 1: Exactly, them. [laughter]. They've reported it to them. So that's why I don't trust. But if the teacher is someone who doesn't really proceed with things, that's when I can talk about things. But I don't really trust teachers that much to be honest.

Girl 2: Yeah. I could easily talk about positive events and I'd be happy to do so but with negative I try to be a bit cautious especially in Finland, you know. They take everything so seriously. (FI_F3_CH_G)

This is already frustrating. It is sad, I think, because we all live in the 21st century and in a democratic country like Germany. And I think also in small institutions as schools more participation should be provided to us. Yes. I would appreciate it if the class representatives could change anything. And weren't only there to organize playground services. (G_I43_ISCED3_G)

I see the educational needs of children of this age group being a lot about, I mean, the need for play, as well as the need for relationships with peers, the negotiation of rules, the negotiation of play, the negotiation of shared spaces and materials. (IT_T14_F)

In normal times, relationships are good and children help each other autonomously, this is so true when a new child arrives, there is so much support, it is amazing to watch how they sort themselves out naturally, they are so mature. (UK_T11_F)

individual agency by preschool children in Germany, for whom rejecting taking a nap is a way of showing their independence and ability to make their own decisions. In the day care centre, children thus efficiently negotiate their presence in both play and rest spaces. Furthermore, upon being asked what they do if they want to complain about something or change something in kindergarten, children responded that they usually go directly to the head of the day care centre. This not only clearly shows their trust in the system but also their self-confidence and agency. Interestingly, while children do recognize ways in which they could actively participate in school life, they are also critical about the scope of their influence (e.g. regarding the Children Parliament). A student council is positively evaluated by students in Sweden, who believe that thanks to such a body they can change small things at the classroom level. In Poland, children link their agency with collective actions of evaluating their behaviour and performance. They like to be engaged in open discussions and express their opinions.

The Gender Dimension of Agency

The gender dimension of practicing agency by migrant students was underlined by teachers and other professionals in some countries. For example, social workers in Finland emphasized that, due to **diverse cultural background family expectations** regarding careers and education towards migrant boys and girls, their participation in school activities may differ significantly and negatively. At the same time, interpreters pointed out that the **school should actively promote gender equality** and thus encourage girls and women to fully participate in social life. In Italy, teachers similarly underlined that **socialization into gender roles** and social expectations can encourage boys to participate intensively in social activities, while deterring

It's also an attitude sometimes. There may be resistance to having study guidance at all. There are those students who, especially after a couple of years in a Swedish school, may think, 'I do not need this'. (SWE_M3_M)

We tried to give our opinion on the infamous decision that girls can't dress how they want. Some decided to put posters on the walls etc., and the management sent the educators to tear them up. We did not understand. We asked for explanations and the only answer we got was 'yes, it is the management which imposes that on us. You can't say anything. These are the regulations which have been in place.' [...] There were a lot of posters all over the school and when we saw the educators, especially female educators, remove these posters and tear them up in front of us, we felt a bit like, I'm not going to say dirty, but a little humiliated. We were saying to ourselves that we are not supported.

(BE_I3_G)

Girl 1: Well, the decisions that we make are easy decisions, but the other decisions that the big ones have to make and determine, those are mostly, well, very difficult ones. (...) really very, very difficult decisions. Well, I don't think I want anything else.

I: Who are the big ones? Are they the adults, or are they the older students?

Girl 2: Yeah, so our teachers. (G_F24_ISCED1_G)

girls from active engagement in events they do not feel suitable. The continuing further education of migrant girls can be circumscribed by family expectations. In Poland, teachers working at schools near the centres for foreigners, where refugee families from very different life situations and often after traumatic experiences reside, accentuate the influence of the family in the academic development of girls. According to them, **female students are expected to finish their education quite early** in order to get married. A similar observation was raised by Italian teachers, who claimed that girls were encouraged less to continue their studies, negatively influencing their self-esteem and increasing their chances of taking on unqualified jobs. The gender dimension of agency is also present in the narratives of the children. For example, student girls in Germany find some school spaces to be too loud and disturbing due to the behaviour of boys. Their strategy for dealing with such situations is to simply avoid those places. However, if avoidance is no longer possible, female students ask teachers for an intervention and initiate a discussion on the impact of being rough and loud on students' wellbeing. This clearly demonstrates **girls' agency** in shaping their school experiences.

Enhancing Agency Through Peer Networks

Teachers and children in all countries highlighted the **importance of peer networks in enhancing children's agency and participation**. They observe that other students are **a source of support for migrant children** offered individually, collectively with teachers' support. It is apparent that the assistance from older local (as in Poland, Italy, Belgium) and migrant (as in Belgian OKAN school) students have a positive impact on migrant children's self-confidence, feelings of security and well-being. It also **helps them**

I: What happens with the things that you bring up ... how are they received?

Boy: I was in the class council last year together with another student from my class, and it's like this that she, the "headmaster" asks like "what does your class think and what do you want to change?" and stuff, then we say it and she listens to it, but not always....

I: Ah, something happens.

Boy: Yes, exactly.

I: But have you experienced something happening sometimes?

Boy: Yes, but mostly not.

I: But is it really this channel that you have to express your opinion?

Girl1: Yes, such things that you want to change. Although if there is something small you want to change in a class, then you can just talk to the teacher and then it feels like it changes immediately. (SWE_F3_ISCED3)

I: How do you decide on the mark for your behaviour? Does the teacher decide alone or do you decide too?

Girl: As I remember we always decided what the grade would be.

I: What did it look like?

Girl: We wrote the name on the blackboard and a teacher said, for example, how many was negative comments someone had, or if he/she got any, and then we had to decide whether if it was 4 or 5, or an A for behaviour.

I: How did you feel about it?

Girl: I felt good about it. (PL_I9_CH_G)

The school should promote these things and educate girls and women even more about Finnish society. And men too, of course... they have some bad habits to unlearn. The school should take an open stance on this for both men and women. The school is in an excellent position to teach young women and young girls that they have those rights. (FI_I3_F)

to better understand cultural norms as well as comply with school rules and regulations structured by teachers. Moreover, migrant children in Poland describe their native peers as enabling them to settle in the class and providing opportunities for socializing and forming friendships. It is noteworthy, however, that while trying to understand the role of peers, the teachers in Belgium refer to students' shared age, common experience but also insufficient activities and practices that might empower migrant children. The opposite picture emerges from the interviews with Finnish and German teachers, who indicate how school can facilitate children's agency through peer networks. In both cases, the contact between non-migrant and migrant students is facilitated through school: teachers appoint students who are already perfectly familiar with school to guide new children through school life and make them feel welcome. This approach can lead to enhancing children's agency through practice-based examples, i.e. by observing the participation and engagement of other students in school activities.

The teachers also recognize how **peer networks improve the educational opportunities** of migrant children. Through the contacts with their peers, they gain more opportunities to develop their knowledge of the local language through, among others, peer mediation of the native language (Italy) or create more space for individual expression in the school (Belgium).

The importance of peer networks was also raised by children. In Italy, students argue that the support emerges from a personal bond which can develop into **long-lasting friendship**. Therefore, peer networks go beyond the school premises and the school context and spread to personal sphere as well, particularly discernible in the case of Italy. The study in the UK illustrates that **outside school spaces** – such as playground – allow children to develop their agency and increase their participation. As emphasized by the children in the study, they can take autonomous decisions and increase their capabilities to undertake various tasks through social interactions and joint play. In this context, children's agency and partici-

For example, if you organize an extracurricular activity, it is generally the boys who are allowed to come and take part in all the activities, but the girls are very inconspicuous [...] girls are hardly ever allowed to come, whereas the boys take part in everything and this clearly facilitates them, but also in terms of relationships the boys have fewer difficulties in relating to friends with other nationalities, girls tend to isolate themselves more, to stay among themselves. (IT_T16_F)

One girl said that she was going to get married. And I replied: What do you mean? She was in the first year of secondary school, at the hairdressing school. She said she would still like to study, but she was already engaged. She already has a boyfriend, a family. (...) Her older sister was also forced to marry. They were together for 3 months and she ran away from that boy because he beat her. (PL_T13_F)

The fathers of the girls of the Maghreb area already have an idea of their daughters as mothers, at home, who may gain a school diploma but not for the reason of increased job opportunities. The same thing, not for religious ideological reasons, but the same thing applies to the fathers of Ghanaian and Nigerian girls, a little education, yes, whatever is compulsory, it has to be done or social services might come to your home, but they tend not to have high expectations for their daughters. A little bit better, a lot better in fact, are the parents of boys from Eastern Europe [...] or the boys' fathers expect their sons to do something better than their own job. (IT_T6_F)

They have this extraordinary gift of knowing how to welcome and support each other, of immediately identifying the difficulties that a classmate is experiencing and acting in this sense. We have seen it not only with the classmates who perhaps don't understand much Italian, but for example with the classmates who have disabilities, the whole group all the children of any origin activate behaviours of care and activate behaviours of welcoming the other, that is to say, noticing that a child is on the sidelines and going to call him. (IT_T14_F)

pation facilitate their self-confidence as well as helping to develop social relationships and group-processes.

Peer networks also play important role in **forming children's agency in a context of problematic situations, conflicts and the way of resolving them**. The cases of Poland and Italy clearly illustrate that being able to take some actions on their own to resolve the conflict by themselves without engaging teachers or parents is also a sign of children's agency in their relations with other peers. Moreover, being judged by older students and teachers often leads to their withdrawal from class life, feeling reluctant to speak up and present their opinions and feeling inferior to others. Afraid of making mistakes or showing a lack of knowledge (asking for explanations) inhibits their participation. This can even be reinforced by their own personal traits and characteristics, such as being shy.

Agency Outside the School Environment

Agency outside the school environment is much less visible than in school environment in both children's and professionals' statements. Both groups focused more on how children perform and function in the school space, which may be more relevant to their personal experiences. However, children and social workers, who also work in the home or community, are much more likely to talk about agency outside of school than, for example, teachers or interpreters. The three sub-themes under which the theme of agency arises are: future plans, children's after-school activity spaces, and keeping in touch with language and culture of origin.

I: When you came to this class in September, what was it like with your friends then?

Girl: Well, a girl sat down with me, her name was Lena and she sits with me now and she's a very nice girl, because she sat with me from the first day.(...)

I: And when you went back to school [after the pandemic], how was it in May?

Girl: She sits with me too and helps too.

Intercultural assistant: But it's better now [with the language], well what are you already....

I: Because everyone started writing to me or talking to me. (PL_I14_CH_G)

And that's why we're now tackling the tandem project. Where the third grade, for example, always takes over a first grade as a monitoring, so to speak, where everyone gets a godchild. And then you also do things together, in the hope that they will have someone, an ally in the schoolyard, so to speak, but not to ally against others, but simply to have support in questions of general orientation, language, learning mentorship, etc. (G_T2_F)

Only that I had a fight with my friends. Then for two entire days I didn't go to them. And on the third day I didn't go, then we settled everything, reconciled and one thing like that. (PL_I8_CH_B)

That is, I would like to participate more, but I am afraid of making mistakes, and I'm also afraid [unclear] in front of other people, also because I am another colour and so I am afraid that someone might start targeting me. (IT_F29_CH_G)

I can listen more than I can speak [...] because I'm shy and I'm afraid that I might make a mistake. (IT_F31_CH_G)

Future Plans

Children spoke about their educational plans, which they would like to realize in their countries of emigration (both for migrant children staying in Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Poland or England) and outside their country of emigration. Those plans, which are connected with further education in the country of emigration (Germany), are often also connected with the **desire to obtain a job with satisfying salaries in the future**. It is worth mentioning, however, that it is not the migration experience itself that determines children's plans, but also other factors, such as their age (e.g. children in Sweden from upper secondary school have more clarity about their future) or status and personality, which according to the British are related to children's aspirations and plans. From the teachers' perspective, migrant children, on the one hand, care about their grades and have **high aspirations for their own development** and future, but on the other hand, some of them **find it difficult to plan for the future** (Germany, Sweden) or do not care about learning, do not engage in studying, show no – or only superficial – goals, are passive and tend to be isolated and demonstrate very low levels of self-esteem (Italy). In Italy, some children plan to enter professions related to higher education, but others mention professions such as YouTuber, mechanic, firefighter, songwriter, cartoonist, architect, interior designer, video-game creator/designer, driver, or cleaner, which is sometimes the same profession of one of the parents. An example of children's agency is also the choice of a profession that does not conform to a stereotypical gender role. However, in families from countries where the role of women is clearly defined and girls are expected to marry at an certain age, some girls have to negotiate their choices, which may be contrary to family expectations (e.g. some traditional Chechen families in Poland, well in-

So, life in Germany. We started anew, I don't know what will happen in the coming years, in the next five years or so, but I really want to learn well here, learn something, study and have a good job. I want that too much. I hope that I can do that. (G_I42_ISCED3_B)

Aspirations and expectations depend on the background that includes much more than ethnicity. There is social class, which is more important, you know the problem of white working-class boys, then of course it depends on the catchment areas, so many differences between schools. (UK_T1_F)

There are some who have great difficulties, but they don't even try, they don't even have the goodwill [...] they are passive, they don't have any goal, at least they don't show it. (IT_T5_F)

Girls want to continue their education, they want to stay in Poland, continue studying, and educate themselves. They link their plans to it. They are not girls looking for husbands anymore. No, these girls think differently. Probably girls are more ambitious, more hardworking, girls have a more ambitious attitude than boys. (PL_T4_F)

Many times, it is even harder for second-generation immigrants because they are pleased that are in safe conditions and somehow got their lives started, but that second-generation might be in pain between these cultures even more than that first generation because they don't have the same culture to preserve - they don't know it properly - when a different kind of culture is cherished at home, they don't sit here in Finnish culture either. (FI_F1_SW2_F)

tegrated second-generation youth in Finland). Researchers from Finland and Italy reported that some children had plans for a future in countries outside the country of emigration, perhaps indicating an agency related to the child's interests and hobbies. Moreover, in Finland it also shows the development of hybrid or global identities, but sometimes also lack of a sense of belonging what would require active action on the part of the host community.

Children's After-School Activity Spaces

An important role outside the school environment for children's agency is played by social workers who work in both home and institutional settings to support children's self-esteem, build on their strengths, and show opportunities for activities outside school.

Children with migration experience spend time after school in playgrounds (England), in sports fields or in associations (Poland), in recreation centres (Sweden), in the Christian community, or communities based on their native language e.g., Turkish community (Germany). According to Swedish social workers, children can participate in popular activities in community centres including sports, cooking, arts workshops, music, and discussion groups. These activities are suited to how the school operates, but often **do not require language skills**, which can be particularly helpful in supporting children's and young people's self-esteem and agency at the beginning of their stay, when they experience many challenges in the educational space due to the language barrier. These spaces are designed for people living in the neighbourhood, both children and adults. They constitute important spaces for the formation of peer relationships as, according to some children and teachers, the ties made with the host group at school do not extend into the after-school environment (Germany, Poland). Out-

Sure, I would like to go back to my home country but at the same time I wouldn't want to go back cause things are bad there. I'm afraid of my and my family's safety. I'm used to Finland. Like I wanted to live in Finland for the rest of my life but I'm too lonely here as we have a lot of relatives in like Germany. I can't go back to [country Y] and I don't want that either, but like Germany is a place my family would like to go to, but at the same time, because I've lived here almost all of my life, so it feels terrible to think that you're going to start everything from scratch. Anew, there. You forget the language you've learned here and everything you've come to learn. (FI_F2_CH_1_G)

Much of this is automatic. For instance, around 2015 when many fled from Afghanistan and Syria, and [name of school] received many. Then we had to adopt our activities, in collaboration with the school, so that they could participate in our activities. (...) and something we soon discovered, was that often the activity per se did not demand a language. Rather, if you play football, you learn the language by doing. (...) By participating in activities, you are part of a context where you share more than the language, you share an interest, and it is fun to be there, everybody is there with the same purpose. So we have seen advantages as regards activities. (SWE_SW6_M)

This cultural aspect has an enormous weight because males can go out, if sometimes they don't come it's because they go to pray or because they don't want to, but females are precluded from this opportunity, they don't let them go out and they find it difficult to come because they are just not used to it, it's improper, it can't be done. (IT_T18_F)

side school, in **informal spaces**, children usually establish relationships with other emigrants who share **similar experiences**, but also sometimes with members of the host community. Without feeling judged, they can engage in activities they like, build peer relations, express themselves, develop their own interests (Poland, UK, Sweden). Parents and guardians play an important role in supporting or blocking the development of agency in non-school spaces. Teachers report that in conservative families, parents sometimes refuse to allow girls to participate in extra-curricular activities (Italy). An expression of agency in Belgium is the fact that children make use of the support offered by psycho-medico-social centres (PMS), particularly since the child or parent has to go there themselves and not through the school. Parents resist such forms of support due to a lack of trust, but sometimes children themselves contact these institutions.

Unaccompanied minors often stay in residential centres (Belgium), under Local Authority care for undocumented children and foster placement for those with documents (UK), or reception centres (Italy). The assistance given by social workers to these children is sometimes hindered further by the difficult experiences of these children and sometimes feelings of abandonment, even though it typically results in a higher degree of independence of these children. The responsibilities of the social workers are to provide care for the children until they are granted asylum, to coordinate the cooperation of the school with other institutions (Finland, Belgium) or providing a sense of security and relationships (Italy). In the case of unaccompanied minors, independent migration itself is already an expression of agency, although according to some Italian social workers this agency is illusory as the child's migration resulted from decisions of the parents. A form of supporting the agency of children living in residential centres (Belgium) by social workers is **the voluntary choice of leisure activities**. As long as they are present in school, children have the right to choose how they spend their free time and, although different ac-

I know it [the The Psycho-Medico-Social centre] is good because as soon as there is a problem the students make an appointment with the woman from the PMS and they take it without shame, without embarrassment. For them it is natural. Because when I was in school, I remember I had people in my class who had to go to the PMS and for them, PMS means that you have problems, that you are crazy, whereas this is not at all the case. (BE_T1_F)

Working with MENA in fact, the first challenge is to earn their respect because they were on their own from an early age. So to have good communication with them, we need to have their trust and respect. (BE_SW2_M)

The biggest challenge is to ensure that these young people have confidence in themselves, that they understand that they can emancipate themselves [...] without having to go through a relationship. It sounds like an aberration when you say it like that because, as educators, relationships are obviously at the heart of everything, but it is true because these young people who came to Italy from a family that told them, at best, "please go away from us to help us" [...] they arrive here and find themselves in front of other adults who tell them "look, believe us because we will tell you which is the right way". (IT_SW8_M)

Boy1: We go to the Mosque and we just had the Eid celebrations which I love because it is like Christmas
I: it is important to you to take part?
Boy1: My family, we meet many friends and relatives.
Girl1: We had Christmas, before Covid, and it is a bit later than the Christmas here because we have that different calendar so it is like having two Christmas. They are a bit different, but the message is the same I think. (UK_F25_CH)

tivities are on offer, they often choose to keep in touch with family members by making a phone call or sending messages. Italian social workers emphasize the importance of giving children space, mentioning the need to be honest, patient, and non-judgmental with them in order to build good relationships.

Keeping in Touch with the Language and Culture of Origin

Knowledge of the language and culture of origin enables children and young people to keep in touch with their families and to build relationships with people from their country of origin both outside and within school. This aspect is extremely important for **building a sense of security** at the beginning of a stay in a new country and later for the development of a **hybrid identity**. Knowledge of the language and culture of origin also enables to maintain privacy, providing children with a tool to exploit when they do not want someone to understand what they are saying. In contrast, second-generation migrants are sometimes found to voluntarily choose to communicate in the language of the country of emigration with both family members and friends. This indicates that children actively take advantage of the opportunities offered by multilingual development.

M1: You connect to the person directly that we come from the same country, we have the same background. So you get a connection with that person.

M2: I think that is the case with everyone, even here in Sweden. Swedes too. If you see someone, maybe you connect. That's when you feel, 'Yes, we come from the same country' so. (SWE_F2_ISCED3)

I: What do different cultures mean to you?

M1: Well, I think... It's like important to me that we're like... that I maintain [culture X], that I can talk about it and like the traditions still exist in our family. (FI_F6_CH_1_B)

I think I start speaking in my mother tongue when I do not want people to understand. Although I think most people use it, because they meet someone who is from the same country, or because they might get angry. (SWE_F2_ISCED3)

The Impact of COVID-19
on Student Agency
and Participation

The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread school closures or large scale alterations to their operations all over Europe. The outbreak was unexpected, and many educational institutions faced numerous challenges in responding to the situation. As a result, various arrangements were implemented between different educational levels and countries. In Belgium, Italy, Finland, Poland, and the UK, governments closed schools at the beginning of pandemic and, over time, restrictions alternated between being eased and re-imposed. After the first lockdown, Belgium opted to attempt to retain the traditional educational environment, limiting the number of students allowed in the classroom, restricting non-essential visitors, and using a hybrid learning approach. In the UK, when in-person teaching was provided, social distancing was imposed in schools, with the implementation of face masks mandates at times for children and staff. In Italy, traditional in-class teaching was essentially written off for the 2019/20 school year, with the

main strategies focused on improving the delivery of remote teaching: providing better equipment and the smoother organization of classes. In the 2020/2021 school year, as in Belgium, measures were implemented to ensure a safe educational environment in addition to the option to switch to remote teaching when required. The Polish case encapsulates how the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the structural inequalities and problems within the existing educational system. More specifically, it showed how both teachers and students alike have to tackle poor infrastructure, technical barriers, digital illiteracy or, in the case of the children, a lack of support. In Germany, schools reacted by changing the policies and practices affecting the daily routine of school life. To comply with social distancing rules and to prevent the spread of the virus, schools enforced the wearing of masks (in class and during breaks), closed break and leisure rooms, restricted certain areas in the outdoor area/schoolyard to certain groups at a time, limited the number of teachers who were assigned to teach

a particular class and scaled back parental engagement to only picking up and dropping off children. A different approach was adopted in Sweden, where universal school closures were not implemented: schools were only closed partially and this took place in stages.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Children's Participation in School: Voices from Professionals and Students

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the educational systems of all the CHILD-UP countries, affecting accessibility to education, the curriculum and teaching methods, as well as the support offered to children. All these processes affected the educational functioning of schools and especially children's participation and their learning achievements. Although the effects of the pandemic were experienced by all children, **children from socioietally disadvantaged groups were especially prone to being negatively affected**. In the UK, Germany and Belgium, teachers noted that children with a lower socio-economic status which cut across ethnicity, migration background and social class, were especially at risk of experiencing limited participation in education. The COVID-19 pandemic also exposed the link between children's participation in school activities and their age. As professionals in Italy, Belgium and Poland argued, younger children suffered more from the drawbacks and downsides of online teaching since they particularly need direct, non-verbal, face-to-face communication with teachers and classmates as well as the teacher's support, which were difficult to provide during remote teaching. Professionals in Poland also stated that the **gender inequalities among students with migratory background were perpetuated during the pandemic**, making girls more prone to pa-

Children in kindergarten need physical contact [...] what was missing is precisely this contact. Children need this, not only a hug but also a look. (IT_T42_F)

And of course, it would be great if you could reach the children in a video chat. But that has been forbidden to us by the principal. For data protection reasons, or we are not yet involved in Lernsax, or I don't see that the parents can do that with Lernsax, because it is simply a system that was a bit difficult for us teachers, and if the parents don't speak German, someone would have to be on site to say ok, I'll install it on your phone. I'll set it up for you now. Then you need language mediators again. So theoretically, there would have to be a system administrator at every school to support you with something like that. THEN it would be optimal, then it could work. Otherwise I don't see it as profitable for our school. (G_T2_F)

It was hard because my little brother, he causes chaos at home. He runs around and my mother she washes, and she talks to her siblings very loudly. (SWE_F7_ISCED2)

triarchal norms embedded in their parents' culture. As a result, those who had already been vulnerable before the pandemic struggled more with the effects of COVID-19, deepening the existing inequalities and hindering the integration and participation of children from vulnerable groups in classes. In this context, the professionals – such as intercultural assistants and teachers in Poland or Italy – talked about the invisibility of migrant children during online teaching. Their disappearance or low active participation was explained as stemming from a lack of equipment, their own digital illiteracy or that of their parents, insufficient support from teachers or their parents' inability to navigate the intricacies of educational institutions. In Italy, professionals also claimed that some children with migration backgrounds disappeared because they simply returned to the country of origin of their parents or because their parents found sending them to school too dangerous to their health.

The accessibility of education raised the question of the existence of a digital divide. Professionals and children in all countries pointed out a **lack of proper equipment** as well as the **digital illiteracy of children, their parents and teachers** as a factor hindering children's participation in education and opportunities during the remote learning period. However, the digital divide has its own variations and characteristics in each country. In the initial phase of the pandemic, many children – and especially those with migrant backgrounds, from large families and those with lower socio-economic status – faced difficulties in obtaining adequate equipment (like in Poland). Yet this was addressed over time by schools, teachers or NGOs and low quality and speeds for broadband Internet emerged as the main issue (Poland, the UK). At the same time, some professionals noted that children and their parents had not been able to make up for their computer illiteracy in such a short period of time. What seems to be a common factor in all countries is the opinion amongst professionals concerning the limited digital literacy of children's parents needed to

Yes. Well, I don't have peace and quiet now because I only have two rooms and my sisters, I have two younger sisters, are also in my room and I don't really have peace and quiet now. (G_I43_ISCED3_G)

Well Ilia or I was in the kitchen and Ilia, well we changed every day, and so I was in the kitchen, the next time I was in the big room and so on. (PL_I11_CH_B)

In my opinion, being in front of a screen for five hours every day is not very good for our health in the sense that, both for our eyes and also psychologically, because it is also stressful to sit there and do nothing other than to look there and stay there all day, and then anyway getting up and going to school was part of the routine that we've now become used to. (IT_F11_CH_G)

support their children. The Swedish, German, UK and Polish cases also highlighted the poor conditions for learning. For example, professionals talked about sharing a workspace with siblings/other members of family or the background noise of family life. Even in the latter case, however, working conditions improved over time.

Another recurrent theme was the description of **remote teaching as “boring”**. Children explained that the remote teaching gave them limited interpersonal interactions and therefore was not capable of enabling them to socialize with others. In Italy, this feeling of boredom was additionally linked to **tiredness caused by attending all classes online**: such a mode of teaching did not ensure their wellbeing and health. In Poland, Sweden and Germany, children also complained about a perceived lack of engaging teaching methods and audio-visual materials. Their experiences of online teaching relied on the teacher’s competences and adjustments to online teaching which they often found unsatisfactory, unprofessional and chaotic, especially during the first phase of pandemic. Gradually, however, classes became more professionally managed as teachers became more experienced in using online teaching tools.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only had direct impact on children’s perception of their classes, but also on the support from their teachers. From their perspective, remote teaching was essentially a period of lost time: **the quality of education was low and opportunities to learn were wasted**. In Sweden, Germany and Poland, children complained that they had to manage too much by themselves and felt overburdened with the responsibility for their education. In their opinions, teachers were simply sending the materials or links to be studied in order to complete the tasks and the students were expected to go through the materials, to look for an explanation if anything was unclear. Children were also made to make up on their own after being absent. In such situations, children acknowledged that they looked for **non-institutional support**: they consulted sib-

Boy1: We barely got help during Corona.
 Boy2: Yes, we kind of had to manage by ourselves.
 I: What help do you get when it comes to difficulties?
 Boy1: Google. (SWE_F2_ISCED3)

As we have to move forward in the course, the teachers do not have time to react and answer questions during class. (BE_I4_G)

Since then I’ve always been in school until Corona came and after that I helped the children with their homework on the phone. And it works. (G_M3_FFF)

Parents cannot support children because they do not know how the educational system works, or the language and also because of a lack of knowledge about how computers work. (PL_T14_F)

lings, classmates, parents or used Internet resources (as in Poland or Italy for technical assistance to online classes) or as part of external initiatives such as “Corona school” in Germany. If the institutional support was provided – as in case of Belgium, where the teachers were obliged to be available to students by the school – children reported that teachers were not available for them to provide additional explanation and answered their questions as well as some students not having access to the proper equipment which would have had allowed them to benefit from such a solution. This sense of feeling neglected might have stemmed from the inefficient use of digital technology. Children in Poland and Italy claimed that it was hard to get the attention of their teachers: their raised hands, other reactions during lessons or non-verbal signals went unnoticed. Moreover, audio challenges negatively impacted students’ ability to listen and hear well. As a result, children lagged behind as they neither understood tasks they were obliged to do, nor could they express themselves while explaining the problem.

Nevertheless, some children raised the point that their teachers had provided help when asked. Such opinions – although by no means predominant among the children interviewed – were more in line with the narratives woven by teachers. It should be noted that in all countries (except Sweden) teachers referred to the fact that they had to switch to online teaching overnight, without receiving much prior help or advice. They had to support and monitor the children during remote classes as well as addressing parental concerns, which frequently led to exhaustion after an entire day of working online.

In this challenging situation, teachers were not left alone as **interpreters/mediators/cultural assistants were also more involved in online meetings with parents**. However, they also experienced various difficulties, depending on the country. While interpreters/mediators/cultural assistants in Italy complained about obstacles to maintaining contact

And it also depresses her a lot, she showed us a couple of such scenes here that I was concerned, but it comes from the fact that she was frustrated with the situation. There was supposed to be a pre-pandemic foreign language song contest in March and she was preparing for that contest, but they sent us home. and there was a scene of stomping, screaming, and we explained to her that it was all schools, but she couldn’t understand it. she is very ambitious. (PL_T7_F)

I think Corona is quite unfair, because we had planned quite, quite, quite a lot of class excursions before Corona and there always wanted to come over, for example, a policeman, or a fireman, (...), but unfortunately they couldn’t come, we couldn’t do any excursions either. (G_F24_ISCED1_G)

Not good. I didn’t speak much Polish, because there was no one to speak to, there were no friends, well [they were] only in those lessons [online] and that’s all. (PL_I17_CH_B)

with parents and children due to their clients lacking the requisite skills or equipment at home, indirect contact in Belgium (understood as on-line meetings and face-to-face meetings with the face covered by a mask) frequently led to misunderstandings and impeded the use of body language. On the other hand, the interpreters/mediators/cultural assistants also reported some experiences related to newly available strategies and options, such as working with smaller groups or on-to-one, supporting them in doing homework by phone or organizing some social events like a painting contest.

While discussing the participation of students during the remote teaching period, teachers highlighted the **risk of children dropping out due to lack of support from their parents**. Teachers in Poland expressed worries concerning the parental lack of language proficiency and ignorance of the educational system, as well as the impaired inability to maintain contact with parents due to their digital illiteracy. Additionally, teachers in Germany noted that parents with migrant backgrounds may not be able to support their children due to their inadequate cultural and language competences, often exacerbated by their lack of financial resources. Consequently, children from a migrant background had a greater risk of abandoning school or serving as translators and mediated between parents and teachers, a fact which placed even more responsibility on them.

Regarding additional, extracurricular activities, teachers and children in all countries noted **limited opportunities for developing their interests and knowledge in extracurricular activities**. The regulations imposed on schools significantly affected indoor and outdoor play and activities alike – both in school (particularly acute in Poland and Finland) and in other local institutions/services (as reported in Germany) – decreasing the amount of after-school activities, clubs, contests, excursions and class trips or festivities. It should be noted that teachers considered children with migratory backgrounds as being more prone to negative consequences stemming

During online learning, the teachers often made presentations on the topic, they often prepared additional documents with notes in Word files. The geography teacher made presentations, notes in Word, and videos. The physics teacher made presentations at the beginning, then in a document (...) with notes, a teacher explained everything. Later on, there were still some videos. I think that there was a video, a presentation, a Word document in every lesson, there was a lot of that. (PL_I4_CH_G)

It wasn't nice because you couldn't get close to anyone, for example, we can go at the blackboard to write down a calculation only if we have our own chalk, we have to sanitize ourselves, well it's not nice to be at a distance. (IT_F32_CH_G)

We only do some subjects and we have to, we can't talk to other classes, play with other classes, we can't have contact with them. (...) And we always have to wear masks in class when we get up and in yard break when we get in line. When we go in to school, we have to wear our masks too. (...) We can't play with others and we always, always have to wear that stupid mask. (G_I25_ISCED1_G)

from the closure of additional classes. For example, in Finland this meant that a safe space for receiving professional support in learning Finnish and doing homework in interaction with peers was no longer available. This example underscores the fact that the pandemic revealed the inability of schools to address children's language development. This is particularly true for Poland and Germany where teachers spoke of a deterioration of language skills among children with migrant backgrounds, and in Italy, where L2 classes were often postponed or cancelled because the children who needed them were unreachable and when they did connect, priority was given to relations within class and with teachers. They reported that children had limited possibilities to speak the local language – they could not practice it in the conversations outside classroom: neither at home (especially in families which cannot speak the local language) nor with classmates.

The negative side-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and schools in general were particularly salient in all countries, yet **positive experiences** were also reported, with online teaching seen by some children as having advantages. In Sweden, for instance, children emphasised that working from home was easier for them as there were none of the distractions which they faced in the traditional classroom. In Poland, children appreciated the opportunity to use dictionaries and the fact that, in case they were not prepared then they could quickly go through their notes. They were also given more materials such as presentations, documents with additional information by teachers. In Italy and Poland, children highlighted the fact that attending lessons was easy and helped them to manage stress better – with no need to travel, they could get up later and wear whatever they wanted.

And what I found nice during the Corona time was that we grew together more, because we were together more often, also in the after-school care. Before the first lockdown, we always had separate compartments here on the property, and we all had to stay together in the after-school care, just one class, and we grew together much more. Well, I think that's just nice. (G_F30_ISCED1_G)

Boy: I think, I don't like how, during lockdown, like, we got separately. got so used to being with my friends, having fun, and then Covid comes along...

I: And stops it. And were you worried about it?

Boy: Yeah. I was missing my friends because they have always been here for me.

I: Yeah, you would miss them. And how did you feel about it? Yeah...

Boy: Two thumbs down.

I: Oh. Why?

Boy: Because like [name removed] said, it makes me separated from my best friends. (UK_F5_CH_3_B)

During breaks, you could only either play on the computer for the whole break or chat. It's better at school. Because you can go out in the corridor, play a ball, a small one, a soft one, that won't do anything. (...) This is better. (PL_I8_CH_B)

Schools after Lockdown

The long-awaited return to school appeared to disappoint children in some countries. Children longed for contacts with friends, being and playing together but when the most restrictive lockdown was over and schools were re-opened, the limitations imposed on students and social distancing made the contact between students, as well as between school and parents, still difficult. Although some children rationalised the changes as necessary for their learning, well-being and health, others – especially in Italy, Germany or the UK – voiced their concerns regarding physical separation from their peers, wearing masks (except the UK) or not having the opportunity to bring their own personal belongings to class. The school seemed very different than before: desks were separated from each other, activities (both indoors and outdoors) were organized in smaller groups, each group of students was allocated a separate time and section to prevent children from interacting with each other as well as children not being allowed to come close to each other. The organization of school and the school's rhythm also changed. According to some of the children, the school had become a sadder place than before lockdown. The limitations were even more restrictive in the case of the unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy, who were still not allowed to take part in the activities outside their communities. This not only has had short-term negative consequences, but also a long-term impact on their competences and the position in the labour market.

The new organization of school life had a number of positive effects, with some children in Germany appreciated that due to smaller number of children in class they received better support from teachers, more space and better contact with classmates. Others reported that the experience of schooling under the pandemic (e.g. working in small

I: what would have been different if there had been no Covid?

F1: the relationships between people, so even friends etc. would have been different, then in the first quarantine I came to understand many things about my friendships, I mean, I found out what the real friendships were, the people who were there and the people who didn't care. (IT_F1_CH_G)

When I didn't understand something in lesson, I would call Gabriel, he would tell me everything and give me homework. (PL_I17_CH_B); Before that it was not necessarily so strong, we helped each other but since that epidemic, as soon as we came back, we asked more questions of our classmates than of our teachers. Because we preferred to ask the questions to our classmates rather than to the teachers, because we work better with them and we help a lot, a lot I think, yes we are united. (BE_F4_5_G)

groups) helped to create bonds between children and strengthened them as a class. Teachers also benefited from these changes, although they pointed to different positive outcomes. For example, they appreciated working with smaller groups in Germany, which they found easier to manage, teach and address the needs of children with migratory backgrounds. In the UK, relations with parents, especially those of younger children, improved as they had few moments to talk to each other when the child was picked up – something impossible during lockdown.

Maintaining Relations between Classmates

There is no doubt that the **COVID-19 pandemic hindered contact with classmates and friends** in all countries. Children faced difficulties in meeting and spending time together, whether playing or learning. Their needs to socialize with other children were not taken into account sufficiently and they felt that they were **deprived of the space necessary for developing their agency**, as was noted especially in the UK. Maintaining digital contact (e.g. during breaks, after school) was reported by children, but they emphasised that it could not replace face-to-face meetings. At the same time, as the case of Italy shows, a number of children admitted that they re-evaluated their friendships due to the pandemic: while some of them survived pandemic and appeared to be genuine and were cemented, others were destroyed as they were superficial. In Poland and Belgium, some children also talked about the support they received from their classmates: they could rely on them while doing homework or preparing for classes and thus student solidarity increased.

I didn't like doing the lessons online either because I was annoyed when my parents weren't home and the connection was down and I didn't know what to do, and because it was a bit harder and there are older kids who are there [online] for longer. (IT_F19_CH_G)

In my opinion the biggest difference between digital school and face-to-face school is that the digital school, in my opinion, makes you grow, for example it makes you mature in certain areas, for example in certain lessons that are done in class, the teachers can see if you are concentrating, but at home you can switch off in different ways and relax, or you can become more mature and recognize when you should do something or not. (IT_F29_CH_B)

There are students who are very independent right from the start. You could see that now, um, in the time when we had the school digital now, during the Corona time. Uh, there were really even in the fifth-grade students. who have done everything independently and confidently, and, um, so it was really a dream to experience that. (G_T5_F)

The negative impact of social distancing on emotional, social and educational development among students was also emphasised by teachers. In Poland and Belgium, teachers talked about **missed peer-socialization**, with isolation leading to mental problems, stress and depression. In the case of children with a migratory background, social distancing and a lack of peer contact reduced their relations with locals and other students.

The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children's Agency

The COVID-19 pandemic affected children's agency in different ways. In Poland, it was clear that the pandemic hit those who at the earlier stages of their education doubly hard, negatively affecting their agency and participation in school activities. The Italian and English studies indicated similar effects, highlighting **children's dependence on parental assistance** in managing the computer and Internet connection as well as in organizing their classes or homework. Parental support was therefore seen as necessary but also a limiting factor in children's agency.

Some older children acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic was a period which enabled them to **develop their sense of autonomy, agency, responsibility and self-control as they were responsible for their educational paths** (as in case of Italy or Germany). Children's agency was also revealed in their contacts with teachers. As a teacher in Belgium noted, as the children were more advanced with technology, they often took control of class activities. However, not all students enjoyed this type of freedom and agency, with some children feeling overwhelmed and **lacking the structure of regular in-school classes and extensive teacher guidance**. This was felt particularly hard in Poland, where the children ex-

At first, at the first lockdown, everything was online, we didn't have online meetings like Google Meetings. So we did everything by ourselves. Even my parents didn't have time to help me, so I did everything by myself. And then, as like, sometimes I wouldn't even know what to do, so because I didn't know what to do, my parents would just tell me to teach my brothers. (UK_F24_CH_1_B)

It's very good but I do not understand why they ring our parents and we are not asked. It is us too. Management seeks the advice of parents rather than students. In itself, the idea is good, but perhaps it was necessary to ask the students for advice, and then the parents. It's been a bit, you are the child, so they have to ask the parents how are you doing. (BE_I7_G)

But about the educators, sometimes they are just on top of us, they think they know everything. They don't even imagine what some of us are going through. (BE_FG4_2_G)

pected to be cared for and complained about the shifting of the burden and responsibilities of educational processes on them. In the UK, older children faced difficulties in combining their own education with helping their younger siblings due to their parents' work commitments. For students it was also discouraging if their voice was not heard. They feel **left out of decision-making processes**: instead of being asked about their opinions, teachers – as shown in the Belgian report – refer to their parents or make the decision on their own based on the power relations and belief that they are more knowledgeable. Through such behaviour they reveal the underlying power relation and lack of understanding for students' autonomy and the unwillingness to listen to them and develop their agency.

Recommendations

The recommendations in this report are divided into sections arranged according to the needs and observations of both children and professionals. Children indicated the need for support in the institution of school as a relational space where children build friendships and experience conflict, as well as the school as an educational space where children realize their own aspirations and accomplish educational tasks, and as a space for self-actualization where children can develop their own interests and sense of agency. Professionals emphasized to a much greater extent the need for educational support for children and teachers from a systemic perspective, especially how teachers, social workers, mediators, interpreters or cultural assistants should work on their own competences to enable children and their families to develop educationally, socially and emotionally. To reflect the opinions of children and professionals, the following

recommendations are divided into these sections: the school as a relational space, the school as an educational space, the school as a space for personal development, and the work of professionals and cooperation between institutions. In each section, the general recommendations are illustrated by means of examples from a particular country.

The School as a Relational Space

From the perspective of both children and professionals, especially social workers and interpreters, mediators or assistants, there is a need to work on building openness and a sense of security and safety in the school environment, to support the development of relationships between children with migration experience and those from the local community. It is

important that teachers are able to use **cultural diversity as a resource** through which everyone can learn and feel welcome to contribute with his/her ideas.

The children's statements suggest that it is easier for children **to build relationships in open, less formal spaces**. It is worth ensuring that school spaces such as sports fields, playgrounds, common rooms are accessible to children and that children can use them during breaks.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the needs of children and also enable them to have **contact with their peers from the country of origin**, especially at the beginning of their stay in new country. The possibility of communication in the language of origin may be a factor that builds a sense of security and reduces anxiety in the first months of staying in a new country. It is worth creating space and opportunities for children and young people who have already gone through the acculturation process to share their experiences. Thanks to this, they can act as experts, and children who have just arrived can not only receive logistical but also emotional support from people, who are able to take on their perspective.

Another important issue raised by the children themselves is the **trust they have or**

In class, teaching and learning should be built on open discussion and mutual respect. Every student needs to feel they are involved and that they matter. All voices need to be heard for example through role play to support group spirit, ensure mutual understanding, and guarantee a safe atmosphere for learning, self-expression, and co-working. (Children, Finland)

Intercultural assistants working in schools, similarly to teachers, stressed the need to introduce systematic education on cultural diversity in schools. Activities sensitising students to cultural diversity should be included in the curriculum and implemented horizontally, not only on special occasions. (Professionals, Poland)

Regarding children's desires, the main result is that children would like schools to become more favourable environment for cultivating social relationships. This transformation would concern the creation of space for children to express themselves as unique individuals rather than standardized roles. Children advance a plea for physical spaces, but also spaces to be carved within educational activities, to be tailored to their need to getting to know each other as unique individuals. (Children, UK)

The migrant 'groupings' formed by them are an important channel for the flow of information about the school, teachers, requirements, tasks, collaboration with other students, however, and importantly, they would stand up in defence of their colleagues in the event of aggression committed by other children. (Children, Poland)

It was also recommended by one social worker that when developing something for asylum seeker youth it would be helpful to interview immigrants with asylum background who are already well integrated as asylum seeker youth themselves usually feel difficult to share their wishes and thoughts. Social workers stated that there should be more different activities for asylum seeker youth for their different needs and that the activities should be closer to them. (Professionals, Finland)

would like to have in their teachers. It is therefore crucial that teachers take an active role in the process of building relationships with the new students, building trust with the children which can lead to both success in peer relationships and the educational process itself.

From the perspective of children and professionals, it is not only important to undertake activities that will develop tolerance and empathy among children and young people, but also **active anti-discrimination practices**, such as anti-discrimination workshops, diversity activities and peer tutoring at school. These recommendations appear in local reports in most of the countries which participated in the study.

It is therefore important for teachers to be able to take the perspective of the child, but also to **prepare the local peer environment** so that it too can understand the experience of migrant children. An interesting recommendation from a German student was for the students to learn about the teachers' perspectives and vice versa, something which could be achieved by weekly role reversal (teacher – student) so that both sides raised awareness about the challenges they faced.

A recommendation that comes up especially from mediators and social workers is the need for **sensitive cooperation between teachers and families**, taking into account the

For children, an ideal school is primarily one with fair, helpful teachers who can be trusted.

(Children, Poland)

It is interesting to note that all age groups (ISCEDo to ISCED3) indicate that they want teachers to be reliable, approachable and assertive. With the support of responsive teachers, children's self-confidence can increase. It can also help to create trust and motivation for learning and for contact with other peers. Children want teachers to be welcoming, supportive and a moral, impartial authority. (Children, Germany)

Racism must be recognized (see, understand, act) and civil courage (also for climate protection) must be promoted (school, teachers, all students). (Children, Germany)

At school level, anti-racism and anti-racist practices should be explicitly promoted to ensure equality and equity among all students in their learning environments. (Children, Finland)

More of a formal and targeted focus on combatting harassment would help students to feel safer in school and more able to share their opinions and speak out. This could take the form of content in courses, specialised training sessions or workshops, or a team of staff members and students dedicated to teaching about and combatting harassment. (Children, Belgium)

As to school policy on bullying and discrimination, social workers wished that if bullying or outright racism becomes evident at school, the minimum requirement is addressing it immediately and making clear that it is not acceptable. (Professionals, Finland)

Anti-discrimination workshops for children and teachers; Developing training, methods of mediation in the event of conflicts, violence at school, ridicule, and harassment; (Professionals, Poland)

emotional and social situation of parents. The emotional state of the parents, their sense of security has a great influence on the state of the child, therefore it is necessary to **look at the child as part of the family system** and to take care of the system itself. Because of the cultural differences between educational systems, it is important to **explain the school's policies to parents**, such as for example rules for excusing absences and parent meetings. This can be important in helping to **overcome the language barrier**, to improve work with an interpreter, cultural assistant or mediator in terms of their communication with parents. In addition, it is important to ensure that parents understand the recommendations and content of the conversation. This can be accomplished by using a multimedia application familiar to parents to convey information in writing or by preparing written information for parents on a piece of paper if they need to take a particular action, such as supplying the child with some materials. The development of a sense of security on the part of parents can be supported by creating spaces for integration, meetings for parents where they can exchange experiences and meet parents from local families.

There were also recommendations which mentioned supporting families better in their integration which would also directly affect children's integration and wellbeing e.g. take better account parents' wellbeing at reception centres and support their language learning as now the pressure is on children. (Professionals, Finland)

Use family as a resource. It must be avoided that children are left alone and stressed between the demands of the family and school/daycare. The integration of the children must be inseparable from the integration of the parents/family. The inclusion of older siblings can be helpful if they are already better integrated. Ultimately, the integration of parents is a main field of work for the integration of children. (Professionals, Germany)

Mediators also suggested a change in teachers' approach to communication with families, in particular suggesting meetings to know the family and to allow the family to know the school system. (Professionals, Italy)

For migrant parents to better understand communication from school, the messages should be interpreted for parents e.g. via some application before sending. All social workers saw the importance of interpretation services for encountering migrant parents and children in their own language. It must be remembered that when working with an interpreter, sufficient time is set aside as the conversation will last longer. When it comes to parents' meetings at school, it would be good also to use paper information sheets for sharing information or call parents on the phone because the use of digital information applications is not regular among migrant parents. (Professionals, Finland)

There should also be a preschool for parents or corresponding forms of contact and trust-building. There is a width in ways of incorporating parents reaching from doorway conversations to parent's café (e.g., presentations on certain topics) and parent's school (e.g., offering information on school and formulation of expectations). (Professionals, Germany)

The School as an Educational Space

Both teachers and children also shared their own needs about what is needed for children to participate in the school experience. In addition to a sense of security and openness, which are built both by the attitudes of teachers and the host community, the design of the school space, there are more specific recommendations for forms of support such as additional language of education classes, the creation of preparatory classes, the possibility of employing support teachers, mediators, or translators, as well as the use of active pedagogy in working with children. The recommendations from Poland, Belgium, Italy and Germany stressed the need to provide children with **additional language of education classes, but also to create preparatory classes**. An interesting recommendation, namely using English as the third language of communication, can be found in the German report.

Children particularly emphasized the importance of **support from translators, mediators** who help with communication during the first days at school, demonstrating the value of employing this type of support as it benefits the child, parents, and teachers.

The second action is the implementation of L2 classes for children, which should be done early in the year or upon the child's arrival, as bridge classes to provide tools for children to then successfully fit into the classroom, above all as language support for studying.

(Professionals, Italy)

Special classes (L2- or preparation classes) have proven themselves to be useful. These classes provide not only the opportunity of language learning, but safety, space and support for newcomers to arrive in Germany in general and in the German school system in particular. Moreover, L2-classes are considered as arenas of social learning concerning participation, communication and thus provide opportunities to experience social integration. However, it is sometimes also stated that there is a risk of segregation and stigmatization.

(Professionals, Germany)

Include other forms of communication (such as music, art), work more in small groups and in individual lessons.

(Professionals, Germany)

The newly arrived students talk about study guidance in their mother tongue as an appreciated form of support for their schoolwork. The study guidance tutor helps them to translate and explains texts so that the students can continue their learning. Further, it seems like the students appreciate further social and educational support, which can be provided by student coordinators and study guidance in the mother tongue tutors. Thus, it is important to strengthen study guidance in mother tongue for students who need it.

(Children, Sweden)

For the majority of children, assessments compromise their experience of school: written and oral tests create anxiety and fear, indeed one of the positive aspects generated by online learning was the reduction of pressure on expected levels of performance and, in turn, their levels of anxiety. This is also one of the reasons why children appreciate group collaboration, something which permits them to help each other and share the burden of being evaluated.

(Children, Italy)

An extremely important theme is the **modification of assessment and traditional ways of working with children**. Especially at the stage of learning the language of a country of emigration, it is very stressful for children to speak in that language and to be assessed. It is worth modifying the system used to assess these children, adjusting expectations to their abilities, e.g. not asking the child to answer in front of the whole class when they feel insecure, introducing group or pair work, introducing non-verbal forms of expression such as art, music.

The School as a Space for Children's Personal Development

The school is a space where children can pursue their needs, aspirations and agency. Children present many needs related to the **recognition of their autonomy and decision-making through access to co-creation of the school space**, e.g. joint agreement on examination dates, choice of working methods co-decision on the educational program as well as expression of their needs. It is important that their opinion is considered that they feel that they co-create the educational space.

These changes concern the possibility of experiencing school with more ease and comfort. From the structure of the timetable, the colour of the walls, to the ways and places in which they can spend their breaktimes, these suggestions express the need to be in an environment in which they feel comfortable and where they do not feel too controlled by adults. (Children, Italy)

Students wanted to feel trusted and to feel their agency was valued in the classroom. They felt the rules in school were too strict and imposed upon them, and they wanted to be more able to express themselves through their dress and speech. (Children, Belgium)

The final exams at the end of 8th grade were also considered to be a significant problem. This difficulty was particularly related to students who arrived in Poland shortly before 8th grade and for whom mastering Polish in such a short time was impossible. Significantly, the examinations are currently only available in Polish and the sole provisions available are the use of a dictionary and extended examination time. In the opinion of the teachers, given the requirements of the curriculum, these adaptations are far too limited. The final exams should be adapted more to the needs of students: the worksheets should be available in their mother tongue and schools should ensure the presence of an intercultural assistant during the exam. (Professionals, Poland)

Participants in the focus groups, therefore, do not see their limited agency in education as a problem and they affirm to experience agency outside of instructional activities, for instance in the playground, which therefore strongly emerges as a crucial space of children's social experiences at school. (Children, UK)

More concrete recommendation, are concerned with the complimentary competences in school and the after-school activities. Several interviewees pleaded for these measures to remain. According to their experiences, these resources are needed and they make a difference. (Professionals, Sweden)

On the other hand, to strengthen agency in this educational context, professionals stress that **children's achievements are measured considering their competences and abilities, as well as their language competencies and barriers**. If the methods of examination at the end of an educational stage are not adapted to children's linguistic abilities and are not sensitive to curricular differences, their results may be lower and limit their opportunities to achieve their educational aspirations, such as being accepted into high school. An exemplary recommendation from the Polish context concerns transitional exams between one and two stages of education.

From the perspective of both children and social workers, it is important to create **informal spaces at school where children can engage in activities related to their interests**. It is therefore important to support children in identifying institutions and places where they can pursue their passions and interests outside school.

In the context of cultural differences, it is valuable to **identify parents' expectations of their children's education in relation to gender roles**. This is a very sensitive topic and therefore requires cooperation with both children and parents and perhaps also a school psychologist. However, in order to support the needs and plans of the child, it is worth showing the child

Social workers argued for a need for different low-threshold hobbies, such as football, for migrant children and youth. If children are clients of child protection, they can receive financial support for hobbies but as (the offspring of) clients of adult social work, they cannot, which makes it more difficult to participate in peer activities. (Professionals, Finland)

Especially girls from a migrant background should be encouraged to study and make use of their academic potential. It must be underlined that in a welfare society, like Finland, it is possible to have both career and family, and that in democracy, everyone is entitled to exercise agency over one's own life choices. (Children, Finland)

By employing such a concept of agency, we may obtain a deeper insight into the choices made by children concerning their further educational plans, learn about their aspirations and those of their parent, and discover how the human capital of a migrant family can modify educational projects and endeavours. We will be then able to identify and explain migrant children's preferences for science subjects, the importance they attach to grades and how they assess their peer environment. (Children, Poland)

According to the students the teachers should not only give educational support but also challenge them in their learning. (Children, Sweden)

Recognising the identity of migrant children, their religious and cultural practices. (Children, Poland)

Such transnational practices pursued by families must be strongly emphasised as they are focused on their country of origin, which is, among others, expressed in maintaining bonds with their next of kin, making visits, and inviting younger members of their families to Poland. Children are important actors in transnational family practices as they are the ones who create a transnational intergenerational arc which is a crucial element of their emerging identity. (Children, Poland)

and parents the opportunities afforded by education, discussing them together and helping the child choose the best path. For the good of the child, it is important to work with parents so that they do not feel left out or that the school is trying to turn the child against them.

The same is true of the teacher's expectations of the child – it is important to have a good relationship with the child in order to recognize what the child needs and, therefore, to adjust the requirements, which does not always mean lowering the requirements, but sometimes, after recognizing the strengths of the child, adjusting the level of difficulty of the tasks to the child's abilities, when, for example, a child doing well in math may need more complicated tasks than the rest of the class.

It is very important to support the **development of hybrid identities**, which involves combining the cultural elements of both the country of origin and the host country in an original and unique personal synthesis. According to children and specialists alike, the space for expression of the culture of origin should take place regardless of whether the child speaks the language of the country of emigration fluently or not. However, it is important not to use stereotypical and ethnocentric thinking about cultural differences, only noticing and putting the emphasis on the religious or culi-

Two of the mediators recommended working with translanguaging as a tool to increase student participation and a feeling of belonging. (Professionals, Sweden)

There were many recommendations for school study counsellors considering a need for a resource-based counselling approach which accommodates individual dreams and school performance without paying as much attention to what is seen as the youth's mother tongue. More resources for teachers and social workers (incl. counsellors) were seen as important so that they could encounter children more individually. (Professionals, Finland)

The creation of a special working-group of staff dedicated to refugee/migrant children in schools and constantly developing their competences in this area was also seen as good practice. An important role was assigned to the school psychologist, who should be able to respond to the needs of all students. (Professionals, Poland)

Many teachers also stated that certain professionals, such as social workers and speech therapists, should be on-site at the school. This way they would be more easily accessible and better acquainted with the students and school environment. (Professionals, Belgium)

A minor yet decisive voice heard in the teachers' sample argued for ensuring psychiatric help for every child in need, independent of his/her language skills. There seems now to be variety in the possibilities of receiving help in different municipalities in this regard, which affects negatively some teachers' everyday work, not to mention the child's learning and overall well-being. (Professionals, Finland)

A key recommendation from teachers that they felt would improve the situation of both teachers and migrant children was more training opportunities for teachers. The topics they listed were in the areas of: technology, teaching illiterate students, people management skills, and how to work with children who have been traumatized (Professionals, Belgium)

nary dimension of a given culture, for example, but also to take into account the agency of students and their individual needs. At the same time, it is worth supporting the child's use of the language of the minority in communication with parents and relatives.

From the perspective of specialists, it is important to provide **adequate psychological support** at school so that children can fully recognize and realize their potential, and on the other hand, speech therapy and psychiatric support if necessary. Support in identifying strengths and resources is important for children, especially during transitions between educational stages.

The Work of Professionals and Cooperation Between Institutions

The last part of the recommendations concerns how professionals should be **supported in order to create the right conditions for the educational and emotional functioning of children**. The child is a part of the system created by the school institution, teachers, social workers and other people working with migrant children and if the system itself

Teacher training, provided by experts or universities and aimed at teaching in multilingual and multicultural contexts, as well as reception, inclusion, and conflict management, should be continued. (Professionals, Italy)

A number of training sessions and workshops providing opportunities to acquire new skills in legal regulations, soft skills (e.g. in intercultural and interpersonal communication) and working with clients from different cultural backgrounds were considered a good practice here. (Professionals, Poland)

Mediators suggested that teachers should attend more training and courses to learn about the condition of migrant children and migration in general. (Professionals, Italy)

Teachers would benefit from training in trauma counselling to be more prepared to encounter and support traumatized students and to understand the consequences of their undesired experiences for their learning and involvement in school. (Children, Finland)

For teachers, more education on anti-racism is needed. It is only by becoming aware of colonizing and discriminative practices in the past and present that a teacher can start shaping space for respect towards diversity in the classroom. (Children, Finland)

It was also indicated that part of raising competences should be the constant supervision of their work, access to psychological support for teachers working with children who have gone through trauma or have developmental disorders and activities counteracting professional burnout. Such solutions are almost entirely unavailable in Polish schools; if teachers decide to ask for help, they usually do so on their own and at their own expense. (Professionals, Poland)

The integration of the children only takes place by increasing and strengthening the competence of the teachers/pedagogies (for teachers is on top: coping with trauma; deeper and more important: unconscious exclusion, stigmatization). Supervision and team consulting must become a basic part of the integration. (Professionals, Germany)

is not efficient and supportive, the child will not be able to develop according to his/her potential, pursue aspirations, or foster a sense of empowerment and social relations. The recommendations mainly concern the implementation of knowledge development not only for teachers, but also for social workers in the field of interculturalism, working with trauma, counteracting discrimination.

In addition, the recommendations also address the implementation of support in terms of supervision for teachers and professionals working with children who have experienced trauma.

Another recommendation from the perspective of social workers concerns the implementation of **inter-institutional cooperation**, the creation of **intersectional teams** that can provide effective and comprehensive support to children with migration experience. The professionals also recommended to employ mediators, cultural assistants or translators in schools or institutions supporting migrant children while ensuring decent employment conditions.

Last, but not least, it is important to implement systemic support including **both funding of support and availability of educational materials tailored to the needs of children with migration experience** from the perspective of professionals.

Moreover, several social workers highlighted the importance of increasing collaboration with mediators, to know more on families' cultures. One educator also stressed the importance of mediators as virtuous and successful example for children. (Professionals, Italy)

To have more structured, long term and intensive collaboration with class teachers, subject teachers and the mentors of the student. This would require that the mediators get more time for tuition and study guidance, and that they can concentrate their work to fewer schools. (Professionals, Sweden)

Social workers hoped that there would be more workers with immigration background or knowledge of different cultures working with immigrant families and children. It would be important to bring experts from different cultures to school daily so that they can be asked if students cannot be contacted in Finnish or if it is a more difficult issue that would be easier to tell in their mother tongue. Besides, at schools, teachers could utilize immigrant children's cultural knowledge, when different religions and cultures are explained. (Professionals, Finland)

Funding is pivotal to maintaining a child-centred approach and the attention to the uniqueness of each child that constitutes, according to teachers, an avenue for the integration as agents all children, of which the integration of migrant children is integrated important component rather than a separated endeavour. (Professionals, UK)

School and teachers should have sufficient resources available for this integration work (smaller classes, preschool for day care; specific further education or training for teachers). (Professionals, Germany)

A practical recommendation by teachers is that more teaching material is prepared for the various needs of preparatory instruction. (...) The material should consist of compatible elements that can be applied in a flexible manner to suit learners of different age and level of language skills. (Professionals, UK)

Conclusion

The CHILD-UP study provides insights into understanding the school as an educational and social space, highlighting some important factors that should be taken into account in order to shape the school as an inclusive setting. It clearly illustrates a need to provide opportunities for active co-determination in at least some spheres of the school's activities, to involve students in decision-making processes and negotiating various arrangements. In addition, students would like to see greater coherence in the learning process, greater reflection on the broader aims of education and changes to teaching methods, content, or the combination of knowledge with practical dimensions. Finally, the school must be a place where students feel safe, supported, and defended against attempts at exclusion or discrimination.

The study findings are also related to the relationships between teachers and peers. Students are very sensitive to unfair treatment, and in the case of migrant children these are perceived as them being giv-

en lower grades, undermining their ability to learn or declining remedial teaching. Equal treatment, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, are also important issues. Both students and professionals emphasized the importance of appropriate ways of working, which can stimulate inclusion and cooperation or, on the contrary, promote rivalry. Peer cooperation was often reported as stemming from the encouragement of a teacher, who introduced a mutual learning practice (like group work) that includes all children in small groups and projects that involve everyone.

The research emphasizes once again the importance of teaching the language of a receiving country as early and effectively as possible, the knowledge of which not only enables the migrant child to participate actively in lessons but is also a factor supporting their integration into the school community. The role of the mother tongue is seen as a primary factor supporting school achievements and peer relations among children from the same country of origin. This research documents the value of multilingualism.

As the report demonstrates, the school can be a crucially important space for the promotion of children's agency, one positively enhancing their self-esteem, educational and social development, and helping them develop plans for the future. Transcending the narrative of the passive role played by children in migration means that we look at their situation through the lens of their capability to express their opinions and emotions, their ability to contest adult decisions, and shape their relationships with other actors (including their peers). The collected data shows that the school can play a role in the recognition of children's agency by introducing tools that stimulate trust, the free expression of one's own feelings and thoughts, the negotiation of rules and shaping of social relations according to students' needs. Such tools may include interactive methods of work, introducing mediation into teaching, working in small groups, learning by doing, and using personal experience in learning. Among the factors that limit or hinder students' expressions of agency, professionals point to institutional and non-institutional factors. Institutional constraints include those directly related to the working conditions of teachers and mediators, education funding mechanisms, and language barriers, which, at least at the beginning of working with migrant students, may clearly limit their participation in school life. Internal hierarchies at school and a culture of subordination (in which the student only listens to the teacher) are also identified as important elements which negatively impact children's agency. Among the non-institutional factors, individual and cultural backgrounds are identified as those hindering to open up to school life by migrant student. In this context, the gender dimension is fundamental and manifests itself, for example, in social expectations of girls and boys with regard to their educational careers and emotional expressions. For the students themselves, their agency is mainly expressed in terms of taking decisions about themselves, having a sense of influence on school activities, being listened to, and being able to form social rela-

tionships according to their own needs. Agency also appears in the context of conflicts at school, where students see their ability to influence how difficulties are resolved as an expression of their full participation and subjectivity. Peer networks are essential for the social participation of children who use them to better read the cultural codes of the host country, improve language skills, and facilitate academic development. It is peers who sometimes become the first "lifeline" for newly arrived students. Beyond the school environment, students express their agency in three important areas: 1. thinking about and shaping their future, 2. participating in leisure time activities and co-constructing social spaces around them, and 3. maintaining relationships with the culture of their home country and forming hybrid identities.

The school as an educational institution and social space has undergone significant changes as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes have especially affected children from vulnerable groups, underscoring socio-economic status, age and gender as the main factors placing children at the risk of exclusion. Particularly, children from a migration background were seen as invisible during the period of remote teaching introduced in response to the outbreak of the pandemic. Their lack of participation in the remote teaching (or even disappearing from "online school") was first and foremost caused by a digital divide (e.g. lack of proper equipment, weak broadband Internet connection) and digital illiteracy (of both children and parents), but also insufficient support from teachers and peers. In this context, the greatest challenge for school was to navigate the rocky road between providing high quality education, respecting safety measures while ensuring children's participation, autonomy and agency. One of the solutions implemented by all European countries to deal with the pandemic, albeit to varying extents, was remote or online teaching. Despite some positive effects of this measure being mentioned by children and professionals, the dominant opinion was negative.

For most children in all countries, remote teaching resulted in fatigue, difficulties in maintaining well-being, health and social relations. It also negatively affected interpersonal connections, limiting the opportunities for children to spend time together as well as adversely affecting the language skills of children with migrant backgrounds. In terms of agency, the impact of the pandemic was two-fold. On the one hand, the study shows how the pandemic limited the children's agency and participation in classes: their voices and opinions were not taken into account, and teachers consulted their parents on issues related to their education. On the other hand, the older children saw this period as one which developed their sense of autonomy, agency, responsibility, and self-control.

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